'Heritage' is a term which has been serviceable to the local authorities, who have used it to promote town improvement schemes and to extract government money for service sector jobs. It has been one of the flagships of nature conservancy and the environmentalist movements of our time. In cases like the campaign for Oxleas Wood, it is a rallying point for opposition to the property developers and a challenge to the powers that be. Heritage is also popular with the general public, who seem untroubled by the philippics launched against it. 'Historic' towns (including such newly historicized ones as Rochester-upon-Medway) ancient monuments (a category nowadays extended to industrial heritage sites), country parks, working farms and wildlife reserves, provide a natural focus for Sunday outings and weekend breaks - rather as the spectacle of the new, or the wonders of science and invention, used to do in the days when the promise of modernization was undimmed (on Whit-Monday, 1871, some seventy thousand visitors are said to have flocked to Liverpool to see the new warehouses). On summer holidays, nature 'mystery trails' and 'historic' walks minister to the romance of place; living history museums and theme parks offer a vivid encounter with the past - for some children it may be a first one; while steam railways offer a journey back in time - last year they carried some fifty million summer season passengers.
Intellectually, on the other hand, 'heritage' has had a very bad press, and it is widely accused of wanting to commodify the past and turn it into tourist kitsch. Aesthetes of both Right and Left, though especially perhaps the latter, have found it offensive, accusing it of packaging the past, and presenting a 'Disneyfied' version of history in place of the real thing. Purists have objected to the schemes promoted in its name, arguing that it blurs the line between entertainment and education and warning that, as with church restoration in the nineteenth century, it will replace real-life survivals with simulacra of an original that never was.¹

Heritage has also emerged as one of the principal whipping-boys of Cultural Studies, a prime example of those tutelary complexes which it is the vocation of critical inquiry to unmask. They cast it in the role of a 'project' designed at once to anaesthetize and 'sanitize' the record of the past while making it harmless and unthreatening in the present.

Heritage-baiting has become a favourite sport of the metropolitan intelligentsia, the literary end of it especially. Barely a week goes by without it being targeted for abuse in one or other of the 'quality' newspapers, and indeed The Independent, taking up arms against the restrictive covenants imposed on the owners of 'listed' buildings, has taken to calling conservation officers 'the heritage police'.² The arts columns of the newspaper follow suit. For Tom Paulin, never at a loss for expletives where Ukranian matters are at

¹ David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, Cambridge 1985, p. 341; Richard North, 'Welcome to Pensioners Forced to Remove Windows', *Independent*, 24 August 1993; 'Do Not Pass Go', ibid., 31 July 1993; 'Who will Protect us From the Protectors', ibid., 1 December 1993; 'Can We Have our Square Back', ibid., 15 February 1994; 'Conservation, the Last Straw', ibid., 28 July 1993 is a cautionary tale about a Dorset householder who used what the county officers of English Heritage believed to be an unsuitable foreign thatch.
issue, and flagging a recent *Independent-sponsored* conference on the subject, 'The British heritage industry is a loathsome collection of theme parks and dead values.'\(^3\) Even the television correspondent of *The Independent* weighs in: 'A medal to whichever TV critic it was who blew the whistle on Morse, saying, in effect, that he was a boring and pretentious middle-brow snob. The enormous, almost religious, following that John Thaw's detective amassed must have something to do with the comforting "Brideshead-effect" of the series' timeless Oxford back-drop.'\(^4\)

Heritage is accused of wanting to turn the country into a gigantic museum, mummifying the present as well as the past, and preserving tradition in aspic. Exchequer grants to Environmentally Sensitive Areas - where farmers are subsidized to retain and enhance traditional features of the landscape and wildlife habitats - are currently under attack: according to the Whitehall correspondents they are potential targets for the next round of Treasury economies. In a kindred vein, though here the attack comes from the Left rather than the Right, the National Trust is accused of featherbedding the owners of historic properties, insulating them from the cost of maintaining their establishments, and allowing them, however impecunious, to continue in a life of pampered ease and upholstered luxury.

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\(^3\) 'Question of Real Value', *Independent*, 5 October 1993.

\(^4\) Television programme notes, *Independent*, 1 September 1993. A mild protest seems in order here since part of the point of Inspector Morse is that he is indifferent to Oxford's charms, and indeed seems to have chosen the police career in recoil from them. In any event it would be difficult to imagine a world further removed from that of Zuleika Dobson or the young Charles Ryder than Inspector Morse's murderous square mile.
Local authority interventions in the field of heritage are routinely savaged, and treated with derision as though they were necessarily an exercise in bad taste (a recent article in *The Independent* lampooned the municipal authorities in York for building a neo-Georgian public lavatory; an earlier one ridiculed the City of Westminster for putting up 'heritage' traffic-lights in the West End).\(^5\) This is one of the very few spheres of municipal enterprise in which public sector employment, instead of contracting, has actually contrived to expand, and it may be that the critics, though coming from the Left, have taken on, as if by osmosis, the authentic accents of that New Right for whom the very idea of the public is suspect.\(^6\)

Heritage, according to the critics, is the mark of a sick society, one which, despairing of the future, had become 'besotted' or 'obsessed' with an idealized version of its past.\(^7\) The historicist turn in British culture, which they date from 1975 -the year when the term 'heritage' began its inflationary career -corresponded to the onset of economic recession, the contraction of manufacturing industry and the return of mass unemployment. It testified to the collapse of British power. Heritage prepared the way for, or could be thought of as giving expression to, a recrudescence of 'Little Englandism' and the revival of nationalism as a force in political life. It anticipated and gave expression to the triumph of Thatcherism in the sphere of high politics. Heritage, in short, was a symbol of national decadence; a malignant growth which testified at once to the strength of this country's *ancien régime* and to the weakness of radical alternatives to it. It was an admission,

according to Robert Hewison in *The Heritage Industry* (1987) that history was 'over'.

In Patrick Wright's *On Living in an Old Country* it was 'part of the self fulfilling culture of national decline'.

Historians have been only too ready to join in this chorus of disdain, accusing heritage of travestying the past and counterposing its ersatz and kitsch to the allegedly objective inquiries pursued in the world of higher research. David Cannadine, who from his American fastness seems never to tire of deriding 'this heritage junk', charges it with encouraging a bunker mentality and attempting to imprison the country in a time-warp. He was already sounding a warning note in 1983, on the eve of his departure from these shores. 'Not since the 1890s or the 1930s has the worship of wistfulness been so widespread. And there in part lies the explanation; then, as now, depression is the begetter of nostalgia, disenchantment the handmaiden of escapism. As before, when the shopkeepers go out of business, we become a nation of ruminators'. Interestingly the History Working Party, drawing up their recommendations for the new core curriculum, and strongly committed to the study of both material culture and the built environment, nevertheless felt obliged to distance themselves from a word which had become contaminated, proposing to use instead -a distinction, surely, without a difference - 'inheritance':

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10 David Starkey, 'A House fit to House our Nation's History', *Independent*, 28 February 1994, expressed alarm at a version of Gresham's Law in which, as he discerns it, the bad history is driving out the good. 'Certainly we can have too much history of the wrong sort; too many Merchant/Ivory British Country House films; too much Crabtree and Evelyn In-My-Lady's-Chamber smelly scent and soap.'
We have been careful to minimise the use of the word 'heritage' because it has various meanings and is in danger of becoming unhelpfully vague. For historical purposes the word 'inheritance' may be more precise in its meaning, implying 'that which the past has bequeathed to us'.... While all people in Britain partake to a greater or lesser extent of a shared 'inheritance' they also have their own individual, group, family, etc. 'inheritances' which are inter-related. The study of history should respect and make clear this pattern of inheritances.  

For many radicals, 'heritage' is a sore on the body politic, reinforcing, or imposing, a reactionary version of the national past; feeding on fantasies of vanished supremacies; ministering to nostalgia for a time that never was. Neal Ascherson gave eloquent voice to these doubts when, in an influential series of articles in the Observer, he characterized heritage as being 'right-wing' and accused it of pandering to what he was pleased to call - with fine disregard to the parallel developments taking place in relation to Historic Scotland - 'vulgar English nationalism'.  

Heritage, he argued, was a consolatory myth, entropy in holiday dress; it was the tourist industry's answer to secular economic decay:

   Where there were mines and mills, now there is Wigan Pier Heritage Centre, where you can pay to crawl through a model coal mine, watch dummies making nails, and be invited 'in' by actors and actresses dressed as 1900 proletarians. Britain, where these days a new museum opens every fortnight, is becoming a museum itself.

Ascherson's use of the word 'vulgar' when complaining of the effrontery, or 'vulgar arrogance', of living history's claim to have opened a hot-line to the past, is worth pausing on. It may seem a strange epithet to issue from the lips of one who is on public record as a socialist, a republican and a democrat, but it is not that strange. As moral aristocrats, waging war on the corruptions of capitalist society, socialists, like the radical

14 Neal Ascherson, "'Heritage' as Vulgar English Nationalism', Observer, 29 November 1987.
15 Neal Ascherson, 'Why "Heritage" is Right-Wing', Observer, 8 November 1987. For this writer's more recent variations on the theme, 'Reminders from the Past to Suspend our Disbelief', Independent on Sunday, 26 April 1992; 'It May not be Art ... ' Independent on Sunday, 2 January 1994; 'What Should We Preserve', Independent, 16 October 1993.
nonconformists who preceded them, have often been at their fiercest when denouncing Vanity Fair, or what Aneurin Bevan called in his last great speech the 'vulgar materialism' of capitalist society.16 And from the time of William Morris onwards they have been apt to rebuke the masses for what another great Labour leader, Ernest Bevin, called the 'poverty' of their desires. In Ascherson's case, those attitudes are compounded by literary snobbery, an apparent belief that the only true knowledge is that which is to be found in books. Heritage is a fraud because it relies on surface appearance; like colour television, it takes the people's mind off higher (or deeper) things:

The Total Museum, though it can entertain, is a lie. Pretending to open a window into the past is a technique which weakens imagination much in the way that colour television weakens the intuition, whereas radio -by its incompleteness -so strongly stimulates it.... The claim to be able to 'recreate' history is a vulgar arrogance.17

'Heritage', then, is accused of displaying the ignorance and brashness of the upstart. It is also by definition flashy, as meretricious as the baubles of Vanity Fair.

The heritage industry is a fraud. What happened to the people living in these islands can't be dug up, polished and sold. The past is not recoverable like some diamond brooch from the Titanic, partly because it is alive within us. It follows that the 'here is the past' display of heritage is not only a deception, but -more dangerously -a wall built across our awareness of history, and across the links between past and present.

Given an initial impetus, in this country, by Robert Hewison's 1987 squib The Heritage Industry, and a more substantial one by Patrick Wright's On Living in an Old Country, heritage-baiting rapidly established itself as a steady earner for TV documentarists, journalists on safari, and the writers of features in the quality press. Academics -radical academics weighed in, proving, at least to their own satisfaction and that of Cultural

17 Ascherson,'"Heritage"asVulgar English Nationalism'.
Studies course-designers, that museums were a prison-house of artefacts, and souvenirs and gift shops a way of commodifying the past. By 1991, as a programme note suggests, exposures of heritage were competing with one another for prime time on the airwaves:

*Chronicle: Past for Sale?* (BBC-2, 8.10) and *Signals: Theme Park Britons* (Channel 4, 9.15). It's rotten luck on both parties that these two very respectable programmes on the same theme should be scheduled for the same night. Both are concerned about heritage, the country's largest growth industry, and with the way our past is packaged and dispensed like so much fast food in heritage centres and theme parks. Each highlights the concern that historical truth and local needs are sacrificed to profit as the entrepreneurs appropriate from the museums the role of informing us about our past.

One loving shot of a perfect Georgian window in *Chronicle* sums it up -the house is to go to make way for a Roman Heritage Centre flogging imitation antiquities, conceived by its designer as a 'Roman EastEnders'.

*Flogging a Dead Harse*, the recent exhibition at the Photographers Gallery-sponsored by the Arts Council and now reproduced as a coffee-table book with king-size colour reproductions and text by a presenter of *The Late Show* -might be described as anti-heritage's coming-of-age, a kind of *pot-pourri* of its clichés. The work of a colour documentarist, it takes in all the familiar targets, following a well-worn itinerary -a kind of anti-heritage trail-first marked out by Robert Hewison. Starting with The Northern Experience in County Durham, moving on to The Way We Were heritage centre at Wigan Pier (always good for a metropolitan sneer), it ends up with some softer Home Counties target -in this case 'Edward Elgar' country at Worcester.

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"Flogging a Dead Harse," a photographic commentary on 'hyper-history', cast as a critique 'not simply ... of heritage' but also 'of the very notions of Englishness', is a sustained essay in disgust, in the manner of Wegee and Diane Arbus, though in colour rather than black-and-white, and with ordinary people - Northerners especially - as the grotesques rather than midgets and freaks. The Northern Experience at Beamish Hall, County Durham, is represented by a middle-aged man squinting uncomfortably through the eyepiece of a video camera; the Bronte museum at Haworth by a fat man and his even fatter wife standing by the churchyard wall looking hot and bothered. Ironbridge - 'birthplace of the Industrial Revolution', now designated a World Heritage Site - is represented by, of all things, a white-haired man with a Rottweiler straining at the leash (just in case we miss the point, the text tells us that he looks 'like a gauleiter'). On an open-topped bus tour of Liverpool's Albert Dock, two elderly ladies gawp. At Eden Camp, the Second World War theme park at Malton, Yorkshire, an overweight grandad, shot from below in order to make him look sinister, bring out his double chin and exaggerate the size of his hands, stares sightlessly into space, while the little boy at his side clasps 'The Great War Play Set'. At Wigan Pier Heritage Centre a young boy with a Mickey Mouse tee-shirt watches a pitbrow girl pushing a coal-wagon. The Vintage Tram Museum at Crich, Derbyshire, is represented by the headless torso of a boy clad in lavender coloured Bermuda shorts; Westminster Abbey by the rear view of a baldheaded man looking at nothing.

Though directed against the packaging of history, "Flogging a Dead Horse" is a slick production, using a series of stratagems to make its images repellent. Angles and frames
are so manipulated as to make every picture out of joint; objects and viewers are juxtaposed so as to diminish the one and belittle the other. We are never once shown the objects themselves -they exist as a kind of mocking commentary on the sightseers. In the manner of 1980s avant-garde photography the people are pictured in a state of alienation, looking neither at each other nor at the objects they have ostensibly come to view. Even though most of the photography is in the open air it looks studio-lit, so that the people are unnaturally flushed; the interior scenes are cropped to look claustrophobic.

Behind the critique of heritage lie residues of that conspiracy theory according to which historical change is engineered by ruling elites, and popular taste is at the mercy of what 1960s and 1970s radicals took to calling the manipulations of ‘the media’. In France this took the sophisticated form of countercultural high theory, developed by Michel Foucault in relation to the tutelary complexes of knowledge and power, and more specifically in relation to museum culture by Pierre Bourdieu and Philippe Hoyau.20 In the United States it was rather an extension of the 1960s radical critique of ‘consumerism’.21 In Britain, where the rise of heritage was identified with the victory of New Right politics, a more traditional notion of the ruling class came to the fore and 'heritage' was said to represent a kind of return of the repressed, a victory of feudal reaction. It was a 'project' or 'strategy' (so radical cttcs alleged) undertaken on behalf of the wealthy, the privileged and the powerful, and actively promoted by the ruling elites.22 It deployed a dominant

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21 Sharon Zukin, Landscapes of Power; from Detroit to Disney World, Berkeley 1991.
form of 'Englishness', played with reactionary fantasies, and threatened to make the country-house version of the national past (or even, as the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies argued, the Warwick Castle one) hegemonic. For Neal Ascherson it heralded the advent of a permanent Conservative majority:

The heritage industry, like the proposed 'core curriculum' of history for English schools, imposes one ruling group's version of history on everyone and declares that it cannot be changed. One of the marks of the feudal _ancien regime_ was that the dead governed the living. A mark of a decrepit political system must surely be that a fictitious past of theme parks and costume dramas governs the present.23

The denigration of 'heritage', though voiced in the name of radical politics, is pedagogically quite conservative and echoes some of the rightwing jeremiads directed against 'new history' in the schools. Like the videos, slide-shows or classroom exercises in 'empathy' it is accused of taking the mind out of history, offering a Cook's tour or package-holiday view of the past as a substitute for the real thing.24 It abolishes, or seems to abolish, the distinction between work and play, and turns potential learners into passive consumers. It invites spurious identifications, robbing the past of its terrors and turning it into an ideal home. Still worse - a kind of ultimate profanity in the eyes of the purists - is the use of the performing arts, as with the actors and actresses who dress up in period costumes and act as demonstrators, interpreters and guides. The 'hands-on', interactive 'living history' displays at the museums are almost equally suspect, offering a Pick-'n'-Mix approach to the past in place of a coherent explanation or progressive narrative.

23 Neal Ascherson, "Why "Heritage" is Right-Wing".
The charge of vulgarity could be said to be a leitmotiv of heritage criticism, and may account for the frequency with which heritage is bracketed with theme parks, toytowns and Disneyland. The association with the world of entertainment is clearly a cause of great offence, inviting the scorn of the high-minded, mingling as it does the sacred and the profane, high culture and low. Heritage is accused of trivializing the past, playing with history, focusing on unworthy objects. Its predilection for dressing up is thought of as childish, while its association with the holiday trades is almost by definition demeaning. The scorn is no doubt spontaneous but it does not seem fanciful to point to the lineal descent from those ancient notions of the 'dignity' of history against which Lord Macaulay inveighed when calling for a recognition of the domestic and the demotic. Fact and fiction, the imaginary and the real, like the sacred and the profane, are supposed to be at war. In a context like this, the very idea of spectacle, with its undertones of the theatrical and its reliance on glitter, is offensive.

Heritage is also discredited, in the eyes of its critics, by its association with what used to be called, in the heyday of aristocratic snobbery, 'trade'; but which in post-1960 critical theory, or Cultural Studies, is more apt to be labelled 'consumerism' and conceptualized as the Emperor's New Clothes. It is accused of making history a selling point; of trading on nostalgia; of commodifying the past. Here, as elsewhere, Flogging a Dead Horse has it off pat. A Brechtian slogan: 'THE PAST IS UP FOR SALE' -given a full-page spread - interrupts the flow of images, and serves as a kind of black-and-white equivalent to the voice-over. Constable's 'Hay Wain' is overprinted with a magenta-coloured price flash suggesting that, at 99p a time, the treasures of the past can come cheap. In another
ironical juxtaposition a studious-looking man is peering at a shelf-full of souvenirs in which regional types, such as the 'Geordie' and the 'Collier lass', are cased as mannequins and reduced to doll-like figures. The message is rammed home in the double-page spread which brings the book to a close. Taken from the 'Elgar Country', Worcester, it superimposes the 'M' of a McDonald's American diner over the moustachioed elegance of an Edwardian tailor's dummy, and juxtaposes a group of denimed modern youths with the flannelled fools of a period cricket photograph (the modern youths, photographed from behind, are faceless clothes-horses, meaninglessly gesturing in the empty air; the Edwardian cricketers, highly individuated, and no doubt among the first to volunteer in 1914, stare back at us with all the poignancy of the fallen dead).²⁵

Arguably it is not the traditionalism but the modernism and more specifically the postmodernism of heritage which offends. Aesthetes condemn it for being bogus: a travesty of the past, rather than a true likeness, let alone -the preservationist's dream -an original. In other words, in spite of the charge that heritage is imprisoning the country in a time-warp, and the accusation that it is sentimentalizing the past, heritage is being attacked not because it is too historical but because it is not historical enough. It lacks authenticity. It is a simulation pretending to be the real thing. It is not because heritage is too reverent about the past that it provokes outrage, but on the contrary the fact that, in the eyes of the critics at least, it seems quite untroubled when it is dealing with replicas and pastiche.

²⁵ Flogging a Dead Horse.
Literary snobbery also comes into play: the belief that only books are serious; perhaps too a suspicion of the visual, rooted in a Puritan or Protestant distrust of graven images. Artefacts -whether they appear as images on the television screen, in costume drama, or as 'living history' displays in the museums and the theme parks -are not only inferior to the written word but, being by their nature concerned with surface appearance only, irredeemably shallow. Here Neal Ascherson's preference for wireless over television and his real hatred for open-air heritage displays is worth pausing on: reading a book is strenuous and demanding; spectacle -and here Ascherson is following a well-worn line in cultural criticism -is something which is passively consumed. The first is an intellectual activity; the second is mindless. The unspoken assumption is that people cannot be trusted with pictures; that images seduce where the printed word engages the full intelligence.26

Some of the hostility aroused by the idea of heritage may be misogynist, and it is perhaps indicative of this that in the attacks on the 'commodification' of the past so much animus is directed against what is almost entirely a female gift culture -pot-pourris and toiletries, of the kind on sale at the National Trust gift shops, earning particular derision.27 In the case of Flogging a Dead Horse, however, it is not the teashop ladies, those ancient targets of macho abuse, but the spectacle of the Northern working class -young and old, men and women -which excites sexual disgust. In the camera's eye they are no less

26 Ascherson, 'Why "Heritage" is Right-Wing'.
27 Heritage-baiting is an almost exclusively male sport, and one way - it might be suggested - in which literary men can prove themselves manly. It is remarkable how often it is the pot-pourri and toiletries side of 'heritage' which is singled out for ridicule. Is it that the manifestation of femininity compounds the offence, or was it in some cases the original cause of disgust?
repellent when smiling than when scowling, and it is difficult to imagine them doing anything which might make them appealing, or earn them a modicum of dignity and respect.

Something might be said too about social condescension. The idea that the masses, if left to their own devices, are moronic; that their pleasures are unthinking; their tastes cheapo and nasty, is a favorite conceit of the aesthete - as it was of their predecessors, the moralists and philanthropists who, in the manner of Philip Stubbes' *Anatomie of Abuses*, took up arms against the meretricious attractions of Vanity Fair. Behind the radical rhetoric of such an exhibition as *Flogging a Dead Horse* it is not difficult to find echoes of the Arnoldian belief that anything connected with commerce was by definition 'vulgar', that provincials were necessarily Philistine, and the populace uncultured. Superimposed on this are the familiar Leavisite themes derived from the cultural criticism of the 1930s and 1940s, according to which mass civilization is by its very nature degraded, and popular tastes, as they succumb to it, debased.²⁸

Reas, in line with the film-school teaching of the 1970s and 1980s, wants to challenge the illusions of authenticity and to offer, in place of fixed images, a free-floating assembly of shapes which refuse any simple reading. And he seems to want to subvert those sentimentalized ideas of 'The Northern Experience', which *Coronation Street* and the 'new-wave' realism of the 1960s did so much to popularize. But his alienated figures conform to current film-school orthodoxy, and they also rejoin an older iconography,

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²⁸ Q.D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public*, London 1932, paid popular culture the compliment of taking it seriously; *Scrutiny* was more apt to treat it as a simple degeneracy.
memorably represented in the Margate funfair of Lindsay Anderson's *Dreamland* and the Piccadilly Circus of Alain Tanner's *Nice Time*, in which pleasuregoing is represented as repulsive. It also echoes the age-old belief of the high-minded that the masses are being culturally debased. His 'heritage industry' is a kind of 1990s version of those 'mechanized' and 'Americanized' amusements, 'standardized' shows, and 'passive' audiences which J.B. Priestley in his 1934 portrait of holiday-making, and John Osborne in *The Entertainer*, contrasted to the 'old roaring Variety turns' of the Edwardian music hall.  

Theme parks -doubly offensive because they seem to come to us from America, and because they link history to the holiday industry -are a particular bugbear for the critics. As engines of corruption, or seducers of the innocent, they seem to occupy the symbolic space of those earlier folk-devils of the literary imagination, jukeboxes and transistor radios, or -the particular object of Richard Hoggart's spleen in *The Uses of Literacy* (1957) -candy-floss and milk-bars. In contemporary left-wing demonology they have

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30 Richard Hoggart's denunciation of an earlier import from the United States - milk-bars - seems worth reproducing as a caution against a too immediate hostility to what is alien and innovatory:

Like the cafes I described in an earlier chapter, the milk-bars indicate at once, in the nastiness of their modernistic knick-knacks, their glaring showiness, an aesthetic breakdown so complete that, in comparison with them, the layout of the living-rooms in some of the poor homes from which the customers come seems to speak of a tradition as balanced and civilized as an eighteenth-century town house. I am not thinking of those milk-bars which are really quick-service cafes where one may have a meal more quickly than in a cafe with table-service. I have in mind rather the kind of milk-bat - there is one in almost every northern town with more than, say, fifteen thousand inhabitants - which has become the regular evening rendezvous of some of the young men. Girls go to some, but most of the customers are boys aged between fifteen and twenty, with drape-suits, picture ties, and an American slouch. Most of them cannot afford a succession of milkshakes, and make cups of tea serve for an hour or two whilst - and this is their main reason for coming they put copper after copper into the mechanical record-player. About a dozen records are available at any time; a numbered button is pressed for the one wanted, which is selected from a key to titles. The records seem to be changed about once a fortnight by the hiring firm; almost all are American; almost all are 'vocals' and the styles of singing much advanced beyond what is normally heard on the Light Programme of the B.B.C. Some of the tunes are catchy; all have been doctored for presentation so that they have the kind of beat which
become the latest in a long line of opiates of the masses, on a par with Butlin's holiday
camps and bingo halls in the 1950s; 'canned entertainment' and 'Hollywood films' in the
1930s, or what J.B. Priestley feared was the 'Blackpooling' of English life and leisure. Their appeals are by definition meretricious and mechanical; their pleasures mindless,
pandering to the lowest tastes. As the science-fiction writer E.L. Doctorow has put it,
these simulated environments only offer 'shorthand culture for the masses ... a mindless
thrill like an electric shock, that insists at the same time on the recipient's rich psychic
relation to his country's history and language and literature. In a forthcoming time of
highly governed masses in an overpopulated world this technique may be extremely
useful as a substitute for education and, eventually, as a substitute for experience.'

For the aesthete, anyway for the alienated and the disaffected, heritage is a mechanism of
cultural debasement. It leaves no space for the contemplative or the solitary. It forbids
discrimination and the exercise of good taste. Its pleasures are cheap and nasty,
confounding high and low, originals and copies, the authentic and the pastiche. It brings
'crowd pollution', in the form of mass tourism, to sacred spots, surrounds art treasures

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is currently popular; much use is made of the 'hollow-cosmos' effect which echo-chamber recording
gives. They are delivered with great precision and competence, and the 'nickelodeon' is allowed to
blare out so that the noise would be sufficient to fill a good-sized ballroom, rather than a converted
shop in the main street. The young men waggle one shoulder or stare, as desperately as Humphrey
Bogart, across the tubular chairs.

Compared even with the pub around the corner, this is all a peculiarly thin and pallid form of
dissipation, a sort of spiritual dry-rot amid the odour of boiled milk. Many of the customers - their
clothes, their hair-styles, their facial expressions all indicate - are living to a large extent in a myth-
world compounded of a few simple elements which they take to be those of American life.


with crocodiles of visitors, and turns ancient monuments into spectacles for the ignorant to gawp at.32

The hostility of historians to heritage, though different in kind from that of the aesthetes, is no less overdetermined. Our whole training predisposes us to give a privileged place to the written word, to hold the visual (and the verbal) in comparatively low esteem, and to regard imagery as a kind of trap. Books, from an early age, are our bosom companions; libraries rather than museums are our natural habitat. If we use graphics at all it will be for purposes of illustration, seldom as primary texts, and it may be indicative of this that, as with material artefacts, we do not even have footnote conventions for referencing them. The fetishization of archives -fundamental to the Rankean revolution in historical scholarship -reinforces these biases, giving a talismanic importance to manuscripts. Even when our point of address is material culture -as in, say, current preoccupations with consumerism or changes in the use of domestic space -our evidence is more likely to be drawn from manuscript remains: probate inventories or household budgets rather than

32 'SoHo...Disneyland for the Aesthete', Sharon Zukin, *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change*, London 1988, p. 20; and 'Disney World' in *Landscapes of Power*, pp. 221-41; 'Theme Park Britain', *Guardian*, 16-17 December, 1989; Mark Lawson, 'Taking the Mickey out of Euro Disney', *Independent*, 24 August 1994 for hostility in France. The venom of the normally rather gentle Lord Mayor of Oxford to a proposed 'Alice in Wonderland' theme park on the outskirts of the city nicely catches the outrage which the mere mention of the word 'theme park' provokes: 'Oxford's Lord Mayor John Power and former city planning chief said: "There are more than enough theme parks in this country. It's outside the city boundary, so it can't call itself an Oxford attraction; we have enough places exploiting our name as it is. The Alice theme is disgusting. Alice is a beautiful classic story which has entertained generations of children. To have it turned into a Hollywood-type theme park is unbelievable. I bet Christ Church will have something to say"', *Oxford Star*, 1 July 1993. It is perhaps symptomatic of the fear and loathing currently directed at theme parks - in the United States, it seems, no less than in Britain and France - that the bogey figure in Stephen Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* - the children's hit of 1992 - and before then a cult novel - is a megalomaniac millionaire eager to make a financial killing with his reconstituted prehistoric monsters.
museum exhibits or archaeological finds (a rare exception is Margaret Spufford's use of a cambric handkerchief to reconstruct the itinerary of a seventeenth-century pedlar).  

Modern conditions of research seem to dictate an almost complete detachment from the material environment -indeed, to follow the recommendations of some migrant scholars, it is a positive advantage to be writing English history from the other side of the Atlantic. We do not go out on archaeological walks, as our Victorians forebears did, or learn the lie of the land -as Marc Bloch and R.H. Tawney recommended -by putting on a stout pair of boots. We are unlikely to spend our summer vacations, as students, poring over the mysteries of numismatics, as the young Charles Oman did in his apprentice days as a scholar, nor staking out positions on a battlefield, as Thomas Carlyle did when preparing his Letters and speeches of Oliver Cromwell. The computer-literate, calling up a transatlantic or Antipodean printout, or downloading information from a terminal, may not even have to leave the study.

Retrieval work is no part of our scholarly brief. We do not have to rescue our evidence from the teeth of the bulldozer, as archaeologists do, or call in the aid of the scuba-divers or the aerial photographers in search of an elusive quarry. Nor do we need a preservation order to protect our sources from the depredations of agribusiness, as is the case with those archaeologically sensitive landscapes protected under the Countryside Act of 1979.  

34 Sir Charles Oman, Memories of Victorian Oxford and of Some Early Years, London1941.  
Blessed (or burdened) with a superabundance of records, we see no need to augment their number but are content to wait on the archivists and librarians, devoting our energies instead to record linkage or the exploitation of hitherto neglected files. With the exception of pre-Conquest scholars who, like classical historians, are heavily reliant on such fugitive remains as monumental inscriptions and burial mounds, we are very little interested in the evidence of material artefacts: we may initiate our students in the mysteries of the record office, but hardly of the cemetery or the dig.

The idea of 'living history' is even more remote from our scholarly routines - as well as being, in the eyes of the fastidious, offensive. We do not devote our sabbaticals to reconstituting a period street, nor spend our weekend breaks, or summer holidays, getting up steam on the footplate. Demographic historians, testing out their theories, do not dress up as Victorian mothers and fathers or pretend to be overseers of the poor. Economic historians, weighing the pros and cons of the machinery question, do not feel obliged to join in a steam ploughing match or crank a fairground engine into life; nor, studying the statistics of overseas trade, are they likely to feel moved to test out the speed of a tea-clipper by sailing one in a tall ships regatta or entering it for a North Sea and Baltic or cross-Channel race. Seventeenth-century scholars, preoccupied with their own internecine warfare, do not join in the annual re-enactments of the siege of Chepstow Castle or the Battle of Marston Moor.

The hostility of historians to heritage is possibly exacerbated by the fact that they are in some sort competing for the same terrain. Each, after its own fashion, claims to be
representing the past 'as it was'. Each too could be said to be obsessed with the notion of 'period', though the one renders it through zeitgeist; the other in terms of icons. Interpretation, the privilege of the archive-based historian, and 're-creation', the ambition of heritage, also share a common conceit; the belief that scrupulous attention to detail will bring the dead to life.

Does envy play some part? Heritage has a large public following, mass-membership organizations whose numbers run to hundreds of thousands, whereas our captive audiences in the lecture hall or the seminar room can sometimes be counted on the fingers of one hand. Heritage involves tens of thousands of volunteers. It can command substantial exchequer subsidies, and raise large sums by appealing to the historically minded public. It has royal patronage, and enjoys support from politicians of all stripes. It fuels popular campaigns and is at the very centre of current controversy about the shape of the built environment. It can mount festivals and pageants. It enlists corporate sponsorship and support for its retrieval projects. It is something which people care passionately about; where they are ready to enter the arena of public debate rather as, in the old days, they were ready to re-rehearse the rights and wrongs of the Norman Conquest or the English Civil War.

Whatever the reasons, history and heritage are typically placed in opposite camps. The first is assigned to the realm of critical inquiry, the second to a merely antiquarian preoccupation, the classification and hoarding of things. The first, so the argument runs, is dynamic and concerned with development and change; the second is static. The first is
concerned with explanation, bringing a sceptical intelligence to bear on the complexities and contradictoriness of the record; the second sentimentalizes, and is content merely to celebrate.

If the parable of the motes and beams were followed, as it should be, few of the historians' practices would emerge unscathed. Are we not guilty ourselves of turning knowledge into an object of desire? And is it not the effect, if not the intention, of our activity as historians to domesticate the past and rob it of its terrors by bringing it within the realm of the knowable? Historians are no less concerned than conservationists to make their subjects imaginatively appealing. We may not prettify the past in the manner of English Heritage or the National Trust, but we are no less adept than conservation officers and museum curators at tying up loose ends and removing unsightly excrescences. We use vivid detail and thick description to offer images far clearer than any reality could be. Do we not require of our readers, when facing them with one of our period reconstructions, as willing a suspension of disbelief as the 'living history' spectacle of the open-air museum or theme park? Is not the historical monograph, after its fashion, as much a packaging of the past as costume drama? And do we not call on our own trompe-l'oeil devices to induce a hallucinatory sense of oneness with the past, using 'evocative' detail as a gauge of authenticity?

The perceived opposition between 'education' and 'entertainment', and the unspoken and unargued-for assumption that pleasure is almost by definition mindless, ought not to go unchallenged. There is no reason to think that people are more passive when looking at
old photographs or film footage, handling a museum exhibit, following a local history trail, or even buying a historical souvenir, than when reading a book. People do not simply 'consume' images in the way in which, say, they buy a bar of chocolate. As in any reading, they assimilate them as best they can to pre-existing images and narratives. The pleasures of the gaze scopophilia as it is disparagingly called -are different in kind from those of the written word but not necessarily less taxing on historical reflection and thought.