
A different kind of story: Pedagogy of hope at The Ration Shed Museum, Cherbourg

Carly Smith

Carly.Smith@usq.edu.au

Abstract

In recounting the history of Cherbourg as an Aboriginal settlement, the Ration Shed Museum presents some traumatic narratives. It paints a picture of violent geographic and cultural dislocation, crude living conditions, forced labour and administrative oppression by infusing historical artefacts with the personal recollections of Cherbourg residents. The intent behind the Ration Shed Museum itself, however, is something quite different: its curators want to tell a story that speaks of hope for this community's future, and to work towards some form of reconciliation. They do this by actively engaging with the 'terrible gift' of the past in the present, and by providing spaces for encounters that can lead to open discussions of difficult social issues and celebrations of contemporary Cherbourg life. This article draws on ethnographic interviews and observational data alongside the theoretical work of Roger I. Simon and Andrea Witcomb to describe how the Ration Shed Museum engages its community and visitors in a dual process of both understanding Cherbourg's history and reframing traumatic narratives to enact a pedagogy of hope.

Introduction

Those who think museums are about the past have got it wrong.

Public practices of remembrance are always about the future. (Simon 2012: 92)

In the tradition of Santayana (1905: 284), it does seem common sense to understand history so we don't repeat the mistakes of the past. Unfortunately, though, it is sometimes easier to just ignore history — especially if it is uncomfortable and even more so if it is not our own. We can relegate the stories of absent 'others' to libraries and museums, supposedly letting ourselves move on.

Over the last thirty years, however, there has been a theoretical turn toward the notion of historical consciousness that expands well beyond Santayana's (1905: 284) views of historical inquiry. This has resulted in a renewed appreciation of the influence of the past in the present, particularly regarding the significance of

memory in the development of individual and collective identities (Booth 2006: 3–4; Connerton 1989: 22; Seixas 2004: 4–6; Thorp 2014: 27). Increasingly, this has also resulted in the examination of public sites of memorial and ethical discussions about collective memory, identity and the representation of traumatic histories. The question now is not just about moving on from the past — if, indeed, that ever was the objective — and has become one of how we can move on *with* the past.

This article is situated within these discourses of historical consciousness and the ethical implications of remembrance. Specifically, I explore the ways in which the Ration Shed Museum at Cherbourg, in South-East Queensland, draws on the township's troubled history in order to engage with its present and offer a message of hope for its future. In engaging with these discourses, I preface this article with two assertions: first, that we can only learn from the past if we bring the stories of absent 'others' into the present; and second, that by actively engaging with the stories of absent 'others' in the present, we can elicit hope for the future. This bringing forth of the past into the present is what lies at the pedagogical heart of the Ration Shed Museum, and is what positions the museum as a point of orientation and hope for the future of the Cherbourg community.

The article begins by providing background context of the community of Cherbourg and the Ration Shed Museum. It then goes on to articulate my methodological process and explore a selection of literature associated with public sites of memorial including history museums like the Ration Shed. Specifically, I draw on the works of Roger I. Simon and Andrea Witcomb in presenting the Ration Shed Museum as a site for constructing difficult knowledge and working through the terrible gift of the past. Finally, the article explores how the museum mobilises a pedagogy of hope through purpose, narrative and affect, as well as through its relationship to community.

Cherbourg and the Ration Shed Museum

The Ration Shed Museum sits in the historical precinct at Cherbourg, in Queensland's rural South Burnett district, approximately 260 kilometres north-west of Brisbane. Cherbourg, originally known as Barambah, was established in 1899 by the Salvation Army as an Aboriginal mission. In 1905, the mission was taken over by the Queensland Government and became one of the first settlements created under the *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897* (Qld). In the settlement's early days, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians from across Queensland and New South Wales were forcibly relocated to Cherbourg, ostensibly for their 'own welfare' (Blake 2001: xi–xii; Kidd 1997: 266).

The living conditions at Barambah were deplorable, and by 1906 the settlement had been reported to be 'a depot of semi-starvation, disease and misery' (Arnell 1906, cited in Blake 2001: 85). Kinship ties were deliberately undermined and cultural expressions of any sort were heavily restricted: 'Every personal affiliation was lamed, every group structure was put out of kilter, no social network had a point of fixture left' (Stanner 1968, cited in Blake 2001: 53). The inmates — to borrow Blake's (2001: xii) terminology — were hired out for the benefit of the state, including for domestic and agricultural work and the production of pottery and souvenirs for the growing market in Aboriginal artefacts. The superintendents



Figure 1

(Colour online) The former ration shed and superintendent's office at the Cherbourg historical precinct (Source: author's collection).

maintained strict control over activities and resources on the settlement: permits were required to leave the site, and meagre quantities of food were administered from a small timber ration shed (Ration Shed Museum 2018). In 1988, Cherbourg became a Deed of Grant in Trust Community and the first Cherbourg Council was elected in 1991. Today Cherbourg is a thriving, self-governing Aboriginal township with a population of approximately 2000, with the historical precinct and the Ration Shed Museum sitting proudly in the heart of the community (Ration Shed Museum 2018).

The Ration Shed Museum was first conceived in 2004. Sandra Morgan and her sister Lesley Williams found the old ration shed near Cherbourg's present-day football field. Sandra and Lesley recognised the social and historical significance of the building, as well as its potential as a keeping place for the community, and the old shed was soon shifted to its present site in the historical precinct (see Figure 1). The precinct now encompasses several other buildings, including the superintendent's office (see Figure 1), boys' dormitory, domestic science building and CWA building. The Ration Shed Museum is a not-for-profit organisation governed by a board of Cherbourg community members and chaired by Sandra Morgan (Ration Shed Museum 2018).

The Ration Shed Museum provides important insight into Queensland's colonial¹ history from a perspective that historically has been silenced. Sandra Morgan says, 'We're not here to blame or shame, you know. We just want [visitors] to *understand*' (Morgan and Simpson interview 2016). Personal stories from former and current Cherbourg residents are shared here, as well as those from former settlement staff. The museum's material collection is eclectic and uneven, but providing systematic evidence of Cherbourg's history was never the point: these items are here because of their significance to the people of Cherbourg, the memories they evoke and the dialogues they initiate.

What makes this museum unique is that its curators present Cherbourg's tales of trauma and oppression as a means of engaging the contemporary. The Ration Shed Museum tells a different kind of story than might be expected of a history museum — especially one that addresses such a problematic aspect of Queensland's history. Sandra describes the museum as 'a great healing, and a learning place for a

lot of people and for a lot of things' (Morgan and Simpson interview 2016). The Ration Shed Museum tells a story of difficult knowledge, a troubled past and an unsettled present; however, it also presents a vision of hope for the future of Cherbourg and its people.

Methodology

The data informing this article are drawn from my current ethnographic research into the purposes and pedagogies of selected museums in regional South-East Queensland. The data set was collected over several visits from April 2015 to December 2016. It consists of observational notes and diagrams, photographs, informal conversations, a guided tour of the museum and documentary data collected from the museum's website, brochure and social media platforms. Two key participants were formally interviewed together: Sandra Morgan, the instigator of the museum and the current Chair of the Ration Shed Museum Committee, and Ada Simpson, a Cherbourg community member and long-term volunteer and guide at the museum. This interview took place on 17 May 2016, in the museum office and ran for approximately 45 minutes. The interview was semi-structured around the concepts of purpose, pedagogy, identity and community at the museum, and utilised Madison's (2005: 4) critical ethnographic principles and Spradley's (1979: 223) descriptive, structural and contrast questions. I later recorded, transcribed and thematically coded the data (Boyatzis 1998: 31; Saldaña 2015: 8–13). Interviewing Sandra and Ada simultaneously resulted in a dialogic interview that was rich with personal stories, jokes and clarifications between the two women — Sandra and Ada talked with each other as much as they did with me, once again highlighting the personal significance of their work at the museum and the importance of the past in the present.

Theoretical frame

Williams (2012: 112) notes that memorial museums invert the premise of traditional general, universalist museums; instead of uplifting visitors by displaying the best of human kind, memorial museums often showcase the worst. While both traditional and memorial museums can provide inspiration, they do so from radically different angles. For this reason, I have employed a very specific set of theories to help understand the pedagogical power of the Ration Shed Museum. Most notably, I draw on the work of the late Canadian sociologist and educator Roger I. Simon (2000, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2011a, 2011b, 2012, 2014, 2016) and Australian museum and cultural studies scholar Andrea Witcomb (2003, 2013, 2014, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c, 2015d).

Simon's work is primarily concerned with forming ethical, living relationships with the past and evoking a critical historical consciousness through the museum's work in representing traumatic historic events (Bonnell and Simon 2007: 65–6; Chinnery 2010: 398; Paolantonio 2015: 263–4). He sees the possibilities of museums in presenting the past as a space of alterity so that the encounter between the past and the present might become a site of renewal and hope. For Simon, reviewing the past simply through the political needs of the present can lead to further injustices and lost opportunities — futile arguments about 'who had it worse', 'whose fault it was', and 'it's not my problem'. In order for us to move forward, the

traces of the past left by absent ‘others’ needs to be engaged in the contemporary and honoured as ‘one’s thought-provoking inheritance’ (Simon 2012: 96). This is very much a relational philosophy that draws on the ethics of Emmanuel Levinas (Chinnery 2010: 398, 2013: 254; Paolantonio 2015: 265).

The role of affect and its relation to thinking is also a central theme in Simon’s work. Simon views the pedagogical power of museums as stemming from the dialectic between emotion and thought (Simon 2011b: 446–7). Neither affect nor cognition can work alone to bring the past into the present and create the kind of living, ethical relation that Simon deems fundamental to renewal and hope. Witcomb’s recent work presents a similar case regarding the role of emotion in museums. With an over-arching concern for how museums open up meanings rather than close them down (Witcomb 2015c: 136), Witcomb explores what she calls a ‘pedagogy of feeling’ (2014: 58–9; 2015b: 166; 2015d: 322). This pedagogy of feeling is a sensory form of experience that belongs in the realm of the poetic rather than in the cognitive, and it refuses to reduce *meaning* to *information*. A pedagogy of feeling can be unsettling for those involved, evoking latent memories and feelings by activating the senses. But a pedagogy of feeling can also move visitors towards ethical relationships with ‘others’ in museum narratives as the past and present coalesce; the visitor recognises themselves in the ‘other’ and the ‘other’ in themselves in this shared space (Witcomb 2013: 260).

Both Simon and Witcomb view museum spaces as points of encounter. For Simon, this encounter occurs across time and between the present visitor and absent ‘other’. For Witcomb, the encounter is between culturally dissimilar selves and ‘others’. Both recognise that encounters are performative events that blur the binary of viewer-viewed and that ‘the experience of the encounter itself can play a role in the production of meaning’ (Witcomb 2015a: 467). Like a pedagogy of feeling, encounters can be unsettling for those involved because learning is invoked through memory, emotion and close contact with ‘others’. In order to be hopeful, then, these encounters must be deeply relational and ethical, and maintain a present and future orientation.

Together, the works of Simon and Witcomb provide a theoretical frame with an ethical core that captures my view of how the Ration Shed Museum enacts its social purposes. Remnants of the past extend into the present in ways that continue to shape the identities of all involved, and the museum itself provides a space for the negotiation of these identities. The presentation of histories evokes remembrance in ways that cannot always be articulated cognitively because they are often more felt than thought. The absent ‘others’ of the past are honoured for their counsel. Our own positionalities in relation to Other-pasts and Other-persons are both troubled and revitalised, and encounters in this space of difficult knowledge are generative and hopeful.

Constructing difficult knowledge

The types of knowledge referred to here as ‘difficult’ are most often associated with historic trauma or oppression (Bonnell and Simon 2007: 66–7; Silvén and Björklund 2006: 252–3; Simon 2011a: 193, 2011b: 432–3). It is difficult for both the victims of violence and the perpetrators, even if contemporary viewers were not directly involved (Baum 2000: 93; Simon 2000: 10). If traumatic historical events



Figure 2

(Colour online) Domestic items on display at the Ration Shed Museum (Source: author's collection).

are memorialised *without* being made difficult, it can lead to an identity complex that includes victimhood and culpability (Williams 2012: 97) — an unproductive space of continued guilt, blame and hurt. The treatment of knowledge as difficult, then, is the key to hope (Simon, Rosenberg and Eppert 2000: 5–7).

Difficult knowledge is something that needs to be *detected*, or positioned in such a way that commonly accepted knowledge and understandings are questioned. Difficult knowledge does not just exist, waiting to be discovered: it is constructed (Silvén and Björklund 2006: 252). This construction of knowledge as difficult opens up the potential for wider-ranging discourses about histories. Agency in constructing historical narratives is foregrounded, and we invite the idea that memory can be multidirectional, generative and hopeful (Rothberg 2009: 3). As Silvén and Björklund (2006: 252) explain, ‘The question of what is difficult is not just about *what* is represented; by asking the question one also *does* something with the cultural heritage and extends the field to admit more multifaceted and new histories.’

Difficult knowledge is not something inherent to particular artefacts, discourses or histories: it is what we make of them. For Simon (2011b: 433), it comes down to ‘the provocation of affect — that is, affect’s relation to the possibilities of thought’. Difficult knowledge occurs when emotional responses are evoked and thinking is challenged. Silvén and Björklund (2006: 252–3) note that material objects might represent difficult knowledge in an obvious way, or might be transformed into representations of difficult knowledge through their narrative contextualisations. The Ration Shed Museum uses some material items that are obviously difficult, such as the display of historic legal documents, mission ledgers, permits and some photographs, yet most of the collection would seem mundane under different circumstances: bags of tea, sugar, flour and other grocery items; a large set of scales; a neatly made bed; pieces of pottery and other craftwork; a small table setting.

The understanding of cultural codes is important here, and the museum curators manipulate these codes to disrupt familiarity and evoke emotional responses; those mundane items become affective prompts as they are pulled into larger narratives of colonial life (Silvén and Björklund 2006: 252–3). The grocery items and scales represent the strict control of resources (see Figure 2). The neatly-made bed demonstrates the impersonality of dormitory living. The pottery and craftwork become symbols of forced labour and commodified culture. The table setting — for

me, one of the saddest displays — represents a humble family domestic scene of the era, except that the table sits incongruently in the boys' dormitory, the setting is incomplete and the plates are empty (see Figure 2). My heart aches, and I feel genuine empathy for those absent 'others'.

A terrible gift? Remnants from absent 'others'

Once we construct knowledge as difficult, the question is how we work with that knowledge and relate this to our everyday lives (Silvén and Björklund 2006: 262). Simon (2006: 187; 2016: 181) refers to the past as 'a terrible gift', and this can provide some insight into how we might relate to difficult knowledge of the past in the present. If the past is a terrible gift, then its *terribleness* lies in the pain and responsibility that we inherit as we sift through the remnants left by absent 'others'; its *giftedness* lies in finding the significance of past events in our present and future lives. Simon argues that remnants of the past continue into the present, and that working through the past as a terrible gift is a confronting process, but also an empowering one.

This paradox is evident at the Ration Shed Museum. The past represented here is certainly confronting, and the *terribleness* of this inheritance can be felt as an inarticulate weight. I felt this weight when talking with Sandra, Ada and other museum staff. This is not just a keeping place for them, or even a conventional museum. This is a work of respect for absent 'others' and is not something to be taken lightly. The museum staff is tasked with telling their stories. I felt this weight as a solitary museum observer, too. Testimonial after testimonial, image after image, empty plate after empty plate ... it all adds up to form an emotional miasma of the trauma and loss associated with Cherbourg's history. There is information here, yes, but it is mostly an irreducible *feeling* (Witcomb 2013: 256; 2015d: 325). Yet the *giftedness* of these inherited remnants of the past could be felt as well. Rather than being filled with empty platitudes or endless deferrals, the Ration Shed is a space that can still draw active hope from the past into the present. Amidst the empty plates of days gone by, there are photos of smiling faces, children's paintings, sports memorabilia and community awards. This promise of the future is a feeling too.

Reconciliation at the Ration Shed Museum

At the Ration Shed Museum, Sandra and Ada both explicitly identified reconciliation as a central aim. What was interesting about this was that they spoke of reconciliation primarily in terms of Cherbourg's reconciliation of its own past and with its views of the future. Sandra said, 'I think that [reconciliation] plays a big role in this space here. And to just try to encourage the youth here to come step up now and take over. Just to come and understand the history so they can understand *more*, you know' (Morgan and Simpson interview 2016). I later asked Ada what she thought the museum was trying to achieve. She said:

Oh, well first to educate our own mob. Because a lot of our children that's coming up, they don't know anything about their history. Or, if they *do* know, sometimes it's all so negative, too. But at the same time we want to get across the message that it was *hard*. And restricted. But at the same time we're about reconciliation in this space. That's what we always say. (Morgan and Simpson interview 2016).

For Sandra and Ada, reconciliation first needs to take place *within* the community of Cherbourg, and it is all about recognising and understanding life under colonial rule and the implications for Cherbourg's present and future.

Crowley and Matthews (2006: 271) note that reconciliatory 'redress in the Australian context was not tied to arguments about the loss or lack of human rights in the colonial context, but more simply [based] on the assumption that knowledge of what went before would set things right for the future'. This kind of 'common-sense' treatment of the past (Santayana 1905: 284) is what Simon (2011a: 206–7) argues needs to be avoided in the ethical treatment of difficult knowledge. At the Ration Shed, the whitestream idea of reconciliation as a cross-cultural political agreement on historical accuracy (Crowley and Matthews 2006: 270–1) seems secondary to the museum's reconciliatory purpose. As Ada comments, 'This space is all about reconciliation. ... Although, you know, white Australia, a lot of people ... they look down upon us. We just want to *communicate*, you know' (Morgan and Simpson interview 2016). For Ada, the focus of reconciliation is on human rights and social justice, and remembrance is a communicative medium.

Thinking of the museum as a space of encounter opens up possibilities for reconciliatory dialogue through a focus on remembrance, and therefore promotes socially just, ethical relationships. Like Simon, Crowley and Matthews (2006: 267) see this type of space as a pedagogical opportunity for looking at reconciliation as a dialogic encounter between the past and the present. They explain (2006: 267) that the 'between space provides the possibility to inquire into the conditions of, rather than search for, a definite truth or complete resolution of conflict, injustice and injury'. Encounters at the Ration Shed are not about finding a definite truth, either: they are about finding ethical, relational responses to the vulnerable 'other' that are essential for a more hopeful future (Edelglass 2006: 40; Simon 2014: 203–4).

Enacting a pedagogy of hope

Constructing difficult knowledge and engaging with the terrible gift of the past through encounters within the space of the museum can lead to renewal and hope. In this sense, remembrance in the museum space is fundamentally pedagogical (Simon 2004: 186–7; 2011a: 197–8; 2012: 92) and relational, ethical encounters within this space are fundamentally hopeful (Simon 2014: 4–5). A pedagogy of hope² is enacted in several ways at the Ration Shed Museum, including through purpose, narrative, affect and connections to community. All these elements are interrelated and combine to evoke feelings of strength, awareness and responsibility that carry considerable pedagogical force.

Hope in purpose

In discussing South Africa's Hector Pieterse Museum, Crowley and Matthews (2006: 265) say that the 'museum is witness and archive. It represents a truth formation. In and through this truth formation an aspect of reconciliation may be performed.' The same could be said of Cherbourg's Ration Shed Museum. The museum stands as witness to the terrible gift of the township's past (Simon 2006: 188; 2014: 18–27). It is an archive for buildings, material objects, photographs, documents and stories. It represents a truth formation about Cherbourg's history, its people and its present, where objects are interpreted for the present and the future

(Tilley 1994: 73–4). Perhaps most importantly, the museum positions itself in such a way that the people of Cherbourg may be able to reconcile their own past, and so outside visitors may enter into dialogic reconciliation with the legacies of Queensland’s colonial heritage.

Cultural studies theorists such as Stuart Hall (1996: 597–8; 1997: 3–4; 2013: 3–6) contend that histories and identities are socially constructed and embedded. Booth (2006: 66) proposes that collective memories are likewise socially constructed, and are also therefore political and contestable. He goes on to explain that this ‘present weaving of the past, memory, and political identity is clearly a commodious one for modernity and liberalism, which have difficulty accepting ideas of shame, burden, and fate, and the obligations they claim to impose’ (Booth 2006: 66). The Ration Shed Museum, however, has turned this around.³ The museum has indeed woven the past, memory and political identity, but has done so with the purpose of reclaiming its past, its future and its identity. This museum has leveraged the institution of the museum — arguably a stalwart of liberal modernity (Bennett 1995: 1–8) — for its own critical, future-oriented project.

The ration shed and other buildings in the historical precinct have literally been repurposed. What were once the physical structures of colonial administration and oppression are now the structures used to *discuss* colonial administration and oppression. This irony is certainly not lost on the museum’s staff. Sandra and Ada spoke with immense glee about the moment they took over the old superintendent’s building as their own museum office: Ada said, ‘Did Sandra tell you the feeling we had when we first moved in here? Because we were never allowed past that hall there. We were never allowed down the other side, so it was a great feeling when we come in here and we say “We’re in here now! [laughs] It’s ours!”’ (Morgan and Simpson interview 2016).

The purpose of the Ration Shed Museum is also explicitly and publicly stated on its website. The museum’s ‘aim is to tell the story of the community’s history to the youth of Cherbourg and the world at large ... It is a multi faceted complex that engages both the past and the present. It is about understanding what happened in the past and understanding how the past has shaped the present’ (Ration Shed Museum 2018).

In carrying out its purpose, the museum develops a kind of identity of its own and the visitor is positioned to respond to that identity; the purposes of telling stories, engaging the past and the present, and developing understanding are clear to me as a visitor. This then marks my own obligations: I listen, I engage with the past and the present, and I try to understand. The Ration Shed Museum opens a dialogue with me, and I accept.

Hope in narrative

For visitors, the narrative begins on first entering the gates of the historical precinct. There is a large sign overhead, reading ‘Cherbourg State Aboriginal Settlement’, and alongside this a notice from the superintendent, ‘NOTICE: It is an Offence to Enter This Reserve Without Authority. Every person entering this reserve is required to report to the superintendent. Action will be taken against offenders’ (see Figure 3). I watched some visitors at the gate last time I visited the historical precinct. They appeared to read the sign, but then there was a moment of hesitation. I feel the same



Figure 3

(Colour online) The entry to the Cherbourg historical precinct and sign at the Ration Shed Museum office (Source: author's collection).

sense of hesitation when I visit. The sign is ironic in its contemporary use, but it also serves to position me as a visitor in relation to the narrative of Cherbourg. On entering the site, I become the 'other'.

Simon (2005: 54) suggests that a suspension of one's ego and openness to receiving the terrible gift of the past is necessary for an ethical interaction with absent 'others'. This is how the historical precinct first positions its viewers — stripped of ego by requiring authoritative permission to enter — and this is reinforced as visitors walk up the path toward the former superintendent's office. There is another sign near the door, 'NOTICE: Every Person is Required to Obtain a Permit Before Entering', and an image reminiscent of the permits used to leave or enter the mission (see Figure 3). This permit is in fact an entry ticket. The sign also lists opening hours and, interestingly, specific days and times that *tourists and visitors* are allowed. My narrative self is again called into question (Eppert 2000: 223).

The historical precinct itself is a collection of repurposed colonial buildings that are connected by pathways, but these are not linear. Visitors can wander between and among buildings in any given order. There is, of course, an overarching logic to the museum itself in that it seeks to engage the past and the present in order to understand the community of Cherbourg. There is also a logic to the contents of each building — for example, the stories of rationing are located in the ration shed and many of the documentary records are housed in the superintendent's office. Interpretive labels accompany many of the exhibits. In the ration shed, there is a map of Queensland and a large timeline that charts the progression of the Cherbourg settlement that orients the visitor both geographically and temporally.

However, the narratives presented at the museum are mostly fragmented. 'Little narratives' (Lyotard 1984: 60) are offered to tell the story of Cherbourg, and it becomes the visitor's responsibility to piece these together to form a larger picture. Different perspectives are presented, and the viewer is invited to interpret these and open up meaning (Simon 2011a: 206; Witcomb 2015c: 130–2). Narrative gaps

serve as in-between, dialogic and dialectical spaces (Crowley and Matthews 2006: 267). The memories engaged are multidirectional, in that they are negotiated by the viewer and can cross-reference the viewer's own knowledge, experiences and memories, and thereby prompt an affective connection (Rothberg 2009: 4-5; Witcomb 2013: 269). This approach is consistent with the aim to address difficult knowledge with a critical historical consciousness (Bonnell and Simon 2007: 81; Silvén and Björklund 2006: 249; Simon 2011b: 240–1), and rests 'on a premise that testimony and witness are the most powerful ways to make history come alive' (Chinnery 2010: 399). There is an intimacy here that is evoked through testimony and witness, enhancing the sense of encounter with absent 'others' that is vital to engaging with the inheritance of the past. Testimonials speak directly to the visitor and allow the visitor to relate to the lives of 'others' that are lived on very different terms from their own (Bonnell and Simon 2007: 74).

Guided tours are a usual practice at the museum, and Sandra and Ada are excited when visitors ask questions about their experiences of life at the township. For Sandra, asking questions is itself an act of 'courage' (Morgan and Simpson interview 2016). Ada guided me through and presented her own in-person testimony. Ada grew up in Cherbourg and lived through its colonial history. She knows the people in the old photographs and the people of Cherbourg today. Talking with Ada was an invaluable experience in my own 'coming to understand'. I was already immersed in an encounter with the past of 'others', but Ada was now there with me. Open dialogue became even more relational and ethical.

Non-linear, disorderly or unfinished narratives are also useful devices in further orienting the visitor toward a critical historical consciousness (Crowley 2012: 111–13; Ellsworth 2002: 17–23). Crowley (2012: 113) explains that in 'such a space, place is always mobile and entered into — if not as open to other possibilities then at least knowing that the space is not yours to dictate'. Ada's testimony — and therefore my own progression through the museum — was non-linear, disorderly and unfinished. In much the same way as narrative gaps, these unconventional narrative structures force the viewer to enter a space of negotiation in order to understand. Logic fails us in these spaces; we must find a different kind of relation to these 'others' and their stories. Importantly, too, the 'unfinishedness' of these narratives makes room for the future (Ellsworth 2002: 29). Ada's story isn't finished, and it reminds me that history is never a closed loop. Memory resides in the present, and what we *do* with our remembrance is important. Remembrance can pave the way for hope (Chinnery 2010: 403; Chinnery 2013: 260; Simon 2005: 112; Simon 2014: 203–7).

Hope in affect

The failure of logic becomes the place of irreducible affect, and affect is the means through which the visitor can engage in an ethical relationship with the 'other'; it reminds us of our own humanity as it humanises the 'other' and promotes an ethic of care and compassion (Chinnery 2013: 259–60; Simon 2014: 203; Witcomb 2015d: 322). In turn, this kind of human connection brought about via affective engagement kindles hope (Simon 2014: 203–4). As discussed earlier, the act of engaging with the terrible gift of the past carries its own kind of affect, so the weight of responsibility is always in tension with a vision for the future. Together with the

‘other’, we are suspended between despair and hope in this difficult present (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2015: 233; Simon et al. 2000: 1).

Affect takes hold through the positioning of the visitor *as* visitor upon entering the historical precinct. This is a moment that, for me, always brings conflicting emotions about my own subjectivity in relation to the ‘other’. I find this difficult to articulate at the time, and still do afterwards. All I have are those words at the gate and a strange sense of being unanchored. The use of affect is difficult to articulate in other areas of the museum as well. The empty plates, for example, tell me a story that words could never capture — and, even if they could, the impact wouldn’t be the same.

However, not all the feelings evoked at the Ration Shed Museum are a heavy burden. The *terribleness* of past remnants is balanced with the *giftedness* of hope. As I walk on from the table setting in the boys’ dormitory, I come across a display of cheerfully decorated bras. This was the product of a fundraising event, and the bras were made by the women of Cherbourg. They are each named and each unique. This seems a cheeky display of contemporary femininity and strength, underwritten with a subtle sense of humour in its choice of location in the boys’ dormitory. Further on there are handmade tea towels⁴ and carefully crafted shadow boxes telling personal stories of family. The domestic sadness of the empty plates had given way to the domestic joy of contemporary community life.

Hope in community

Simon (2005: 106) and Chinnery (2010: 403) insist that we must pay as much attention to our practices of remembrance as we do to the content of that remembrance. In connecting Cherbourg’s past with its present and its future, the Ration Shed Museum stands as a testament to practices of ethical remembrance and critical historical consciousness. This museum is *in* the community, *of* the community and *for* the community. Its role in the social and cultural landscape of Cherbourg is pronounced in the museum’s aims and enacted through its practices. It serves as a witness and archive, listener and spokesperson, and is willing and able to engage with the kinds of difficult knowledge born of Cherbourg’s troubled history.

The museum runs several programs designed for the Cherbourg community. These include archiving of historical artefacts and testimonies; art workshops and exhibitions; the Many Threads women’s craft group; the ReFire pottery project funded by Arts Queensland and the reclaiming of Barambah Pottery; the Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY); and an annual Fun Run. The museum also has programs designed for visiting outsiders, including educational tours and workshops for school groups, cultural awareness programs and educational materials such as books and documentaries. The Ration Shed Museum is connected online through its website (<http://rationshed.com.au>), its digital archive The Cherbourg Memory (<http://cherbourgmemory.org>), and the use of social media.

Along with its aim to tell the story of Cherbourg’s history, another explicit aim of the Ration Shed Museum is ‘to create local employment and provide economic benefits to the community’ (Ration Shed Museum 2018). The museum displays and sells arts and crafts made by local residents, including the Many Threads group and Barambah Pottery. It also runs a publishing house as a separate entity, Budburra Books, which produces books and DVDs made by members of the Cherbourg community, including school children.

The historical precinct and the Ration Shed Museum sit both literally and figuratively in the heart of the community. On my last visit there, Rocko was in the art studio screen-printing shirts for the Fun Run, there was a Council function in the ration shed, and a HIPPY training session was underway in the domestic science building. Cherbourg residents wandered in and out, and a few outside visitors ventured in after some trepidation at the front gate. This museum is not some stagnant mausoleum (Witcomb 2003: 102) or spectacle of suffering (Bonnell and Simon 2007: 74): this is Cherbourg community *life*.

Conclusion

The Ration Shed Museum represents an important part of Queensland's history. In tackling the past head on, the museum accepts the terrible gift inherited from absent 'others' and puts this to use in the present. Lehrer and Milton (2011: 3) claim that 'new knowledge emerges when we consider memory — in its spatial, material, public dimensions not simply as latent in the social fabric, nor only in top-down efforts by the state to encode preferred memory, but also as it is mindfully deployed by individuals and groups in attempts to provoke, enable, and transform'. Memory is indeed mindfully deployed at the Ration Shed Museum. In enabling ethical relations to be made personal, the museum allows its community members to reconcile their own pasts with their presents, and allows visitors to begin to understand the lasting implications of Queensland's colonial history. The construction of knowledge as difficult and the engagement with the past as a terrible gift shifts the pedagogical force of the Ration Shed Museum toward one of human connection and generative hope.

The Ration Shed Museum embodies a process, but not one of *moving on* from the past: this is a process of moving forward *with* the past and evoking hope for the future of the Cherbourg community and its people. The Ration Shed Museum tells a different kind of story, for now and for the future.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the staff of the Ration Shed Museum, particularly Sandra Morgan and Ada Simpson. I would also like to thank Associate Professor Andrew Hickey and Dr Jacinta Maxwell for their ongoing support and advice. This research was supported by the Australian Government's Research Training Scheme and Australian Postgraduate Award at the University of Southern Queensland.

Notes

- 1 I use the term 'colonial' in this article within the discursive frame of settler colonialism in contemporary Australian cultural anthropology. For influential works in this area, see Wolfe (1999), Veracini (2010) and Banivanua Mar and Edmonds (2010).
- 2 'Pedagogy of hope' is a term derived from critical education theory (in particular, see Freire, 1972, 1998, 2014; Giroux, 1997; hooks, 2003). Hope is social, political and justice oriented. It emerges from places of struggle but is also what unites communities, energises them and drives them forward from oppressive places. Freire (2014: 2–3) describes hope as an ontological need that is the essence of being human; it drives us forward and leads to action. According to Freire, hope cannot be taught or granted but it can be evoked given the right

circumstances. In this case, I argue that those circumstances are provided at the Ration Shed Museum.

- 3 I have written of this previously, with reference to Hooper-Greenhill's (2000: x) proposition of the post-museum (see Smith 2014: 40).
- 4 These tea towels were made by members of the Many Threads women's group that meets regularly in the Cherbourg Historical Precinct. See Besley (2016: 321–4) for an insightful discussion of these tea towels as a medium of activist counter-memory.

Interview

Morgan, Sandra and Simpson, Ada 2016. Interview with Carly Smith, 17 May.

References

- Banivanua Mar, T. and Edmonds, P. (eds) 2010. *Making settler colonial space: Perspectives on race, place and identity*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Baum, R.N. 2000. 'Never to forget: Pedagogical memory and second-generation witness'. In R.I. Simon, S. Rosenberg and C. Eppert (eds), *Between hope and despair: Pedagogy and the remembrance of historical trauma*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, pp. 91–116.
- Bennett, T. 1995. *The birth of the museum: History, theory, politics*. London: Routledge.
- Besley, J. 2016. "Speaking to, with and about": Cherbourg women's memory of domestic work as activist counter-memory'. *Continuum* 30(3), 316–25.
- Blake, T. 2001. *A dumping ground: A history of the Cherbourg settlement*. Brisbane: University of Queensland Press.
- Bonnell, J. and Simon, R.I. 2007. "Difficult" exhibitions and intimate encounters'. *Museum and Society* 5(2), 65–17.
- Booth, W.J. 2006. *Communities of memory: On witness, identity, and justice*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Boyatzis, R.E. 1998. *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Chinnery, A. 2010. "What good does all this remembering do, anyway?" On historical consciousness and the responsibility of memory'. In G. Biesta (ed.), *Philosophy of Education*. Chicago, IL: Philosophy of Education Society, pp. 397–405.
- 2013. 'Caring for the past: On relationality and historical consciousness'. *Ethics and Education* 8(3), 253–62.
- Connerton, P. 1989. *How societies remember*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Crowley, V. 2012. 'Disorderly narratives, public pedagogies and reconciliation'. In P. Ahluwalia, S. Atkinson, P. Bishop, P. Christie, R. Hattam and J. Matthews (eds), *Reconciliation and pedagogy*. London: Routledge, pp. 95–117.
- Crowley, V. and Matthews, J. 2006. 'Museum, memorial and mall: Post-colonialism, pedagogies, racism and reconciliation'. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society* 14(3), 263–77.
- Edelglass, W. 2006. 'Levinas on suffering and compassion'. *Sophia* 45(2), 39–55.

- Ellsworth, E. 2002. 'The US Holocaust Museum as a scene of pedagogical address'. *Symploke* 10(1–2), 13–31.
- Eppert, C. 2000. 'Relearning questions: Responding to the ethical address of past and present others'. In R.I. Simon, S. Rosenberg and C. Eppert (eds), *Between hope and despair: Pedagogy and the remembrance of historical trauma*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, pp. 213–30.
- Freire, P. 1972. *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. London: Sheed and Ward.
- 1998. *Pedagogy of freedom: Ethics, democracy, and civic courage*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- 2014. *Pedagogy of hope: Reliving 'pedagogy of the oppressed': With notes by Ana Maria Araujo Freire*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Giroux, H.A. 1997. *Pedagogy and the politics of hope: Theory, culture and schooling: A critical reader*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Hall, S. 1996. 'The question of cultural identity'. In S. Hall, D. Held, D. Hubert and K. Thompson (eds), *Modernity: An introduction to modern societies*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, pp. 595–632.
- 1997. 'Introduction'. In S. Hall (ed.), *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. London: Sage, pp. 1–11.
- 2013. 'Introduction: Who needs "identity"?' In S. Hall and P. du Gay (eds), *Questions of cultural identity*. London: Sage, pp. 1–17.
- hooks, b. 2003. *Teaching community: A pedagogy of hope*. New York: Routledge.
- Hooper-Greenhill, E. 2000. *Museums and the interpretation of visual culture*. London: Routledge.
- Kidd, R. 1997. *The way we civilise: Aboriginal affairs — the untold story*. Brisbane: University of Queensland Press.
- Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, B. 2015. "'Inside the museum": Curating between hope and despair — POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews'. *East European Jewish Affairs* 45(2–3), 215–35.
- Lehrer, E. and Milton, C.E. 2011. 'Introduction: Witnesses to witnessing'. In E. Lehrer, C. Milton and M.E. Patterson (eds), *Curating difficult knowledge: Violent pasts in public places*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 1–21.
- Lytard, J. 1984. *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Madison, D.S. 2005. *Critical ethnography: Method, ethics and performance*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Paolantonio, M.D. 2015. 'Roger Simon as a thinker of the remnants: An overview of a way of thinking the present, our present ...' *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 34(3), 263–7.
- Ration Shed Museum. 2018. 'About Cherbourg'. *Ration Shed Museum*. <http://rationshed.com.au/about-cherbourg>, viewed 10 February 2018.
- Rothberg, M. 2009. *Multidirectional memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the age of decolonization*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Saldaña, J. 2015. *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Santayana, G. 1905. *Reason in common sense* (vol. 1). New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

- Seixas, P. (ed.) 2004. *Theorizing historical consciousness*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Silvén, E. and Björklund, A. 2006. 'Detecting difficulty'. In E. Silvén and A. Björklund (eds), *Difficult matters: Objects and narratives that disturb and affect*. Stockholm: Nordiska Museets Förlag, pp. 248–64.
- Simon, R.I. 2000. 'The paradoxical practice of Zakhor: Memories of "what has never been my fault or deed"'. In R.I. Simon, S. Rosenberg and C. Eppert (eds), *Between hope and despair: Pedagogy and the remembrance of historical trauma*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, pp. 9–26.
- 2004. 'The pedagogical insistence of public memory'. In P. Seixas (ed.), *Theorizing historical consciousness*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. 183–200.
- 2005. *The touch of the past: Remembrance, learning and ethics*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- 2006. 'The terrible gift: Museums and the possibility of hope without consolation'. *Museum Management and Curatorship* 21(3), 187–204.
- 2011a. 'Afterword: The turn to pedagogy: A needed conversation on the practice of curating difficult knowledge'. In E. Lehrer, C. Milton and M.E. Patterson (eds), *Curating difficult knowledge: Violent pasts in public places*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 193–209.
- 2011b. 'A shock to thought: Curatorial judgment and the public exhibition of "difficult knowledge"'. *Memory Studies* 4(4), 432–49.
- 2012. 'Museums, civic life, and the educative force of remembrance'. In B. M. Carbonell (ed.), *Museum studies: An anthology of contexts* (2nd ed.). Malden: Blackwell Publishing, Malden, pp. 92–6.
- 2014. *A pedagogy of witnessing: Curatorial practice and the pursuit of social justice*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- 2016. 'The terrible gift: Difficult memories for the twenty-first century'. In S.R. Butler and E. Lehrer (eds), *Curatorial dreams: Critics imagine exhibitions*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, pp. 172–86.
- Simon, R.I., Rosenberg, S. and Eppert, C. 2000. 'Introduction: Between hope and despair: The pedagogical encounter of historical remembrance'. In R.I. Simon S. Rosenberg and C. Eppert (eds), *Between hope and despair: Pedagogy and the remembrance of historical trauma*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, pp. 1–8.
- Smith, C. 2014. 'Post-modernising the museum: The Ration Shed'. *Historical Encounter* 1(1), 32–49.
- Spradley, J.P. 1979. *The ethnographic interview*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Thorp, R. 2014. 'Towards an epistemological theory of historical consciousness'. *Historical Encounters* 1(1), 20–31.
- Tilley, C. 1994. 'Interpreting material culture'. In S.M. Pearce (ed.), *Interpreting objects and collections*. London: Routledge, pp. 67–75.
- Veracini, L. 2010. *Settler colonialism: A theoretical overview*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Williams, P. 2012. 'The memorial museum identity complex: Victimhood, culpability, and responsibility'. In B.M. Carbonell (ed.), *Museum studies: An anthology of contexts* (2nd ed.). Malden, MA: Blackwell, pp. 97–115.

- Witcomb, A. 2003. *Re-imagining the museum: Beyond the mausoleum*. London: Routledge.
- 2013. ‘Understanding the role of affect in producing a critical pedagogy for history museums’. *Museum Management and Curatorship* 28(3), 255–71.
- 2014. ‘“Look, listen and feel”: The First Peoples exhibition at the Bunjilaka Gallery, Melbourne Museum’. *Thema La revue des Musées de la civilisation* 1, 49–62.
- 2015a. ‘Cross-cultural encounters and “difficult heritage” on the Thai–Burma railway: An ethics of cosmopolitanism rather than practices of exclusion’. In W. Logan M.N. Craith, and U. Kockel (eds), *A companion to heritage studies*. Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, pp. 461–78.
- 2015b. ‘Cultural pedagogies in the museum: Walking, listening and feeling’. In M. Watkins G. Noble and C. Driscoll (eds), *Cultural pedagogies and human conduct*. London: Routledge, pp. 158–70.
- 2015c. ‘Thinking about others through museums and heritage’. In E. Waterton and S. Watson (eds), *The Palgrave handbook of contemporary heritage research*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 130–43.
- 2015d. ‘Toward a pedagogy of feeling: Understanding how museums create a space for cross-cultural encounters’. In A. Witcomb and K. Message (eds.), *Museum theory: An expanded field*. Brisbane: John Wiley & Sons, pp. 321–44.
- Wolfe, P. 1999. *Settler colonialism and the transformation of anthropology: The politics and poetics of an ethnographic event*. London: Cassell.