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Heritage in the present

Heritage is everywhere

David Lowenthal’s classic *The Past is a Foreign Country* opens with the sentence “The past is everywhere”, and he used exactly the same words three decades later when he revisited that country (Lowenthal 1985: xv; 2015: 1). *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* begins in much the same way, but here the past has been limited to heritage: “ALL AT ONCE HERITAGE IS EVERYWHERE – in the news, in the movies, in the marketplace – in everything from galaxies to genes” (Lowenthal 1997: ix). The phrase “Heritage everywhere” is later used as the title of the introductory chapter of Rodney Harrison’s *Heritage: Critical Approaches* (Harrison 2013: 1).

Lowenthal was not alone in concluding that the past, with its history, memory, and heritage, was intruding on the present. That same observation turns up on a broad front in the West in the 1980s and 1990s. The sense that there was an inflation of the past triggered a wave of critical reflections on this development: Agnes Heller found an increased focus on museums in Europe after the First World War (Heller 1988); Hermann Lübbe noted an increase in musealisation in Switzerland and Germany over the twentieth century (Lübbe 1982); Robert Hewison observed an increase in the number of museums, theme parks, and visitor centres in England since the 1960s and launched the concept “Heritage Industry” (Hewison 1987: 83ff); Françoise Choay perceived an inflation in heritage since the 1960s, reacting particularly strongly against the establishment of industrial monuments and increased heritage tourism (Choay 1992 (French): 158ff; 2001 (English): 138ff); and Andreas Huyssen observed a “relentless museummania” in the 1980s (Huyssen 1995: 14, 20, 25ff). In Sweden, Svante Beckman noted rapid growth in aesthetic and entertainment use of history and heritage, with an ever-larger number of museums and antique markets (Beckman 1993a: 28f).
Referring to the rising number of countries that had ratified the World Heritage Convention and the increasing number of World Heritage sites, Thordis Arrhenius concluded that “[t]he inflation of heritage is today a fact” (Arrhenius 2003: 162). And Rodney Harrison discusses a “heritage boom” and “crisis of accumulation” in late modernity (Harrison 2013: 68ff, 166).

In The Past is a Foreign Country (1985; 2015), Lowenthal mainly gathered, presented, and commented on examples in a collage, but he was all the more explicit in his criticism of heritage in The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History (1997). Other debaters in the 1980s and 1990s were also particularly critical. The background of the development and establishment of “critical heritage” as a separate field of research and education can be sought precisely in the experience that the past, and especially heritage, were occupying more than their fair share of space in the present. This inflation had to be examined and, if necessary, also opposed. But with the gradual maturing of the field, the harsh initial criticism has been toned down and is being replaced by more balanced analysis and reflection (e.g. Harrison 2013: 204ff; Aronsson & Elgenius 2015).

At this time, however, there are many questions to consider. Is heritage actually everywhere? Which cultures are involved in the handling of heritage? When, how, and why does heritage arise and develop as a concept? What characterises heritage? What role do threats and vandalism play for heritage? What is the relationship between heritage and modernity? And what role does, or can, heritage have in the present?

To begin with the first question, is heritage everywhere? On an anecdotal plane, at any rate, it may be noted that David Lowenthal and the old or new edition of his book The Past is a Foreign Country turn up everywhere in the debate about the past, history, memory, and heritage. And over three decades, his book has increased in size from 489 to 660 pages.

It can also be noted that the concepts of cultural and natural heritage are well established in present-day legislation, management, and debate. The globalisation of heritage is seen in the establishment of UNESCO’s Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972). Between 1978 and 2019, the number of World Heritage sites increased from 12 in seven countries to 1121 in 167 countries (The World’s Heritage 2018; WHL, July 2019). And at the national level, heritage is included in the names of a number of institutions, one example being English Heritage (www.english-heritage.org.uk).
Since the 1980s, “critical heritage” has also gradually become established as a field in its own right. Its establishment is demonstrated by the many universities that conduct some form of education and research concerning heritage, manifested in the appearance of special networks, centres or departments, conferences, journals, textbooks, and theses. Examples are the *International Journal of Heritage Studies* (since 1994) and the Association of Critical Heritage Studies (since 2010; www.criticalheritagestudies.org).

One manifestation of the popularity of the heritage concept is its continual division into sub-categories according to type, period, or geography: cultural heritage and natural heritage, critical heritage, experimental heritage, applied heritage, digital heritage, biological heritage, heritage of war, architectural heritage, maritime heritage, intangible heritage, difficult heritage, classical heritage, heritage of modernity, heritage of the future, English heritage, African heritage, and many more.

Another expression of the popularity of heritage is seen in the way that the concept is constantly becoming relevant to new areas or seeping into closely related fields: heritage is combined with such words as archaeology, art, canon, church, colonialism, commercialism, conservation, criminality, democracy, development, development-assistance policy, economics, education, environment, ethics, forests, future, globalisation, politics of memory, history, human rights, identity, identity policy, landscape, legislation, management, memory, modernity(!), museums, nationalism, peace-building, politics, quality of life, religion, religious services, school, science, settlement, society, sustainable development, tourism, use, use of history, values, and world.

And as has happened with “history”, “historicise”, and “historisation”, as well as with “museum”, “musealise”, and “musealisation”, new words have been formed from “heritage” – words that mark a process and suggest a new disciplinary designation: “heritagisation” and “heritology” (e.g. Walsh 1992: 135ff; Sola 2005).

The thesis according to which there has been an inflation in heritage largely rests on an impressionistic experience that calls for concretisation and confirmation by evidence. Harrison thus substantiates a boom with statistics from the UK – National Trust membership (1895–2007 for England, Wales, and Northern Ireland) and annual visitor figures for Stonehenge (1925–2008) as well as for the British Museum (1760–2010); from the US – Colonial National Historical Park (1932–2010), Chao Culture National Historical Park (1925–2010), Yosemite National Park (1925–2010), and the
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Smithsonian Museum (1970–2010); and globally from a number of World Heritage Sites in Danger (1978–2011) (Harrison 2013: 68ff with Figs 4: 1–8).

Harrison claims to identify a boom from around 1970, but his graphs do not show any uniform trend, apart from a gradual increase over a long period of time with breaks for the First and Second World Wars and some temporary deviations. The increase can be demonstrated from the nineteenth century (British Museum) and from the 1920s (Stonehenge, Yosemite), the 1940s (Colonial), and the 1950s (Chao). World Heritage Sites in Danger demonstrates growth since the 1970s, when the list came into being. Only National Trust membership displays a clear steep rise from 1970 onwards, but this growth followed a period of reorganisation and reorientation away from the previous focus on the country houses of the elite (www.nationaltrust.org.uk/lists/our-history-1945–2000).

Harrison’s statistics may be supplemented by overviews from other areas: the establishment of national museums in Europe, which is bound up with nationalism and the establishment of nation states, the consequence being that the phenomenon culminates in the nineteenth century (Elgenius 2015); and the establishment of state and state-recognised museums in Denmark (1770–1997), which shows a relative increase over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Floris & Vasström 1999: 387ff). In contrast, both the establishment of reconstructions and sites with reconstructions in Scandinavia and the creation of archaeological open-air museums in Europe show a marked increase since the 1960s (Petersson 2003: 399ff; Paardekooper 2011: 79 Fig. 5).

In addition, the relationship between different concepts in the public debate can be illustrated from a long-term perspective with the aid of media archaeology, or “digging” in an archive. The occurrence of the words “history” (Swedish historia) and “[cultural] heritage” (Swedish kulturarv) can thus be followed in the Swedish newspaper Svenska Dagbladet with the aid of a digital archive from the founding of the paper in 1884 until the present (January 2020); Svenska Dagbladet is a morning paper, orientated towards the capital, with a conservative profile.

The word “history” appears in all these years with a steadily increasing number of pages; the highest, 4764 pages, occurs in 1994 (Appendix 3). By contrast, the expression “cultural heritage” appears for the first time in 1903; it then reappears regularly, but to a relatively limited extent, before increasing from the end of the 1970s onwards, the biggest number – 261 pages – being recorded for
the year 2000. The expression “natural heritage” (Swedish naturarv) appears for the first time in 1923 and then makes highly sporadic appearances until the 1990s, when the concept occurs slightly more frequently, peaking in 1999 with seven newspaper pages.

It is notable that the word “history” dominates completely in every single year. The ratio between the expressions “history” and “cultural heritage” presents a clear pattern, the ratio of cultural heritage to history increasing gradually but steadily from 0.1 % in 1903 to its peak of 6.1 % in 2016. In the 1980s and 1990s, decades said to have witnessed an inflation or a boom, “cultural heritage” never rises above a ratio of 3.5 %.

The relative importance of the concepts “history”, “memory”, and “heritage” is also revealed by a Google search for the words as a quantitative hierarchy, with “history” at the top and “heritage” at the bottom: “history” 12,990 million, “memory” 2,360 million, and “heritage” 1,740 million; “archaeology” with 308 million comes in far below “heritage” (www.google.com; observed on 1 January 2020).

A fresh look at the statistical examples results in a new picture. The past and heritage were not suddenly everywhere. Instead, we observe a gradual increase in museums, museum visits, and heritage tourism that follows on from a general trend in the West with the establishment of nation states, population growth, and more leisure and motorised travel. There has not been a boom, in the sense of something unexpected or sudden; nor has there been any inflation, in the sense of something having ballooned. There has been a general and gradual numerical increase over a very long period, which cannot come as a surprise; and history has maintained its leading position.

The sense that there has been a boom and an inflation with regard to heritage since the 1980s is due to two factors: first, new themes and periods claimed space as the industrial heritage of modernity; second, there was a shift to new forms of mediation, such as reconstructions and re-enactment. The texts of history had to make room for more material expressions such as images, environments, and acts; and more room was demanded for heritage, with its monuments, buildings, sites, and landscapes.

It is the critics of heritage who sound warnings about a boom and an inflation, even though the shift appears to be relatively modest. The critics would prefer to see an orientation towards traditional text-orientated history, traditional exhibitions, and pre-modern themes. The same internal opposition has been encountered by
antiquarian practice and disciplines such as history and archaeology when their focus has gradually shifted from exclusive concentration on Antiquity and the Middle Ages so that there is also coverage of the Early Modern and Modern periods, not to mention the present and the future.

But the reaction is exaggerated and partly misleading, since traditional text-based history still dominates completely, as does the museum with its exhibitions. However, once a boom has been described, it becomes a fact that is repeated in an unthinking manner. Both opponents and adherents may have an interest in claiming that heritage has expanded.

There is also a rhetorical rivalry that can be seen from the perspectives chosen: everything is history, everything is memory, or everything is heritage. Each of them wants its particular discourse and concepts to cover the whole field of interest in the past. That the concept of heritage also wants to assert its place is apparently regarded as a provocation.

So what is heritage? When, how, and why does heritage arise and develop, both as a practice and as a concept? Does heritage have its own essence or is it an expression of a transient process? An approach to these questions encounters two traditions, two groups of narratives or discourses, each of which sets out its own version of an answer, supplying two answers that may complement each other – the canonical and the critical.

Canonical heritage

Canon comes from the Greek word κανών meaning “reed” or “guiding principle”; it may also mean “ruler”, “measuring stick”, “rule”, or “model”. Canonical scriptures are the genuine or authentic texts in the Bible. Canon law is Roman Catholic legislation that has special status. And saints are canonised, that is, recognised by the Church.

The literary critic Harold Bloom attracted attention and generated debate when, in his book *The Western Canon* (1994), he identified a number of authors and their works as canonical masterpieces, centring on William Shakespeare. Universal or national canonical lists assumed fresh relevance as a reaction against the relativism of postmodernism and a postcolonial criticism of Western values, after having been undeclared and part of general education in earlier times. One example of a formalised hierarchy may be seen in the Danish “Culture Canon” (Danish Kulturkanon, 2006), which arose
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from a political initiative but was compiled by experts. This canon, which was later followed by several others, selected 96 phenomena in seven areas – architecture, visual arts, design and crafts, film, literature, music, and performing arts – of which all Danes ought to be aware.

Canonical lists are not a new phenomenon. For example, the Seven Wonders of the World from Antiquity constitutes a list of outstanding buildings of that period (Klynne 2019). But there is a constant selection of what is considered worth telling about, remembering, or preserving for the future, while other things are consigned to silence, oblivion, or destruction (Assmann 1992 (German): 87ff, 167ff; 2011 (English): 70ff, 147ff). The temples of Abu Simbel represent a monumental canon that communicates an arranged image of Pharaoh Ramses II and the Battle of Kadesh.

Canonical lists are written down in a deliberate attempt to create and maintain hierarchies of values, in which something is considered more valuable than something else. They are written down when there is a need to do so; that is, when something is being threatened by silence, oblivion, or destruction – or is being threatened by alternative priorities. Bloom’s canon was produced because he explicitly considered that the Western literary canon was under threat (Bloom 1994: 8). Irrespective of their justifications and motives, then, canons and canonisation are ultimately about power over the discourse.

Heritage represents one such canon. Heritage is used as a concept denoting that part of our inheritance that needs to be protected and preserved for the future. Something is selected as being heritage and given priority, whereas other things are allowed to disappear.

Canonical heritage may stand for an endeavour to protect and preserve selected remains from the past. Canonical heritage is characterised by the notion that the relevant heritage is threatened, but worth protecting and preserving for the future. Canonical heritage is therefore engaged in justifying protection and preservation, in setting criteria for the selection of heritage, and in developing new methods. Canonical heritage brings together individuals, groups, associations, management units, and institutions. Both legislation and a bureaucratic management culture have evolved around work on heritage.

There is extensive literature on the evolution of protection and preservation of remains from the past. This literature is a set of narratives that describe the gradual evolution of protection and preservation, from sporadic initiatives to the present national or international
law and conventions. These narratives supply a forward-looking outline of the fight against the threats of various periods. They comprise accounts of the first examples of preservation; of heroic pioneers and their contributions; of government initiatives that were gradually extended to embrace additional categories, periods of time, and countries; and of the establishment of laws and management associated with them. The narratives take us from Antiquity up to the present, often culminating in UNESCO’s World Heritage Convention (1972) and the subsequent first national examples of World Heritage sites, which are proudly presented. If the narratives take us any further ahead in time, they will also mention intangible heritage (e.g. Chamberlin 1979; Nielsen 1987; Cowell 2008).

The narratives about the emergence of the protection and preservation of cultural and natural heritage form their own historical genre. They deal with the successful dissemination of heritage preservation as an idea and a practice, even though the concept of heritage makes its appearance relatively late in this development. This is a typical piece of legitimising Whig history-writing (e.g. Southgate 1996: 110f), in which the management practices, laws, and conventions of today are the self-evident aims of an essentially progressive development.

A few scenes from the narratives of the history of preservation are presented here, as examples representing the main lines of that history’s development. Taken together, they yield a pattern showing a close connection between destruction – or threats of destruction – and preservation: one causes the other. Alternatively, though, the same actors may both destroy and preserve.

In Memphis, Pharaoh Ramses II’s son the priest Khaemwaset saved a statue of Prince Kawab (Schnapp 1993 (French): 328; 1996 (English): 328). Early paradoxical examples of preservation can also be documented in the Roman Empire. For instance, attempts were made in the fourth and fifth centuries to regulate the use of monuments as quarries for spolia; this serves as evidence that extensive destruction occurred. The Ostrogoth king Theodoric regretted the destruction in Rome, but he himself imported spolia for his construction projects in Ravenna in around the year 500 (Schnapp 1993 (French): 83f; 1996 (English): 83; Fabricius Hansen 2003: 108ff, 157, 238f).

In 1162, the Roman Senate laid down the death penalty and loss of property for anyone who damaged Emperor Trajan’s column: “Nous voulons qu’elle demeure intacte, sans corruption, tant que le monde durera” (Schnapp 1993 (French): 94; 1996 (English): 94,
“We wish it to remain intact, without decay, as long as the world shall last”). Pope Pius II prohibited the use of Roman ruins as a quarry in 1462, but the same pope caused Octavian’s colonnade in Rome to be destroyed (Schnapp 1993 (French): 338f; 1996 (English): 339f). The Danish King Hans provides an early Scandinavian example of building conservation: in 1508, he proposed renovating the Romanesque crypt at Lund Cathedral (Nielsen 1987: 30f). In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, states such as Denmark, Sweden, and England took numerous initiatives to make inventories of, document, and protect monuments that could shed lustre on the history of their realms. In 1666, Sweden was the first to take two initiatives: first, a law called “Signs and decrees on old monuments and antiquities” (“Placat och Påbudh Om Gamble Monumenter och Antiquiteter”) and, second, nationwide “Inventories for antiquities” (“Rannsakningar efter antikviteter”) (Jensen 2002: 325ff).

The French Revolution, the subsequent Napoleonic Wars, and the Romantic movement brought a new focus on the past, with worship of both Antiquity and the Middle Ages. It is in this period that the museum emerges as an institution, that disciplines such as archaeology, history of art, and history are established, and that the first legislation on protection is enacted. In the midst of the turbulence of the revolution in 1790, the concept “historic monument” was used for the first time by the antiquary Aubin-Louis Millin de Grandmaison as a designation for palaces, churches, and abbeys which could show the history of the country and which therefore needed to be protected from destruction (Choay 1992 (French): 76ff; 2001 (English): 63ff).

It was also during the French Revolution that two new rhetorical concepts, “vandalism” and “heritage”, were established as two sides of the same events. In 1794 the Bishop of Blois, Henri Grégoire, employed the term “vandalism” as a piece of invective to describe the destruction of libraries and religious art. At the same time, he used the words “un héritage commun”, a common heritage, about what needed to be protected (Choay 1992 (French): 76ff; 2001 (English): 63ff; Gamboni 1997: 17ff; Schildgen 2008: 121ff).

As the art historian Derek Gillman has pointed out, Grégoire must have been inspired by the politician and philosopher Edmund Burke, who had written the following in Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790: 47):

You will observe, that from Magna Charta to the Declaration of Right [sic], it has been the uniform policy of our constitution to
claim and assert our liberties, as an ‘entailed inheritance’ derived to us from our forefathers, and to be transmitted to our posterity; as an estate specially belonging to the people of this kingdom without any reference whatever to any other more general or prior right.

The book was translated into French, and then “inheritance” became “heritage” (Gillman 2010: 82ff).

These preservation endeavours were intensified with industrialism and nationalism, especially from around 1870 to the First World War, also known as the period of “The Invention of Tradition”. To name some examples, Japan’s first legislation on preservation came in the 1870s, when the country started a vigorous process of modernisation. Germany began the documentation of monuments at the same time as the country was undergoing a rapid industrialisation. The US was, by contrast, first to have nature conservation, with the national park in Yellowstone in 1872, the Niagara Falls in 1885, and the Grand Canyon in 1919. And the first systematic criteria for the protection of memorials were developed by Alois Riegl in Austria-Hungary after 1900 (Riegl 1903 (German); 1929 (German); 1982 (English)).

Critical heritage

The word “criticism” comes from the Greek word *kritike*, which refers to the art of making judgements. It is related to the word “crisis”, which is also of Greek origin, *kri’sis* meaning “decision” or “judgement”. In everyday language, the “criticism” is attended by unfavourable connotations since it is, in practice, often a matter of finding faults and defects; but its application does not rule out a neutral or even favourable appraisal. Since the Age of Enlightenment, criticism has also been the name of a distinct genre of reviews whose purpose is to communicate, describe, interpret, and assess fictional and non-fictional texts, art, music, theatre, and film. Ideally, the aim is to enhance the understanding and experience of the works; but reviews may become stuck in the derogatory and dismissive aspect of criticism.

The development of critical heritage as a separate field may, in my view, be divided into three chronological phases: the 1980s, the 1990s, and the twenty-first century. In each phase, Lowenthal has a patent impact through his publications. But first, an account will be provided of the history-of-ideas-related, historical, and political conditions that obtain in this field.
The background in the history of ideas of the emergence of critical heritage is formed by various influences that are not necessarily compatible. Chief among them are the Frankfurt School and critical theory, with names such as Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, and later Jürgen Habermas. Here, bourgeois society and its institutions and values are criticised from the left of the political spectrum. It is a criticism that regards traditions, museums, and heritage as conservative phenomena geared to preserving the existing society. According to this line of thought, society should not merely be described; it should be changed as well. Post-structuralism’s power-and-discourse criticism follows, with Michel Foucault as the central name. Finally, mention should be made of postcolonialism’s reckoning with a Western perspective on the world; one important work here is Edward Said’s book *Orientalism* (1978).

Critical theory, poststructuralism, and postcolonialism come together in the critical study of the uses of the past and “the others” that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. Scholars who belong to this orientation ask what past is examined and mediated, how, where, and when this happens, who does it, and for whom – and ultimately why the past is being examined and mediated at all. Besides the essay “Imperialism and Archaeology” (Bandaranayake 1974) and the book *The Rape of the Nile* (Fagan 1975), many were inspired by the anthology *The Invention of Tradition* (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983), which showed how history was not only used but also invented. Moreover, inspiration for the critical study of memory, monuments, and memorials came from Pierre Nora’s project *Les Lieux de mémoire* (1984 (French); 1989 (English), *Realms of Memory*).

The social, economic, and political developments of the 1970s and 1980s formed a direct precondition for the emergence of critical heritage. Those were turbulent decades during which countries in the West were affected by a lack of belief in progress as well as by oil crises, deindustrialisation, and neoliberalism. There was also a shift in the use of the past from knowledge to experience and reflection – and a shift to new forms of mediation.

Lowenthal had already formulated the basis for critical heritage in the anthology *Our Past Before Us* (Lowenthal & Binney 1981), which summarised a symposium held in London in 1979. In the introduction, Lowenthal noted that “[s]aving historic sites and objects has become a widely popular cause. Although pollution, neglect, and the bulldozer still take a heavy toll, more and more is now being rescued. The growth of the preservation movement...
is one of the major social phenomena of our time” (1981: 9). And Lowenthal specifically wanted to see a critical analysis: “As a self-conscious movement, preservation is still too new to have attracted much critical analysis” (1981: 10). He also includes an early variant of later statements about the past and heritage being everywhere: “Remnants of our past lie all around us, some whole, some decayed, some in shreds and tatters, some to be discerned only in traces” (1981: 10).

Critical heritage had a breakthrough in the mid-1980s with the publication of three now “canonical” books that generated attention and debate (cf. Sørensen & Carman 2009: 17ff; Harrison 2013: 98ff): David Lowenthal’s *The Past is a Foreign Country* (1985), Patrick Wright’s *On Living in an Old Country* (1985), and Robert Hewison’s *The Heritage Industry* (1987). Two of the key works supplied Lowenthal’s own extensive reply to the wonderment expressed in his introduction, where nostalgia came in for especially harsh criticism; Wright’s criticism of the use of history as a diversionary political manoeuvre in the present; and Hewison’s devastating criticism of the heritage industry as a new sector of the economy.

It should be pointed out that these three books all represented Western self-criticism originating in personal experience from the UK and the US. The next point to note is that this first phase of criticism was itself nostalgic, polemic, and very critical in a negative sense.

The 1990s then saw a broadening of the field, widely dissimilar disciplines being inspired by Lowenthal’s book in particular. Now there was a gradual “academicisation”, in which heritage emerged as a research field in its own right. The periodical *International Journal of Heritage Studies* (1994ff) was founded in this period. In Sweden, a research project was completed and published in the anthology *Modernisering och Kulturarv* (“Modernisation and Heritage”, Anshelm 1993). And Lowenthal himself published *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (1997), which was hypercritical of the whole phenomenon of heritage.

The final establishment of critical heritage as an academic field in its own right has come in the twenty-first century. This is when teaching and research are established at centres and departments whose scholars focus on heritage. The first real textbooks have been published during this period, for instance *The Heritage Reader* (Fairclough et al. 2009) and *Heritage Studies* (Sørensen & Carman 2009). Cooperation between academics at universities in Australia, Sweden, and the UK has led to the formation of the Association of
Critical Heritage Studies (since 2010; www.criticalheritagestudies.org). Mention may also be made of the textbook *Heritage: Critical Approaches* (Harrison 2013). There was a reprint of Wright’s *On Living in an Old Country* in 2009, and Lowenthal has revised his standard work in *The Past is a Foreign Country – Revisited* (2015). But there has not been a new impression of Hewison’s *The Heritage Industry*.

As with criticism more generally, it should be possible to regard critical heritage as an endeavour to mediate, describe, interpret, and assess the protection, preservation, and use of heritage. Ideally, the purpose would be to increase the understanding of heritage in the context of impending change. Critical heritage may therefore be concerned with what heritage is protected, preserved, and used; how, where, and when this happens; and who it is done by and for whom – and also why heritage is protected, preserved, and used in the first place.

My description or definition of critical heritage as typical genre criticism is fairly open. The reason is that in practice, critical heritage displays great breadth, not least in terms of perspectives and attitudes.

The first and most radical form of criticism is aimed against heritage itself as an idea. It rejects the view that the past with its history, memory, and heritage is in any way a good or necessary thing. Strikingly often, though, rhetoric and invective take the place of arguments, heritage being linked to threats, disease, and religion—or interest in heritage being viewed unfavourably as a “heritage industry”. This is how critical heritage is introduced by David Lowenthal, Patrick Wright, and Robert Hewison; but similar attitudes are voiced by many others, among them Norman O. Brown, Pierre Boulez, Donald Horne, Agnes Heller, Françoise Choay, Andreas Huyssen, Frank Füredi, and Svante Beckman. However, this radical criticism appears to belong chiefly to the 1980s and 1990s as an initial reaction against a perceived expansion of heritage.

The second form of criticism focuses on the use, in the sense of consumption, of heritage, taking the view that protection and preservation should not prevent continued use or new modes of use, even if heritage is affected in the process. In the choice between preservation and destruction, the argument is that destruction is acceptable or even preferable. For instance, archaeologist Cornelius Holtorf maintains that heritage may be allowed to be consumed, or worn out, since new heritage is always at hand; he views heritage as an enduring resource (Holtorf 2005: 130ff). Even though heritage...
is not rejected in principle, this attitude is, in practice, reminiscent of the first radical criticism in that it consistently argues that a specific piece of heritage may be allowed to disappear for some reason.

The third, and now most widespread, criticism is concerned with the choice of heritage – the point being that the existing heritage has been too narrowly defined. The established heritage administered by institutions such as UNESCO and ICOMOS is regarded as being too traditional, as bearing the imprint of Western thinking, and as being dominated by material culture and monuments linked precisely to the West. This criticism wants to see an extension of heritage in both theoretical and practical terms. The material therefore needs to be supplemented by the intangible, so that more people around the world can have their heritage – and therefore their identity – recognised. To be specific, more representation of heritage is needed in relation to neglected subjects, periods, geographical areas and, especially, groups in society with respect to class, gender, and ethnicity. The selection of heritage should not be directed from above, but should be carried out locally (e.g. Smith 2006; Meskell 2018).

One unambiguous example of the third form of criticism is a manifesto formulated for the Association of Critical Heritage Studies at a conference in Gothenburg in Sweden in 2012 and signed by the archaeologist Laurajane Smith: it is a postcolonial programme for change, in which “ruthless criticism of everything existing” is considered necessary in order to rebuild heritage studies from scratch. Smith’s onslaught on the existing is indeed ruthless: “The old way of looking at heritage – the Authorised Heritage Discourse – privileges old, grand, prestigious, expert approved sites, buildings, and artefacts that sustain Western narratives of nation, class and science” (www.criticalheritagestudies.org/history).

As a consequence of the third form of criticism, a large number of attempts are under way both to update and to democratise heritage in the present. Such endeavours may involve activating the heritage in relation to issues of sustainable development and human rights, as well as creating a dialogue with the public and local engagement for heritage (e.g. Alzén & Aronsson 2006; Harrison 2013: 140ff, 204ff; Högberg 2013).

The name “critical heritage” embodies a hint that there is an established alternative, namely something that might be referred to as “uncritical heritage”. That this is actually held to be the case is stated clearly in the 2012 manifesto. It was formulated in explicit opposition to the established, which is described as the “Authorized
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Heritage Discourse”, abbreviated as AHD (Smith 2006: 85ff). The manifesto’s desire to be “ruthless” and to build something new from scratch is revolutionary and iconoclastic. Paradoxically, though, it is Western academic experts on heritage who are formulating the criticism.

Even so, the rhetoric cannot conceal the fact that critical heritage has been in the making for three decades. Critical heritage is established and has networks, centres, departments, teaching programmes, academic staff, conferences, journals, textbooks – and a manifesto. Representatives of critical heritage act as established experts and “gatekeepers”. Consequently, an ACHD – the “Authorized Critical Heritage Discourse” – now also exists.

At the same time, the disparagingly named “Authorized Heritage Discourse”, and UNESCO especially, have been extremely alert to issues involving representation, topicality, and dialogue. Hence, the distinction between old and new, between established and revolutionary, is not as great as the rhetoric wants to claim.

Even if the differences between canonical and critical heritage become blurred over time, there is still a distinct difference when it comes to defining cultural and natural heritage, as well as in relation to such themes as decay and vandalism, and modernity.

Heritage and authenticities

The origin of the word heritage is the Old French word heritage or eritage with the verb heriter, “to inherit”, which comes from the Latin heriditare; so the word “heritage” may be a linguistic legacy from both the Norman invasion and the Roman Empire. “Heritage” is explained as “[p]roperty that is or may be inherited”. “Heritage” is also used as an antiquarian term about “[v]alued objects and qualities such as historic buildings and cultural traditions that have been passed down from previous generations” (OED: VII, 167). Consequently, the meaning of “heritage” is closely associated with the concept of “tradition”, which is used about that which is passed on.

As a wide-ranging and ambiguous concept, “heritage” may form part of numerous contexts, for instance The Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank in the US. “Heritage” may also be the name of a film, a novel, or a political party, and it may even be used as a surname.

The antiquarian concept of “heritage” may be specified as either cultural heritage or natural heritage. In the Nordic languages,
however, “heritage” is often translated as *kulturarv*, corresponding lexically to “cultural heritage”, which does not cover the entire field. And despite the French origin of the word “heritage”, the term *patrimoine*, “paternal inheritance”, is used in France instead.

In antiquarian contexts, as well as in everyday speech, heritage serves as a name for valuable remains of the past. Heritage is then used both as an explanation why something is actually being protected and preserved for the future – well, it is heritage – and as a slogan, raising a call to action: this is heritage, so it needs protection and preservation. Employing the concept is likely to be a good choice in that it creates favourable connotations around the past in a present where the public debate is dominated by economic priorities. And if there is a tendency towards specialisation and fragmentation in research, management, and mediation, “heritage” is able to gather different phenomena under a single umbrella. For like history and memory, heritage covers an extensive field of remains from the past.

In order to be able to explain and understand the emergence of the heritage concept, we can follow the development of what is designated by the concept; that is, both thinking and practice concerning the need to protect and preserve remains from the past for the future. The history of preservation from Antiquity to the present is very clearly set out in narratives intended to legitimise current antiquarian legislation and institutions.

Over time, changing concepts have been used to designate what is to be protected and preserved: antiquities, historic monuments, and heritage. In *From Antiquities to Heritage* (2014), the cultural historian Anne Eriksen has linked the varying concepts to different “regimes of historicity”, drawing inspiration from the historian François Hartog, who is, in turn, inspired by several other scholars, including Michel Foucault with his concept of the episteme (Hartog 2003 (French); 2015 (English)).

Both Hartog and Eriksen want to connect the heritage concept with “presentism”, or the current preoccupation of the present. Heritage is used as a concept referring to everything from the past that someone will inherit and therefore assume responsibility for as an exclusive resource. The concept is also linked to the development of individualism and liberalism (Hartog 2003 (French): 113ff, 163ff; 2015 (English): 97ff, 149ff; Eriksen 2014: 132ff, 149ff). Heritage is hence directly bound up with questions of identity and identity policy. But once again, as in crisis theories, one may suspect that heritage as a contested concept and practice is entangled with topical political phenomena in the present about which the authors are sceptical.
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The formal and actual breakthrough of heritage as a central antiquarian, but also popular, concept came with the adoption of UNESCO’s Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972). But even then, the concept had been around for quite a long time. For instance, “cultural heritage” has a prominent place in the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (1954, Chapter 1, Article 1).

Consequently, it is not wholly convincing when Patrick Wright claims – with reference to Hannah Arendt and others – that the heritage concept was regarded in an unfavourable light before the 1980s (cf. Wright 2009: xff). Even so, heritage may have conveyed unfortunate associations with the German word Ahnenerbe (“ancestral heritage”), which was the name of a research institute within the SS, the Schutzstaffel, 1933–1945 (Pringle 2006). And generally speaking, the heritage concept may have been viewed as non-progressive by those who were striving for modernisation.

In Sweden, the breakthrough for the use of the heritage concept has been dated as having occurred in the late 1980s and interpreted as part of a realignment of cultural policy (Pettersson 2003: 9, 56ff, 93, 157). Sweden ratified the World Heritage Convention in 1985 (Annex 1; whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/se). In 1887, however, the concept kulturarf (“heritage”, in the old Swedish spelling) appears for the first time in Sweden in a lecture by the author Viktor Rydberg on the Middle Ages and what the “Romano-Gauls” had taken over from Antiquity (Rydberg 1905: 582). After that, the heritage concept was often referred to in public debate, the media, and book titles throughout the twentieth century. So even if the 1980s and 1990s brought a political and economic realignment, the question is whether heritage might not once more be identified by critics as a scapegoat for a development they did not wish to see.

With the establishment of heritage as a central concept, numerous definitions appear, that is, attempts to specify just what heritage is. To begin with, heritage actually describes something limited, a situation where something is worth protecting and preserving, worth canonising, while something else can be omitted from the list of priorities. But heritage was given a relatively broad definition early on, and since that time it has been expanded even further.

A strikingly broad definition of cultural heritage as an overarching concept is found in the Hague Convention, even though “cultural property” is the main concept here:
movable or immovable property of great importance to the cultural heritage of every people, such as monuments of architecture, art or history, whether religious or secular; archaeological sites; groups of buildings which, as a whole, are of historical or artistic interest; works of art; manuscripts, books, and other objects of artistic, historical or archaeological interest; as well as scientific collections, and important collections of books or archives or of reproductions of the property defined above. (Hague Convention, 1954, Chapter 1, Article 1a)

A long-term tendency may be observed regarding what may or should be heritage, that is, what is heritable. It tends to gradually move closer in time, cover more categories, and be globally disseminated: from Antiquity via the Middle Ages to the Early Modern and Modern period, all the way to the present; from single monuments and buildings to whole environments or landscapes; and from individual countries to the whole world.

The widening of heritage has entailed the inclusion of a number of expressions that refer specifically to the modern period and modernity. The physical movements of modernity by way of trains, cars, planes, rockets, and laser beams; railways, roads, airports, launchpads, and power stations – all become of interest as heritage to explore, protect, and preserve for the future. One monumental example is controversial nuclear power stations such as Barsebäck in Sweden and Ignalina in Lithuania (Storm 2010; 2014: 69ff, 94ff). Human exploration of space offers another example of cutting-edge heritage conceptions (O’Leary & Capelotti 2014).

An expansion also took place when material or tangible heritage was supplemented by immaterial or intangible heritage, the dual intention being to represent the diversity of heritage more adequately and to make sustainable development possible. The relevant principles were laid down in the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003; cf. Smith & Akagawa 2009). Antiquarian management transforms the intangible cultural heritage so that it actually becomes tangible (cf. Baxter 2012).

One example of a broad definition was supplied by English Heritage in 2008: “All inherited resources which people value for reasons beyond mere utility” (Conservation Principles, English Heritage, 2008; the definition no longer appears on the English Heritage website, but it is quoted on the Historic England website under Heritage Definitions, https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/hpg/hpr-definitions). The definition is so general that what is regarded as heritage under it cannot be differentiated from, or will include, the religious sphere with its notions of what is sacred.
An extension of the concept is also visible in official texts from the Swedish National Heritage Board. In 2017, the Board defined heritage as, in principle, everything created or influenced by human beings: “Heritage refers to all material and intangible expressions of human influence – for instance traces, remains, objects, constructions, environments, systems, structures, activities, traditions, naming customs, knowledge, etc.” (www.raa.se/kulturarv/definition-av-kulturarv-och-kulturmiljo; cf. Räkna med kulturarvet (“Count on heritage”), 2017: 7). Here, heritage has been transformed from a broad yet defined concept to something boundless, indeed potentially to everything in the present. As Harrison puts it, “almost anything can be perceived to be ‘heritage’” (Harrison 2013: 3).

The tendency to extend definitions of heritage has been criticised. For instance, the lawyer Jeanette Greenfield points out in *The Return of Cultural Treasures* that the term cultural heritage is used in such arbitrary, inexact, broad, and general ways that it is, in point of fact, useless and ineffective. In addition, she criticises UNESCO for producing rhetoric without practical significance (Greenfield 1996: 254f, 258).

When “almost anything can be perceived to be ‘heritage’”, the canonical model, in which the very best and finest is selected, must be replaced by a more representative model (Harrison 2013: 3 quotation, 18). And in line with this extension, a new view of heritage has developed. On the one hand, there is a traditional essential perspective that is concerned with the existence of a tangible and intangible heritage which has survived from the past until today. This heritage needs to be identified and assessed in relation to set criteria, so that it may then be protected and preserved for the future. On the other hand, there is a constructivist perspective in which heritage is a category created in the present in negotiations between different actors and interests; to quote from Laurajane Smith, “There is, really, no such thing as heritage” (Smith 2006: 11). Here, heritage is something that is defined in what is called a heritage process.

With the widening of heritage and a constructivist perspective, heritage is now, in the twenty-first century, emphasised as something dynamic that is changed and recreated along with the world we live in, and as a process in itself (e.g. Convention for the Safeguarding, 2003: Article 2; Aronsson & Hillström 2005; Harrison 2013: 10; Högb erg 2013; Schofield 2015).

Heritage as a concept is on the move, just like the world around us. Heritage is modernised. Heritage has become part of an
adaptable modernity, constantly restless and heading towards new goals. Or, to put it differently: heritage and modernity, permanence and change, have become so entangled with one another that they have in effect coalesced into one.

The crucial value of heritage is often claimed to be its authenticity, from the adjective authentic, which comes from the Latin word *authenticus* and the Greek word *authentia* for principal or genuine (*OED* I, 1989: 795ff). The authentic can be seen as the original, that which was there at the beginning, and then it approaches the meaning of the *arche* concept. “Authenticity” is a set heading immediately after the criteria in the presentation of individual World Heritage sites in the UNESCO list (whc.unesco.org/en/list).

Heritage is expected by definition to be a genuine or true trace of the past, irrespective of whether heritage is defined narrowly or broadly, tangibly or intangibly. But authenticity is a contested quality. There is thus no single way of understanding authenticity; there are many ways. The concept should therefore be presented in the plural as authenticities.

It is supposedly the authenticity of heritage, its closeness to the true past, the past in itself, that creates the foundation for heritage tourism (*MacCannell* 1976: 2f, 91ff, 145ff; *Horne* 1984: 16f). A need for authenticity has also been said to account for an upturn for heritage and museums; this need is regarded as a reaction against the electronic, the technological, and the artificial in the present (*Choay* 1992 (French): 158ff, 187ff; 2001 (English): 138ff, 164ff). And more generally, the wish for authenticity has been interpreted as an expression of a modern loss of belief and meaning, that is, as yet another example of a reaction to modernity (e.g. *Lindholm* 2008; *Jones* 2010: 186ff).

Many scholars have pointed to analogies between heritage and religion. Remains from the past may be compared with church relics, museums with temples, antiquarians with priests, and tourism with pilgrimage (e.g. *MacCannell* 1976; 1999; *Horne* 1984; *Wangefelt Ström* 2006). Heritage is selected in a process that is reminiscent of canonisation; and it may be described as a phenomenon that satisfies a craving for enchantment where secularisation is gaining ground.

The fundamental common feature here may be the special quality called “sacred” in the religious sphere and “authentic” in the antiquarian sphere. The sacredness of religion and the values of heritage are one of several expressions of the much-discussed division into sacred and profane. With regard to that debate, I want to align
myself with the interpretation offered by the historian of religion Mircea Eliade in *Das Heilige und das Profane (The Sacred and the Profane)*: “daß das Heilige und das Profane zwei Weisen des In-der-Welt-Seins bilden, zwei existentielle Situationen, die der Mensch im Lauf seiner Geschichte ausgebildet hat” (Eliade 1957 (German): 10, “that sacred and profane are two modes of being in the world, two existential situations assumed by man in the course of his history”; 1987 (English): 14). These are, however, two perspectives that are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and the boundary between them may shift and slide.

Even so, “sacred” and “profane” are intangible qualities whose status can only be maintained by distancing. Both sacredness and authenticity are dependent on authoritative contexts, the existence of religious or antiquarian experts who provide confirmation. And on close inspection both sacredness and authenticity melt into air, as does every tangible or intangible thing – heritage included – that encounters the force of modernity.

The Western view of authenticity has been supplemented by an “Asian” view. What has happened is that an essential interpretation of authenticity as permanence on the part of the material has been supplemented by a more constructivist approach. That approach emphasises continuity in ideas, forms, and craft traditions – more intangible qualities, in other words.

According to the Nara Conference in Japan in 1994, authenticity should not be interpreted according to set criteria: “heritage properties must be considered and judged within the cultural contexts to which they belong”. The intention is to show respect for the global diversity of cultures and heritages, which may be both tangible and intangible (*The Nara Document on Authenticity*, 1994: 11). The well-known examples here are stupas, Buddhist buildings for relics, and Japanese temples that have been renewed time and again but are still perceived as old and well preserved, since the underlying ideas are unchanged (Byrne 1995; Larsen 1995). From 2005 onwards, the view of the Conference that authenticity depends on the cultural context also came to cover World Heritage sites (e.g. *Operational*, 2019: §79ff).

The critics rightly want to remind us that the authenticity of heritage is not always decisive; that it can often be difficult to determine what is old or new; and that heritage may consist of parts from different periods, or be completely replaced by copies or reconstructions. In the words of Cornelius Holtorf, “pastness” is a characteristic that can be constructed (Holtorf 2005: 113f; 2013a).
Authenticity as a quality therefore depends not only on which type of heritage – cultural or natural – is in focus, or on whether the heritage is tangible or intangible, but also on the choice of perspective. The meaning of authenticity depends on the purpose of the protection, preservation, and use – whether it is knowledge of truth, a narrative of beauty, or the ethics of goodness. If the purpose is to experience the past, the truth of authenticity may therefore be subordinate to the narrative’s own inner “truth”.

“Pastness” constructed with a view to reducing the wear-and-tear on the authentic past may be exemplified by the copy of the cave at Lascaux in France (WHL 85, 1979). And “pastness” created for mediation can be exemplified by the copies of Abu Simbel and by the exhibition with Tutankhamun’s tomb that is touring the world. But in the case of investments in art, fakes are destroyed when revealed. So just as authenticity may vary, the stance adopted in relation to authenticity – or its absence – may shift, depending on perspective and context.

At Abu Simbel, it is possible to discuss what is authentic and whether it is a crucial value: seen from a distance, the location and architecture can be described as authentic, but at close range they cannot. For the temples stand beside the Nile, but not in their original location, even though their orientation in relation to the sun is unchanged; they have, after all, been moved. And from a distance, the rock and architecture seem authentic; but at close hand and in comparison with older pictures, it is revealed that they have been cut up, moved, and resited in a modern structure. Nor can the monuments as tourist attractions be described as “authentic” in the sense of “original” with their present lighting to enhance the experience, with walkways and ventilation as protection and for the comfort of visitors. Abu Simbel thus has both authentic and non-authentic parts, representing both tradition and modernity, and the visitor is not always made aware of where the boundaries are. And for anyone who is unable to make the trip to Abu Simbel, copies or representations in words, images, and film may be a perfectly satisfactory way of learning, experiencing, and assessing.

Ambivalent vandalism

Pierre Boulez praised vigorous, expanding civilisations without memory or monuments and continued, “our Western civilization would need Red Guards to get rid of a good number of statues or even decapitate them. The French Revolution decapitated statues in
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churches; one may regret this now, but it was proof of a civilisation on the march” (Boulez 1976: 33; originally to Der Spiegel, 25 September 1967). Boulez thus wanted assistance from Mao Zedong’s Red Guards, who were active in the Chinese Cultural Revolution in 1966–1976. His statement was made in the second year of the Cultural Revolution and printed in the year when the Revolution ended.

Boulez’s wish had been fulfilled a couple of years earlier, in 1965, but at that point the West was able to cope without Red Guards. As part of an international campaign under the leadership of UNESCO, Pharaoh Ramses II’s faces were sawn off and removed, just like the rest of his colossal statues and temples of Abu Simbel. But it hardly happened the way Boulez had imagined. For in 1968, the reconstructed temples with the statues of Ramses II could be reopened at new sites, where the rising waters of the Nile no longer threatened them.

Still, Boulez’s wish has been granted on many other occasions. Through the ages, history is attended by the deliberate destruction of monuments, buildings, sites, and landscapes, both tangible and intangible heritage; this is especially so in the last century with its world wars, civil wars, and terror. Since 2000 alone, episodes of destruction in Bamiyan (WHL 208rev, 2003), Timbuktu (WHL 119rev, 1988), Aleppo (WHL 21, 1986), and Palmyra (WHL 23bis, 1980) have shocked the world.

Understandably, these instances of destruction have generated extensive debate and literature across the two cultures of heritage, both about specific localities and what can, must, or ought to happen to them, and, more generally, about destruction through the ages (e.g. Lambourne 2001; Kramer 2007; Boldrick et al. 2013; Noyes 2013; Kolrud & Prusac 2014; Bevan 2016).

The events that have taken place after the turn of the new millennium raise both specific questions and issues of principle concerning motives and values; protection, preservation, and continued use; and possible restoration or reconstruction. The events leave no doubt that the remains of the past do, in fact, play a central role in the present, for otherwise there would be no reason to deliberately destroy these remains or to subsequently endeavour to recreate them. But interest in these events may also border on an ambivalent fascination with violence, destruction, and death.

The events may be described in neutral terms as a deliberate change; but they are more apt to be designated in derogatory terms such as damage, destruction, iconoclasm, or vandalism. Alternatively, the actors themselves and their adherents want to be
able to describe the events as a cleansing or clean-up, in which the world is liberated from something unseemly and unwanted.

“Iconoclasm” means “the breaking or destruction of images”. “Iconoclasm” comes from the Greek word *eikonoklástes, eikón* for “a likeness or image” and *kla’o* for “breaking” (*OED*: VII, 609). The iconoclasm concept is used to describe the deliberate destruction of images that function as collective symbols. This process may involve religious images and monuments which are attacked as part of a reformation or revolution. During the invasion of Iraq, for instance, the taking down and humiliation of a statue of President Saddam Hussein in Paradise Square in Baghdad in 2003 was seen as a symbolic demonstration of the capture of the capital and the shift of political power (e.g. Bevan 2016: 120ff).

“Vandalism” is another term that is used more generally about aggressive and reprehensible destruction. The term refers to the sacking of Rome by the Vandals in 455 and was used by Henri Grégoire in 1794 – at the same time as the establishment of the heritage concept (*OED*: XIX, 425; Choay 1992 (French): 76ff; 2001 (English): 63ff; Gamboni 1997: 17ff; Schildgen 2008: 121ff).

In the rhetoric surrounding the destruction and removal of ancient monuments and antiquities from their original archaeological sites, those acts are occasionally referred to as rape; that is, they are metaphorically equated with a violent sexual assault (e.g. Fagan 1975; Amery & Cruickshank 1975; Romer & Romer 1993). Rape is germane to war situations as the social order is being dissolved.

Both canonical and critical heritage focus on the destruction of heritage, but there is a distinct difference of attitude between the cultures. While canonical heritage wants to argue for preserving, protecting, and defending heritage, critical heritage – at any rate as encountered in its more extreme variants – argues along various lines for not preserving, protecting, or defending. The difference in attitudes is so marked that it can be claimed to define the two cultures.

Threats and destruction play a crucial part in canonical heritage when it comes to legitimising the need for protection and preservation. The fact that threats and destruction have and have had an important role, both rhetorically and in reality, is clear from the field’s own narratives about the ways in which preservation, antiquarian institutions, legislation, conventions, and management have evolved. The story told by these narratives keeps emphasising threats against remains from the past which it was necessary to avert.

Here mention may be made of the returning fascination with the salvage of iconic World Heritage sites that are under very visible
threat – Abu Simbel threatened by the Aswan High Dam (WHL 88, 1979), the Tower of Pisa threatened by gravity (WHL 395bis, 1987, 2007), and Venice threatened by both rising waters and tourists (WHL 394, 1987). In the specific case of World Heritage sites there is a special List of World Heritage in Danger, which is updated annually (Convention 1972: Article 11.4; also Operational 2019: §§177–191).

Critical heritage has also been fascinated by threats and destruction; but for several reasons, it has been sceptical about defending, protecting, and preserving heritage. The argument may be that it is not that important to preserve an example of heritage that is being considered at a particular time; something else is or will be more relevant or representative. The argument may also be that vandalism is part of the history of heritage, so there is no point in trying to prevent it; graffiti may become part of the monument’s biography. Moreover, the argument may be that heritage destroyed can be of greater importance or value than heritage preserved; more people are engaged in the memory of a lost monument than in one that is still in place. In addition, the responsibility is sometimes assigned not to the agents but to the antiquarian authorities; the claim made in such contexts is that the vandalism would never have happened if the site had not had heritage or even World Heritage status. By elevating a site to World Heritage, UNESCO is seen as creating a “soft target”; World Heritage sites attract threats, risk destruction, and can contribute to ongoing conflicts (e.g. Gamboni 2001; Flood 2002; Meskell 2018: 172ff). The argument has points in common with the blaming of a rape victim on the grounds of “provocative” behaviour or clothing.

In this context, Cornelius Holtorf has reused the concept of creative destruction in order to stress that the destruction of heritage is not necessarily a bad thing. As an example, he mentions the Berlin Wall, fragments of which were spread all over the world as relics (Holtorf 2005: 144f).

But nowhere have the canonical and critical arguments been as clear as in respect of the blasting of the two sixth-century Buddha statues in Bamiyan Valley in Afghanistan in 2001. Defenders regard the statues as valuable, viewing the event as an example of cultural terrorism and an infringement of international law, holding the Taliban responsible (Francioni & Lenzerini 2003). Critics, by contrast, put the blame on the West. The Buddha statues are not considered to have been valuable. Their empty niches have become part of history, and more people than before are taking an active interest in Bamiyan. Therefore, the statues should not be reconstructed (e.g. Gamboni 2001; Flood 2002; Holtorf 2006).
To this I would like to reply that the Buddha statues had value for the knowledge that they alone could provide and the narratives they could communicate; that the empty niches are allowing the violence of the Taliban to win; and that the statues may be recreated using digital methods.

But most of all I want to recall the connection between the destruction of remains of the past and the expulsion, rape, and murder of human beings. Vandalism and mass murder are companions in conflicts (Kramer 2007; Bevan 2016). The French Revolution, eulogised by Boulez, is an early and illuminating example. In the course of it, quite a number of both humans and statues were decapitated. And the past century supplies notorious examples of bombings or massacres such as Guernica in 1937; Coventry in 1940; Oradour-sur-Glane and Warsaw in 1944; Dresden in 1945; Mostar in 1993; Bamiyan in 2001; Timbuktu and Aleppo in 2012, and Palmyra in 2015, in all of which material destruction and massacre took place side by side. In Palmyra, the Roman amphitheatre was thus used in order to stage public executions. The aim in defiling and harming heritage is to defile and harm individuals, groups, peoples, and nations for whom this heritage is important. But it is never the victim who should bear the responsibility.

Remains of the past that are designated as heritage and World Heritage are given greater attention and normally attract more tourists. That makes for tourism that threatens to bring greater wear and degradation. At well-known tourist destinations and World Heritage sites such as the Pyramids (WHL 86, 1979), the Taj Mahal (WHL 252, 1983), Venice (WHL 394, 1987), and Angkor Wat (WHL 668, 1992), tourism is considered a problem. At the Palaeolithic caves at Lascaux (WHL 85, 1979), the problem has been solved by directing tourists to a replica. And at Stonehenge, visitors are kept at a good distance (WHL 373bis, 1986, 2008).

In the choice between preserving and destroying, it is possible to go for both options. Preservation of something may require something else to disappear, or the choice can be made to preserve in one context and destroy in another. Pope Pius II protected ancient ruins in Rome; but the same pope caused other ancient constructions to be dismantled (Schnapp 1993 (French): 338f; 1996 (English): 339f). On its home ground in Sweden, the engineering firm VBB built dams for hydropower plants that entailed the destruction of nature and ancient monuments; but in Egypt it contributed to moving Abu Simbel. Generally speaking, modernity may both rescue and threaten, both create and vandalise.
Something is elevated to heritage – perhaps even to World Heritage – while other things, and more things, are changed and disappear. Most of what has happened is never recorded in history; it is forgotten, and none of it remains. Critics may discern a conspiratorial strategy here. “Cultural reservations” are created and can serve as an alibi to legitimise destruction. But the same strategy can also simply be described as a necessary prioritisation, because everything cannot always stay the same. Preservation must necessarily involve a choice. Priorities are set, selected parts being expected to represent the whole, just as with the metonymic copying and use of spolia in the Middle Ages (cf. Krautheimer 1942; 1969).

In critical heritage, a third way between preserving and destroying is also proposed: it consists in letting decay take its course, a post-preservation model – mainly with modern examples. This approach amounts to accepting that everything changes and vanishes, and curating without conserving or controlling (DeSilvey 2017). But a hospice model, watching and perhaps alleviating without actively intervening, is also a choice. It means giving priority to the narrative about and reflection on impermanence, rather than to the possibility of gaining new knowledge or to the physical preservation of evidence. The choice of strategy therefore depends on what one wants with and for the remains of the past.

Abu Simbel was salvaged, but had to be changed as part of the salvage campaign. The temples could also have been documented and then removed. Or it would have been possible to look on, in a contemplative mode, watching the rising Nile and the drowning temples.

However, which solution was and is the right one remains an open question; that is, whether it was and is right to defend, protect, and preserve the temples of Abu Simbel, thereby assisting Pharaoh Ramses II in his ambition to attain monumental immortality. With reference to Kant’s categorical and hypothetical imperatives: is the preservation of Abu Simbel a good end in itself? Or is its preservation a means of achieving the good? There is no definitive answer.

Consequently, we cannot avoid the existential challenge of choosing among options all of which may have both good and bad consequences. But if we do not choose ourselves, others will choose for us. We cannot avoid heritage policy.

Heritage and modernity

Heritage and modernity have been described as opposing concepts. However, they are merely examples from a larger field in which
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expressions are set up as mutually contradictory – like black and white pieces facing one another on a chessboard. On one side of the field stand history, memory, heritage, tradition, monuments, memorials, museums, conservation, and nostalgia, and on the opposite side stand change, progress, modernity, modernisation, modernism, industrialisation, urbanisation, and secularisation.

But as a metaphor, the game of chess soon turns out to be insufficient for describing the relationship between heritage and modernity. For while a move by one side is indeed followed by a countermove by the other, there is no single set of rules of the game, and the pieces seem to be able to change their roles as the game proceeds; in fact, they even seem to be able to change colour and thereby side in the game. The relationship between heritage and modernity is hence characterised by profound ambivalence.

Heritage and modernity may threaten each other. Heritage may prevent further modernisation – and modernisation may threaten the continued existence of heritage. In that case, extensive heritage might mean less modernity – and more modernity might mean less heritage, assuming a zero-sum game with ideas ranged against ideas and materiality ranged against materiality.

At the same time, though, modernity constantly makes more advanced forms of protection and preservation possible, and is therefore also a resource. And heritage may contribute, as a resource, to modernisation. What is a threat and what is a resource thus depends entirely on the perspective adopted.

Outside a zero-sum game of ideas and materiality, the importance of heritage may increase the more it is threatened. This would mean that the importance of the phenomenon of heritage would increase when modernity increases (e.g. Lübbe 1982; 1983; 1996; Marquard 1986; 2000; Choay 1992 (French); 2001 (English); Huyssen 1995). But the importance of heritage might also increase when modernity decreases (e.g. Wright 1985; Hewison 1987; Heller 1988; Füredi 1992; Beckman 1993a; 1993b; Friedman 1994; Lowenthal 2011 YouTube).

There are two tendencies here. First, heritage that is threatened or decreases becomes rarer, and therefore increases in value. Second, changes in modernity, both upturns and downturns, create social uncertainty, for which compensation is sought. And the compensation may appear during periods of social, technological, or economic modernisation with or without confidence in modernity as an idea.

Turning the argument around, I think that the importance of modernity may also increase when heritage increases or decreases.
A modernity that is threatened or decreases becomes more valuable. And changes in heritage may cause an experience of crisis. For here it is possible to observe how the experience of an increase creates unease and irritation among critics of heritage, who want more modernity instead (e.g. Boulez 1976; Hewison 1987; Heller 1988; Füredi 1992). Conversely, a person who is favourably disposed towards heritage, as in canonical heritage, will interpret an increase as a social expansion and democratisation, which gives more people the possibility of acquiring a fair share of heritage (e.g. Kristiansen 1981).

Heritage and modernity as a dichotomy is thus, at a first glance, plausible and rhetorically powerful; but it is a misleading simplification that fails to convince on closer inspection. For the concepts are contested, ambiguous, and entangled with each other.

Heritage and modernity are both contested concepts. They generate either positive or negative associations and rarely leave anyone unaffected. Canonical heritage regards heritage as something positive, a resource that needs to be protected and preserved for the future. Here an increase in heritage may represent a success. In critical heritage, by contrast – as formulated most clearly by Robert Hewison – heritage represents “bogus history” (Hewison 1987: 144). A relative increase in heritage may therefore in itself be interpreted as a sign of crisis. For some, modernity represents progress to strive for; for others, it constitutes an unwanted development.

Heritage has multiple meanings. Heritage can be associated with the unchanging, stasis, and the past; but present-day heritage includes modern examples representing change, speed, and the future. On the one hand, heritage is a modern concept that gradually established itself in the course of the twentieth century. On the other hand, heritage may consist of both tangible and intangible phenomena that may belong to widely different eras, including the modern era.

Modernity has multiple meanings, too. Modernity is associated with speed, transience, and renewal both in the world of ideas and in the material world. Modernity is thus bound up with the universal ideas of the Enlightenment as well as with the market economy and its creative destruction.

The entanglement of heritage and modernity can be demonstrated in several areas – in the modern context of the heritage concept, in the inclusion of modern phenomena in heritage, in the use of heritage in a modernisation of society, and finally in a modernisation of the concept itself.
The concept of heritage belongs, in itself, to the modern epoch. The concept appears in 1794 during the French Revolution, occurs throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and has its breakthrough in the 1970s as a collective term for whatever should be protected and preserved among the things that previous generations have passed on to posterity.

Heritage may be associated with the unchanging, stasis, and the past; but the boundary for what should be preserved and protected is constantly being moved forward in time, into the modern epoch and closer to the present. For example, in 2014 Sweden specified a limit at 1850 for antiquities (Swedish fornynd) and ancient monuments (Swedish fornlämnningar) in the Historic Environment Act (1988: 950).

The establishment of industrial heritage as worth protecting and preserving is evidence that heritage now also includes an archetypal expression of modernity. An interest in the remains of early industrialisation emerged in the UK in the decades after the Second World War. But interest in closed-down industries as heritage increased especially after the deindustrialisation of the West in the 1970s (Alzén 1996; Edensor 2005; Storm 2008, 2014; Willim 2008).

Heritage has also come to be used in strategies for improving or modernising society. Here heritage is used as a tool in something that can rightly be called heritage policy, a will to bring about change and improvement using heritage as one of several instruments. Consequently, heritage is regarded as a resource for fostering identity, tourism, and economic development; for generating sustainable development; and for work on diversity and solving other current tasks in the present. This happens without the agents involved themselves necessarily wanting to refer to the strategy as modernisation; on the contrary, modernisation as a controversial concept and phenomenon may be something they consciously reject.

When heritage is redefined from something enduring to something undergoing change, from a stable phenomenon to a process in the present, that redefinition constitutes conclusive evidence of the modernisation of the concept. Heritage as a concept and practice then itself becomes part of modernity where, as is well known, “All That Is Solid Melts into Air” (cf. Berman 1982).

Heritage in the present

The past is everywhere, and heritage is everywhere. Often these words are used a bit haphazardly as synonyms. There is also a tendency for more and more of the past to be regarded as heritage.
Heritage in the present

worth protecting and preserving, so the words are gradually coming to denote the same field. But the past and heritage are not identical.

When Lowenthal writes that “The past is everywhere” (Lowenthal 1985: xv; 2015: 1), what he must really mean is that he sees remains of the past everywhere, and that these remains are being given too much attention. And when Lowenthal writes that “heritage is everywhere” (Lowenthal 1997: ix), this is a variant of the same observation, his point being that one type of remains of the past, namely heritage, is spreading at the expense of history and memory.

The past in itself is both gone forever and ever-present. The events of the past are gone forever; but tangible and intangible remains of the past are ever-present as texts, images, memories, objects, and buildings. With their permanence, they reach across to us in our present. Everything in the present is made up of these accumulated remains of the past (Olivier 1999). Even that which we experience as the present moment is a memory, constructed by the brain from previously registered impressions (Eagleman 2016: 39ff). In this way the past may, in an initial response, be said to be everywhere, to quote Lowenthal again. But a more correct statement would be that the remains of the past are everywhere, and remains of the past are everything that exists.

The present is therefore a mosaic of remains of the past, a mosaic whose component parts are of different ages. The development from a past reality to the present-day mosaic is termed a “formation process” in archaeology; this describes the formation of the source material of the present. It is a sequence of events in which the original world is reduced over time, both through natural processes and by means of active human interventions that may be either preservative or destructive. The formation process has attracted methodological interest owing to its potential when it comes to determining, with a fair degree of precision, the extent to which current remains, sources, and durations are representative of a past reality (e.g. Kristiansen 1985; Lucas 2012).

When the present is made up of accumulated remains of the past, the whole of the present can be termed an “inheritance”, or something we take over from generations who came before us. And we inherit the remains of the past, whether or not we want to do so. In consequence, every single thing in the present could be termed either cultural heritage or natural heritage; and the formation process could instead be referred to as a heritage process.

But as long as not all remains of the past are regarded as heritage, the heritage process will have to be kept separate from the
formation process. First, there is a sequence of events in the course of which the remains of the past are formed – the formation process; then comes a selection of what will be heritage – the heritage process. But after that, the selection of heritage will obviously affect what will survive in the future from the past; that is, what will be given permanence.

The sequence of events in the course of which something comes to be selected as heritage – as worth defending, protecting, preserving, and possibly also continuing to use – is termed the “heritage process” (e.g. Grundberg 2000: 17ff, 47ff). The heritage process is a canonisation process in which parts of the past are assigned special values. It is a sequence of events in which a minor part is selected from the large quantity of remains of the past in a deliberate action that prioritises certain individual component parts of the mosaic for the future.

The heritage process is regulated and made visible both through conventions, legislation, justifications, and criteria, and through established professional practice and antiquarian authorities and institutions. And the heritage process can be examined, discussed, and criticised in relation to issues of representativeness and different interests.

What is given permanence and survives up to the present depends entirely on what remains are involved, when they are from, and in what context they are found. The same applies to what is selected as heritage. Here, however, everyone can assert their own, individual, heritage. But what is crucial for permanence is whether the remains are given collective attention and recognition by those who actually have the possibility and the power to determine that something is not only called heritage, but is also treated accordingly in practice.

In the formation process, the stone temples of Abu Simbel carved out of the cliffs stand a better chance of achieving permanence than the Nubian buildings of clay, just as the narratives of Ramses II have better prospects of surviving than those about the slaves who toiled in their construction. But irrespective of category, irrespective of whether history, memory, or heritage is involved, the great bulk disappears over time. So even if the remains of the past are all that exists, the past has been so much more.

In the heritage process, what can and should be selected for the future is, in principle, an open question. Even though Abu Simbel has lasted until today, more or less unchanged, it did not necessarily also have to be recognised as a heritage worth defending, protecting, preserving, and also continuing to use in the future. Irrespective of the fact that Abu Simbel is part of a World Heritage site, this is a
priority set among many potential tangible and intangible cultural heritages, and that priority may be changed in the years ahead.

With the global spread of modernity, with accelerating modernisation, the set of potential cultural heritages is also increasing, while the set of natural heritages is perhaps decreasing to a corresponding degree. Ever more from the modern epoch may therefore come into consideration for protection and preservation, which may force the setting of priorities between pre-modern and modern remains.

What, then, have people through the ages prioritised for protection and preservation? What is it in the inheritance from the past that has been thought to be so valuable that it needs to attain permanence? With a metaphorical analogy to natural selection in evolution, heritage can be identified as the usable part of the past at any moment. What some interested party considered useful has been accorded permanence, provided that that person, group, authority, state, or world community, whoever or whatever they may be, has also had the necessary means to actually ensure permanence. Conversely, it is the non-useful, the useless, that was not prioritised and was allowed to disappear.

What is usable or useful varies over time and space and between different epochs, countries, cultures, groups, and individuals. Priorities are always set between different justifications, motives, and values, and there is always a choice between acting and remaining passive. The heritage process – the selection of what is to be protected, preserved, and possibly also used – is therefore a question of both values and will, of both ethics and politics, of heritage ethics and heritage politics.

Heritage is a term for a way of regarding and relating to a tangible and intangible present. Heritage thus represents both a perspective and a practice. Employing the heritage concept, we bestow values on parts of the present and may choose to act as a consequence of that. We identify parts of the present as usable and useful for the reason that they constitute an important legacy from the past, whereas other parts are allowed to remain unrecorded or be forgotten or destroyed. This means that heritage is here and now. And it connects with everything that engages people in the present – politics, economics, religion, culture, identity, climate, or health. Hence it can come as no surprise that heritage can be – indeed, generally is – controversial.

Questions about heritage are always fundamentally ethical and political because they are about a choice of values and a will to point out a direction in the present. When it is sometimes claimed in
a debate that heritage is now being “politicised”, this is unreflecting rhetoric. The cry of politicisation means that someone is trying to assert values and an aim that diverge from the established view or the respondent’s own standpoint, which is seen as self-evident. The paradigm of normality is being challenged.

Justifications, motives, and values can be categorised, that is, grouped and systematically structured so as to provide an overview. Friedrich Nietzsche identified the use of history as either monumental, antiquarian, or critical (Nietzsche 1874 (German); 2005 (English)), which, when translated into the language of politics, becomes a reactionary, conservative, or revolutionary usage. For my part, I have argued for a different categorisation based on the triad of the true, the beautiful, and the good in the search for knowledge, narratives, or justice. But there are no limits to the justifications, motives, and values that can be formulated. For we constantly find new ways of interpreting the remains of the past so that they remain relevant and useful.

Instead of asking about justifications, motives, and values, we might examine practice, or what happens to heritage. With this change of focus, a practice can be discerned on the basis of the two parts in which the concept of time is divided, change and permanence – a practice that runs along a scale from prioritising and accepting change to prioritising and accepting preservation.

Heritage may be deliberately removed because it is seen as an impediment to change; heritage may be an impediment to modernity – in the construction of a new motorway, for instance. Heritage can be deliberately destroyed, vandalised, as a reaction against what it stands for, as in the case of the Buddha statues in Bamiyan. Heritage may also be deliberately consumed, an act justified by the claim that new and different heritage will always come along and be able to replace the old. And heritage can be allowed to decay and disappear as an instructive example of impermanence, an act of contemplation ahead of the end. The choice of change is the point on the scale where we find the most extreme modernists.

Another option consists in the balancing of change and permanence. Some of the remains of the past are selected as heritage to be protected and preserved, while other traces are allowed to disappear. This is a compromise in which representative or usable parts of a whole are selected. The challenge here is to be able to argue, in each individual case, for how change and permanence are to be balanced. This is the place on the scale where we find canonical heritage with its management, priorities, and criteria.
Finally, the remains of the past may, seen as a whole, be regarded as heritage that should be protected and preserved. Everything can be heritage, as English Heritage and the Swedish National Heritage Board have claimed. For everything may be important to someone, now or in the future. This is where we find the more extreme antiquarian attitude that reacts every time a change is on the way.

The different options along the scale may be concretised in the face of the temples of Abu Simbel: prioritising the modernisation of the Aswan High Dam and letting the temples drown in the Nile; effecting a compromise in which the temples are relocated, modernised, and remain usable; or prioritising the temples and moving or abandoning the plan for a power plant by the Nile. As we know, the actual outcome was a compromise in the form of UNESCO’s salvage action in the 1960s. But in the shadow cast by the famous temples, innumerable other remains were either merely documented or not given any priority at all.

The two cultures of heritage – the canonical and the critical – were both represented in an anthology edited by Lowenthal and the historian of architecture Marcus Binney, Our Past before Us: Why do we save it? (1981). Lowenthal appeared in it with his engagement in issues of preservation and heritage, while Binney was already engaged in SAVE Britain’s Heritage. Lowenthal concluded with four theses:

**What to save.** We should save more than we might like to, remembering the pace of destruction and the needs of posterity.

**How to use what we save.** Not everything old belongs in museums or historic precincts; most of what is saved should be a vital part of the present.

**Coping with the contrived.** The past is what we make of it, not only what it was; the process of preservation changes the look and feel, if not the form and substance, of protected sites and artefacts. We must accept many such transformations as inevitable.

**The past as inspiration.** We do not preserve too much but do too little besides; we could treat our heritage more creatively. Past and present should often be commingled, not separated. (Lowenthal in Lowenthal & Binney 1981: 235f)

If, having reached this point, anyone is looking for clear positions, advice, or guidelines about how heritage can, should, or must be handled, I would like to highlight what the relatively “young” David Lowenthal wrote before his criticism of heritage became radicalised.
Figure 6  Agricultural landscape of Southern Öland. Photo © Bodil Petersson, 2019.