As a historian studying what can be considered a form of intellectual history, I have slowly come to adopt Michel de Certeau’s observation made at the end of the 1980s that ‘objectifying the past, for the last three centuries, has undoubtedly left unconsidered time within a discipline that has continued to use it as a taxonomic instrument’. To a certain degree, time has become commonplace for the historian who has preserved or instrumentalized it. It is not considered because it is inconceivable, but because we do not think of it or, more simply, we do not think about it. As a historian attempting to pay attention to the time I’m living in, I have thus, like many others, noticed the swift development of the category of the present until it has become obvious that the present is omnipresent. This is what I refer to here as ‘presentism’.

How can this phenomenon be better understood? What effects does it have? What does it signify? For example, within the framework of the history profession in France, starting in the 1980s, a history calling itself ‘the history of the present’ emerged, accompanying this movement. In response to the many demands of modern or very recent history, the profession was asked, occasionally compelled, to respond. Existing on different fronts, this history found itself
particularly in the limelight of legal news, during trials for crimes against humanity which dealt mainly with the new temporality of imprescriptibility.

The concept of the regime of historicity is pertinent for conducting this investigation. I evoked it for the first time in 1983, to account for what I considered to be the most interesting aspect of propositions made by the American anthropologist, Marshall Sahlins. However, at the time, this concept drew little attention: mine only slightly more than others. Its time had not yet arrived! Drawing on the theories of Claude Lévi-Strauss concerning ‘hot’ and ‘cold’ societies, Sahlins sought to determine the shape of history which had been specific to the Pacific Islands. Having more or less abandoned the expression, without developing it further, I rediscovered it, no longer concerning indigenous peoples from the past, but in the present, the here and now; to be more exact, after 1989, it affirmed itself as a way of investigating circumstances, where the question of time had become an important issue or a problem: occasionally, something haunting.

In the meantime, I had become familiar with the metahistorical categories of ‘experience’ and ‘expectancy’, as they had been developed by the German historian, Reinhart Koselleck, with the idea of creating semantics for historical times. Questioning the temporal experiences of history, he sought ‘in each present, how the temporal dimensions of the past and future were related’. This is what is interesting to study, taking into account the tensions that exist between the experience and expectations, while paying attention to the modes of articulation of the present, past and future. The concept of the regime of historicity could thus benefit from a dialogue (even though I was the intermediary) between Shalins and Koselleck: between anthropology and history.

A conference, conceived by the Hellenist, Marcel Detienne, a specialist in comparative approaches, provided the opportunity to resume the concept once again and develop it further, along with another anthropologist, Gérard Lenclud. This was a way to pursue, by slightly shifting the intermittent but recurrent dialogue, which had occasionally faded but never been completely abandoned, between anthropology and history that Claude Lévi-Strauss had initiated in 1949. The ‘regime of historicity’, we then wrote, could be understood in two ways. In a restricted sense, as the way in which a society considers its past and deals with it. In a broader sense, the regime of historicity designates ‘the method of self-awareness in a human community’. How, in the words of Lévi-Strauss, it ‘reacts’ to a ‘degree of historicity’ which is identical for all societies. More precisely, the concept provides an instrument for comparing different types of history, but also and even primarily, I would now add, highlights methods of relating to time: forms of experiencing time, here and elsewhere, today and yesterday. Ways of being in time. If, from the philosophical aspect, historicity, whose trajectory Paul Ricoeur has retraced from Hegel to Heidegger, designates ‘the condition of being, historically’, or yet ‘humankind present to itself as history’, we will pay particular attention here to the diversity of regimes of historicity.
Finally, this concept accompanied me during a stay in Berlin, at the Wissenschaftskolleg in 1994, when the traces of the Wall had not yet disappeared. The city centre was nothing but an area of construction sites, with buildings either already in process or still to come, the debate whether or not to rebuild the Royal Palace was underway, and the large dilapidated façades of the buildings in the east, full of bullet holes, revealed a time that had elapsed differently. It would obviously be untrue to say that time had stopped. With its vast empty spaces, its wastelands and its ‘shadows’, Berlin gave me the impression of being a city for historians, where unthought-of time was manifest more than elsewhere (not only forgetting, repression and denial).

Throughout the 1990s, Berlin, more than any other city in Europe, or perhaps in the world, provided work for thousands of people, from immigrant workers to famous international architects. A godsend for town-planners and journalists, it has become a mandatory place to visit, fashionable even, a ‘good study’, a laboratory, a place for ‘reflection’. It has sparked innumerable commentaries and many controversies; it has led to the production of a huge quantity of images, words and texts, probably several important books as well. The sufferings and disillusiones created by these upheavals should not be overlooked. Here, even more than elsewhere, time was a problem, visible, tangible, and unavoidable. What connections should be maintained with the past, ‘pasts’ of course, but also, and significantly, with the future? Without ignoring the present or conversely by not risking to envisage only the present: how, literally, to live in the present? What to destroy, to preserve, to reconstruct, to build and how? These are many decisions and actions that involve an explicit relation to time. We struggle to ignore the obvious.

From both sides of the Wall, that slowly became a wall of time, efforts were initially made to erase the past. Hans Scharoun’s statement: ‘One can not hope at the same time to build a new society and rebuild old buildings’, could in fact apply to both sides. As a famous architect, Scharoun, who had presided the town-planning and architecture commission immediately following the war, had notably built the Philharmonic auditorium. At the dawn of the twenty-first century Berlin had become an emblematic city, a memorial site of for a Europe that was essentially caught between amnesia and the duty of memory. The eyes of the flâneur-historian could still make out the remnants, traces, and signs of order from different times, as one evokes different orders in architecture.

The concept of the regime of historicity, which had originally been formed on the shores of the Great Pacific islands, finished in Berlin, at the heart of modern European history. We will examine here our contemporary time, using these two key words: ‘memory’ and ‘heritage’. Much in demand, largely commented upon and used in many ways, these key words will be used here as signs, and also as symptoms of our relation to time – as different ways of translating, refracting, following, thwarting the order of time: as shown by the uncertainties or ‘crises’ in the present order of time. We shall bear in mind the question: ‘Is a new regime of historicity, focused on the present, in the process of being formulated?’
What has the extended use and universalization of heritage that we have witnessed for the past quarter of a century meant from the perspective of time and its order? What regime of historicity has the rapid growth of heritagization in the 1990s, been a sign of? Does this predilection for the past demonstrate a kind of nostalgia for a former regime of historicity, which has none the less been long obsolete? Conversely, how can it still become adapted to a modern regime which, for the last two centuries, has placed its ‘fervour of hope’ in the future?

During this period, heritage affirmed itself as the dominant category, including if not overwhelming cultural life and public policies. An inventory was made of ‘new heritages’ and ‘new uses’ of heritage were established. In France, since 1983, the journées du patrimoine (heritage days) have attracted increasing numbers of visitors to places considered to be heritage sites: more than 11 million visitors in September 2002. These results, determined and proclaimed in due form each year by the media, resemble a record to be beaten by the following year. The journées du patrimoine have spread throughout the world, and today we speak of – notably through UNESCO initiatives and conventions – the universalization of heritage while, each year, the list of sites of the universal heritage of humanity continues to grow. A National School of Heritage, responsible for training future curators, has operated in Paris since 1991. A Heritage Foundation has also existed since 1996. Drawing inspiration, at least in its expectations, from the British National Trust, it has actually remained quite discreet. Finally, Heritage Interviews have been organized by the Heritage Division of the Ministry of Culture since 1984. Everything related to heritage is discussed, including, most recently, its ‘abuses’.

The Places of Memory by the historian Pierre Nora led to the diagnosis of a ‘heritagization’ of the history of France, if not of France itself, to the extent that the shift from one regime of memory to another led us from ‘history-memory’ to ‘history-heritage’. In this respect, the definition attributed by the law of 1993 concerning monumental heritage is remarkable: ‘Our heritage is the memory of our history and the symbol of our national identity.’ Proceeding from memory, heritage becomes the memory of history, and as such, a symbol of identity. Memory, heritage, history, identity, and nation are united in the polished style of the legislator.

In this new configuration, heritage is linked to territory and memory which both operate as vectors of identity: the key word of the 1980s. However, it is less a question of an obvious, assertive identity, more a question of an uneasy identity that risks disappearing or is already largely forgotten, obliterated, or repressed: an identity in search of itself, to be exhumed, assembled, or even invented. In this way, heritage comes to define less that which one possesses, what one has, than circumscribing what one is, without having known, or even been capable of knowing. Heritage thus becomes an invitation for collective anamnesis. The ‘ardent obligation’ of heritage, with its requirements for conservation, renovation, and commemoration is added to the ‘duty’ of memory, with its recent public translation of repentance.
Outside the Christian world, the example of Japan has often drawn attention. The fact that soon after the Meiji Restoration (1868), the country was endowed with legislation for the protection of ancient architectural and artistic works, facilitated understanding, more easily than elsewhere, the similarities and differences in relation to the European concept of heritage. An initial Inventory Guideline from 1871 was followed, in 1897, by a law concerning the preservation of ancient sanctuaries and temples, introducing the concept of national treasure. The word ‘treasure’ indicates that an object obtains its value from its intangible background (its divine origin for example). Religious heritage (Shintoist) became of prime interest. Then, in 1919, the Law concerning the preservation of historical, picturesque sites and natural monuments was added. Finally, the Law of 1950 concerning the protection of cultural goods acknowledged, for the first time, ‘intangible cultural heritage’. We shall examine here only two features of this legislative framework and the heritage practices that it codifies.

Firstly, provision is made for the periodic reconstruction of certain religious buildings. The fact that they are built of wood is not fully explanatory because the reconstruction is exactly the same and planned in advance. This is particularly the case for the important sanctuary of Ise. The temple of the goddess Amaterasu, mythical ancestor of the Imperial house, is in fact rebuilt in exactly the same way, from Japanese cypress wood, every twenty years. The ritual, begun in the seventh century, has continued up until today (of course with a few interruptions). The next reconstruction is planned for 2013. The permanence of the form is most important. The Western dilemma of whether to ‘preserve or restore’ is not an issue. On the other hand, a Japanese person visiting Paris would be (or, more exactly, would once have been) struck by efforts undertaken to preserve objects and historical monuments from the ravages of time. Japanese cultural policy’s primary concern was neither the visual aspect of objects nor the maintenance of this appearance. It depended on a different reasoning that was rather one of actualization.

This helps us to understand the appellation of ‘living national treasure’, as specified in the Law of 1950. This appellation is granted to an artist or artisan, not as a person, but only as a ‘keeper of important intangible cultural heritage’. The title, which can reward an individual or a group, requires the winner to hand on her/his knowledge. In order to do this, the winner benefits from a grant. It is clear from this original provision that the object or its...
conservation counts less than the actualization of know-how which is handed on precisely through being actualized. Like the temple made of wood, traditional art exists as long as it belongs to or is part of the present. As a result, concepts such as ‘original’, ‘copy’, ‘authenticity’, which are central to the construction of heritage in the West, are not an issue or are not in any case attributed the same value in Japan. Of course, the past is important, but the order of time operates differently than in Europe. A different representation of permanence and a different relation to traces of the past was derived from time that was not primarily linear. This is too brief an outline, a simple sketch from a distance, but it is sufficient to disorient the obviousness of the European concept of heritage.

In recent years, the surge of patrimony, in phase with that of memory, has grown to a scale that reaches the limit of what could be ‘everything is heritage’. As memories are increasingly claimed or demanded, everything could be considered heritage or liable to become heritage. The same inflation seems to reign. As ‘heritagization’ or ‘museification’ always approaches closer to the present, it had to be stipulated, for example, ‘that no work of a living architect could legally be considered as an historic monument’. This is a clear indication of the present historicizing itself, as mentioned above.

Another example, this time urban, of the effect of the heritage theme and the interactions of time is demonstrated in the rehabilitation, renovation, and revitalization policies of urban centres which seek to ‘museify’ but in a vivid manner, revitalizing through renovation. Should we have an unenclosed museum: once again, a museum ‘without walls’? A museum strictly of society, if not a social museum. Of course, this project would involve, in going beyond the notion of historic monument, a consciousness that the protection of heritage should be conceived as an urban project in its entirety. This would confirm the evolution from the Athens Charter of 1931, to that of Venice in 1964. This gives rise to another paradox: the most authentically modern today would be the historical past, but according to modern standards. Only the façades are preserved.

When this past failed to appear, contributing to the unrest of the suburbs or dormitory-towns, it was made to surface. Urban heritage sites were produced in order to construct identity, by choosing a history, which becomes the history, that of the city or neighbourhood: a discovered, rediscovered or exhumed history, which is then displayed, and around

2. Museification of the Berlin Wall.
which is organized, in every sense of the word, ‘circulation’.

Patrimonies are multiplying. One example among others is the law relating to the foundation of heritage which, anxious to omit nothing, has inventoried ‘protected cultural heritage’, ‘cultural heritage in proximity’ (the ‘connective fabric’ of national territory), ‘natural heritage’ (including the ‘notion of landscapes’), ‘living heritage’ (animal and plant species), and ‘intangible heritage’ (traditional know-how, folk traditions, folklore). Genetic heritage is now regularly featured by the media and ethical heritage has also arrived on the scene. The accelerated rhythm of the constitution, or even the production of heritage, throughout the world, is easily observable. A series of international charters has endorsed, co-ordinated and shaped this movement, though much distance still exists between the principles and respect for them.

The first charter, The Athens Charter for the Restoration of Historic Monuments, focused only on large-scale monuments and ignored the rest. Thirty years later, the Venice Charter considerably enlarged the objectives, taking into consideration ‘The Conservation and Restoration of Sites and Monuments’. Article 1 provided a much wider definition of historic monuments: ‘the concept of a historic monument embraces not only the simple architectural work but also the urban or rural setting in which is found the evidence of a particular civilization, a significant development or an historic event. This applies not only to great works of art but also to more modest works of the past which have acquired cultural significance with the passing of time’. The preamble places strong emphasis on safeguarding and introduces the notion of heritage shared by humanity. ‘Humanity, which is becoming more conscious of the unity of human values, considers ancient monuments as a common heritage and, regarding future generations, recognizes itself responsible for their safeguarding. Its duty is to hand them on in the full richness of their authenticity’. Heritage is made up of testimonies, large or small. As concerns all testimony, our responsibility is to recognize their authenticity, but our responsibility additionally extends to future generations.

In this consciousness-raising, saving the temples of Abu-Simbel in 1959, during the construction of the huge Aswan dam, certainly played a key role. This was an experiment that was given wide media coverage, mobilizing public opinion on a large scale. Amazingly enough, the distant past and modern techniques became allies: the future did not take over the ruins of the past. On the contrary, It gave them the chance to remain visible in the future, as a kind of repeated semaphore. The speech made by André Malraux during this campaign bears ample witness: ‘Your appeal does not belong to the history of the mind because you must save the temples of Nubia, but because with it the first world civilization publicly claims world art as its indivisible heritage.’

The more that heritage (at least the concept) gained in stature, the more the historic monument (the category) crumbled. The Law of 1913 substituted ‘national interest’ as a criterion for the classification of a monument with ‘public interest from the perspective of history and art’. This already represented broadening the definition of the concept. However, today, the royal privilege of the definition of national history-memory is
rivalled or contested in the name of partial, sectorial or particular memories (groups, associations, enterprises, communities, etc.), which all wish to be recognized as legitimate, equally legitimate, or even more legitimate. The nation-state no longer needs to impose its values, but to safeguard as quickly as possible that which, at the present moment, immediately, even in an emergency, is considered to be ‘heritage’ by various social actors. The monument itself tends to be superseded by the ‘memorial’: as less of a monument and more a place of memory, where we endeavour to make the memory live on, keeping it vivid and handing it on.

From 1980 to 2000, 2,241 associations were registered in France, whose declared objective was heritage or the environment: ‘minor heritage’. The large majority of these associations are recent, created after 1980. By occasionally adopting wider definitions of patrimony that do not strictly fit the official categories of the administration, which takes care of ‘major heritage’, they tend to destabilize the administrative classification machine. For the associations, the value of the objects that they elect is found partially in the fact that they have sought their recognition. Overall it is more a question of local patrimony, joining memory and territory with operations aimed at producing territory and continuity for those who live there today. ‘Heritage associations demonstrate the construction of a memory that is not a given, and therefore not lost. They work towards the constitution of a symbolic universe. Heritage should not be studied from the past but rather from the present, as a category of action in the present and concerning the present’. Lastly, heritage, which has become a key branch of the leisure industry, is the subject of important economic interests. Its ‘enhanced value’ is therefore directly integrated into the fast rhythms and temporalities of today’s market economy, colliding with it, or in any case, aligning itself with it.

The twentieth century is the century that has most invoked the future, the most constructed and massacred in its name, pushing the furthest the production of a written history from the perspective of the future, in conformity with the postulates of the modern regime of historicity. However, it was also the century that, especially over the final thirty years, attributed the largest definition to the category of the present: a massive, overwhelming, omnipresent present, that has no horizon other than itself, daily creating the past and the future that, day after day, it needs. A present already past before ever completely happening. From the end of the 1960s, this present none the less revealed itself to be anxious, in search of roots, and obsessed by memory. Confidence in progress was replaced by the concern to safeguard and preserve. But to preserve what and whom? This world, our world, future generations, ourselves.

The museified gaze is thus directed towards that which surrounds us. We would like to prepare, starting from today, the museum of tomorrow, assembling today’s archives as if they were already yesterday’s, caught as we are between amnesia and the desire to forget nothing. For whom if not for ourselves, in the first place? The destruction of the Berlin Wall, followed by its instantaneous museification is a good example, with, also just as quickly, its merchandising. Pieces of the wall were immediately available for sale,
duly stamped Original Berlin Mauer. If patrimony is henceforth that which defines what we are today, the imperative of the heritagization movement, caught itself in the aura of the duty of memory, will remain a distinctive feature of the moment in which we are living or have just lived: a certain relation with the present and an expression of presentism.

In examining the trajectory of heritage, there is one component that we have not yet fully addressed: the heritagization of the environment. UNESCO provides a good introduction, because it is both a sounding board and a vast world laboratory, where a doctrine is developed and principles are proclaimed. In 1972, the General Conference adopted the Convention for the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage. The text leaves nothing out of its ambit: heritage is global, cultural and natural. Why an international convention? The preamble begins with the observation that universal heritage is increasingly threatened with destruction ‘not only by the traditional causes of decay, but also by changing social and economic conditions which aggravate the situation with even more formidable phenomena of damage or destruction’. These considerations have also led to the introduction of a new concept: protection, whose responsibility belongs to the whole international community.

Today, UNESCO strives to unite awareness of cultural diversity, concern for biodiversity and efforts in view of sustainable development. What brought these three concepts and objectives together is the concern or the necessity for protection or better yet, preservation. Is it a matter of protecting the present or preserving the future? Both, of course. The question is, however, not necessarily pointless. Do we reason in going from the future towards the present or rather from the present towards the future? We shall come back to this.

From the perspective of the relation to time, what has this heritage proliferation been and remained a sign of?

It is clearly a sign of rupture, between a present and a past, the actual experience of acceleration being one way to undergo the shift from one regime of memory to another, which Pierre Nora has made the starting point of his inquiry. The itinerary of the concept has undoubtedly shown that heritage has never thrived on continuity but on the contrary from ruptures and questioning the order of time, with the interplay of absence and presence, visibility and invisibility that has marked and guided the incessant and ever-changing ways of producing semaphores. This goes back to the foundation of the Western tradition that began with Jesus Christ and the new order of time that was set in motion.

Heritage is one way of experiencing ruptures, of recognizing them and reducing them, by locating, selecting, and producing semaphores. Inscribed in the long period of Western history, distinguishing the concept has gone through several stages that were always correlated with important moments of questioning the order of time. Heritage is a recourse in times of crisis. If there are thus heritage moments, it would be illusory to try to establish a single meaning of the word.
After the catastrophes of the twentieth century, the many wounds and the significant accelerations in the actual experience of time, neither the sudden appearance of memory nor that of patrimony in the end come as a surprise. The question could even be: ‘Why did it take so long?’ Surely because the order of the world and the order of time hardly made them possible. A whole series of conditions was necessary, as was mentioned at the beginning of this voyage through time. On the other hand, the contemporary surge of heritage is distinguished from earlier movements by the rapidity of its expansion, the multiplicity of its expressions and its highly presentist nature, even though the present has taken on a wider meaning. The memorial takes precedence over the monument or the latter turns into a memorial. The past attracts more than history; the presence of the past, the evocation and the emotions win out over keeping a distance and mediation; finally, this heritage is itself influenced by acceleration: it should be done quickly before it is too late, before night falls and today has completely disappeared.

Whether it expresses itself as a request, asserts itself as a duty or claims itself as a right, memory can at the same time be considered as an answer to and a symptom of presentism. The same can be said for heritage. With, however, something additional from the perspective of experience and, lastly, from the order of time. The heritagization of the environment, which signals what is probably the largest and most recent expansion of the concept, undoubtedly paves the way towards the future or towards new interactions between present and future. Are we not then leaving the circle of the present, since the concern for the future is presented as the reason that this phenomenon even exists? Except that this future is no longer a promise or ‘principle of hope’, but a menace. This is the reversal. A menace that we have initiated and for which we must today acknowledge ourselves responsible.

Questioning heritage and its regimes of temporality has thus led us, unexpectedly, from the past to the future, but a future which no longer remains to be conquered or made to happen, without hesitating, if necessary, to brutalize the present. This future is no longer a bright horizon towards which we advance, but a line of shadow that we have drawn towards ourselves, while we seem to have come to a standstill in the present, pondering on a past that is not passing.
NOTES


8. See the website of the World Heritage Centre, which counted 730 hits at the end of 2002.


12. This is the exact title of a text by the Italian architect Camillo Boito, published in 1893, where he tries to define an intermediary position between that illustrated by Viollet-le-Duc – ‘(Restoring a building is not maintaining, repairing or rebuilding it, it is restoring it in a finished state that may have never existed at any specific moment’, (Dictionnaire de l’architecture [Dictionary of Architecture]) – and that of Ruskin – ‘(preserve absolutely, to the point of creating ruins if necessary)’, see Leniaud, op. cit. p. 186–8.


15. The Athens conference was held at the initiative of the International Commission for the Intellectual Co-operation of the Society of Nations and the International Council of Museums. see below.

16. The number of protected buildings rose from 24,000 in 1960 to 44,709 in 1996.


18. Ibid. p. 263.

3. Concepts of time can be influenced by the measurement of time. From left to right:

- Oldest hydraulic clock found in Karnak, Egypt (1400 B.C.), exhibited in the Egyptian Museum of Cairo.
- Prague’s astronomical clock in the old town area, Czech republic.
- Star finder, part of an astrolabe, an ancient astronomical instrument used to measure time and the position of the sun and stars in the sky, Iran.
- Fourteenth-century hydraulic clock in Fez, Morocco.