New Sources of Heritage Theory: Affect and the non-representational paradigm
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Heritage has been theorised from a number of distinct sources since it emerged as an object of scholarly concern. From its uncertain origins in the techniques and technicalities of interpretive communication, it has variously drawn its ontological status from its materiality, from social theory and latterly cultural geography. Along the way it has also attracted the interest of psychologists, economists and educationalists, as well as tourism specialists. The time is ripe, therefore, for a fundamental re-appraisal of the sources of heritage theory, and a questioning of whether indeed any kind of coherent theoretical framework is possible. In order to address this question we offer here a move away from conventional approaches to heritage theory and especially ideas of heritage as ‘bricks and mortar’, or at best a set of operational imperatives, towards one that examines it as embodied, practiced and habitual, something that interweaves with the world to form identities and a range of social, cultural and political meanings. Such an understanding requires the field of heritage studies to detach from those knowledges traditionally associated with archaeology and history and re-think ‘heritage’ in light of new theoretical developments in, for example, non-representational theory, the politics of affect and emotional geographies. For this to happen, heritage knowledge also needs to develop methodological tools capable of tapping into an affective dimension and the various sensualities that ‘heritage as embodied process’ affords. Here, the work of key scholars who have had an impact on this creative theoretical trajectory, including David Crouch, Martin Selby and Divya Tolia-Kelly, will be drawn upon. In the end, however, while the paper has some specific things to say about the ontology of heritage, it is also laced with an implicit challenge, levied at any scholar engaged with heritage studies, to help produce new ways of thinking about the role it plays in everyday life and experience.