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Book Review for *cultural geographies*

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The Afterlives of the Psychiatric Asylum: Recycling Concepts, Sites and Memories. By Graham Moon, Robin Kearns and Alun Joseph, Burlington and Farnham: Ashgate. 2015.

Meandering through the dense foliage that blankets the broken buildings on site, a feeling of disquiet hangs in the air like the early morning mist. DANGER – KEEP OUT signs distract the eye as I desperately try to glance at the former asylum landscape and excavate its histories. Whilst reviewing Moon et al's book *The Afterlives of the Psychiatric Asylum*, I coincidentally find myself visiting the now closed site of Scotland's first Lunatic Hospital, an epitome of Moon et al's key character in their book. The 'fate' of the asylum which the authors so cleverly reveal through their chosen case studies, are played out in miniature at my site and as I hear the squelch of the drenched soil beneath my feet, the vividness of the book's key arguments are thrown into sharper view.

Moon et al's book is a pioneering study into the recycling, reusing and reimagining of the psychiatric asylum in the twenty-first century. While numerous geographical studies have centred upon where the individuals wrapped up within these former landscapes of care have gone, since the dawning of the process of deinstitutionalisation, these authors turn to dissecting what these physical presences in the landscape have now become.

One of the most important contributions of this book is the attention given to derelict asylum sites as 'places in waiting' (p. 156) in relation to the layers of deeply embedded stigma that are associated with such asylum locations. Peeling back the layers of stigmatised pasts, from the modern renaming of sites through to their newly reformed functions, this book highlights the importance of thinking through the dynamic processes of change in closed asylum sites. While there has been a surge of interest in geography with issues around ruination and urban exploration, few studies have actively focussed upon the redevelopment of such sites and what repercussions this has for memory and heritage, particularly in relation to emerging asylum geographies.

The themes of haunting and the spectral run throughout this book highlighting the complex relationship between memory and place. Quoting Michel de Certeau the book illuminates that 'there is no place that is not haunted by many different spirits hidden there in silence' (p.156). However, at times, this concentration on the ghostly manifestations of past lives and practices leaves the fleshy realities of past asylum worlds at the margins. While the majority of this book focusses upon the point where asylums are closed and no longer functioning in their original remit, it is clear that the bodies and experiences of individuals who worked, lived, died and then re-inhabit such places do have a central significance. Chapter 4 'One-site Survival' is an indication of where the realities of mental health provision are brought into sharper focus. Details surrounding the forensic facilities give glimpses into the types of working units that remain. However, still the embodied experiences of its inhabitants are shut firmly behind barbed wire fences and locked ward doors, reemerging only as ghostly shapes and shadows in the margins of the text. Further

engagement with the bodies and minds that moved within these landscapes could help to contextualise further the embodiment of stigmatisation that surrounds such unique places.

This book is undoubtedly an innovative treasure trove of examples and reflections on the newly emerging (post)asylum landscape. Perhaps what is most haunting about these sites is not their presence in the landscape – modified or otherwise – but their neglect in contemporary conversations within social, cultural and mental health geography. As the notion of ‘asylum’ in its various guises becomes increasingly fraught in the insecure political landscape, perhaps the requirement to redefine and challenge engagements with asylum spaces are crucial for the next step in the care, protection and provision for the world’s most vulnerable people. This book is an excellent step forward in this mission.