

A World of World Heritage: Seduction, Dis-enchantment and New Intimacies

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Professor Mike Robinson (</staff/profiles/ironbridge/robinson-mike.aspx>) delivered his inaugural lecture as Chair of Cultural Heritage and Director of the Ironbridge International Institute for Cultural Heritage at the University of Birmingham on 18 March 2014.

As the number of UNESCO designated World Heritage Sites creeps inevitably towards the one thousand mark Professor Robinson reflected upon this particularly modern category of heritage and the pervasive power it appears to exert upon societies and individuals.

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Professor Robinson is interested in the ways in which the concept of World Heritage in particular, draws us into discourses of optimistic humanism, promises of enlightenment and, social and economic betterment. At the same time he is interested in the instances where World Heritage fails social groups, to the point of creating sites of, at best, passive engagement and, at worse, open conflict.

What do 'our' responses to World Heritage, as nation states, local communities and individual tourists, tell us about our 'being-in-the-world'? What happens when the promises of World Heritage do not materialise? How does World Heritage survive in a context of rapidly shifting values and new global mobilities? Professor Robinson suggested we need to explore new relationships with World Heritage which open up interesting cross-disciplinary and cross-sectoral agendas.