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### **Notes on Heritage**

- Etymologically, the term 'heritage' is cognate with 'inheritance' – something that devolves to you, that comes down to you, that you have a right to, that belongs to you in some sense.
- The raw material of heritage is history, but it is history selected for a particular purpose.
- So what is the basis of this selection? It's worth pointing out that history itself is selective, and ideologically constructed. You can't write history without imposing your own political, social, ethical sensibilities on it.
- This may even be true of any attempt to approach the past, including our own personal memories, on which we impose a view from the present; but let's suppose that we really can access our own memories.
- History is an attempt to extend the reach of memory, a way of coming to understand the unremembered past, the past that was around before we were there to remember it.
- Perhaps the building blocks of history are other people's memories, transcribed in documents, texts of various sorts, as well as physical

remains, and vaguer categories like folk memory, fairy tales, mythologies etc.

- So we have history on the one hand, and then on the other, a particular slice through history that we call heritage.
- If heritage has to do with inheritance, with what belongs to us, maybe we can say that heritage is the history that particularly belongs to a particular social collective – a nation, a locality, a society of some sort, an *us*.
- Heritage perhaps is the aggregation of stories, documents, biographies, key events, as well as landscapes, buildings, artifacts, works of art, cultural forms etc, that are important to a society, that go towards constructing the identity of that society, how it thinks of itself, and therefore of course, of how individuals within that society think of themselves.
- Perhaps this is the way that what we call ‘collective memory’ is constructed. Collective memory is a sense of the past that has become personalised, it takes on some of the emotional force of personal memory.
- Collective memory is a kind of extended personal memory which is shared between members of a social collective, and which helps construct collective identity.
- Heritage is the content of collective memory, so you might think that heritage is what is ‘remembered’ collectively, but unfortunately it isn’t quite as simple as this.
- Collective memory is a slightly misleading term: collective memory doesn’t *remember*, it assigns significance.
- Collective memory is what the community considers important; it consists of the stories that the community tells about itself, to itself, and to others, the stories that it wishes to carry along with it from the past.
- Heritage is a collection of significant events from the historical, and also from the mythological record (and of course this process of itself blurs the distinction between history and mythology) which have meaning – illuminative functions – in the present, for the present community.

- The selection of heritage elements for a culture has everything to do with the current self-definition of that culture. There has to be a formulation, implicit or explicit, of what the heritage item says about us now.
- There are many interesting questions about how a society selects heritage items from the historical record, what the normative social functions of heritage are thought to be within a collective, what our sense of our heritage says about us now, how we confront issues of truthfulness, bias, authenticity.
- Contested or conflicted items from the historical record, episodes whose recall engenders guilt or division - what has been called *traumatic history* - tend not to be selected for the accumulation of heritage. They may be denied, or suppressed; but even when they are 'worked through' or overcome and reassimilated into the collective narrative, they are items, I would suggest, of history, not of heritage.
- The basic point is that heritage is a view of the past that is constructed in and by the present. In its clearest formulation, you can say that heritage is made, not found. This does not necessarily mean that it is fabricated – although it may be – but that it is selected, identified as heritage, by us, in the present.
- Heritage is a mode of cultural production in the present that has recourse to the past. It has been called 'the invention of tradition.' Heritage is not 'out there', waiting to be found, but created in the present. But of course the past is its main resource.
- Heritage has been called a value-added industry. It produces something new, revalorised. It adds value to the obsolete; new uses are found for the item/location/activity, but the thing itself also adds the value of pastness.
- And in this way it connects a society to its past, and therefore to its ongoing identity.