the arrival of the postmodern, in which the historical past entered a phase of infinite regression, unreachable through the patina of spectacle and commodity. Perhaps the most sophisticated attempt to locate the complex mix of developments which went under the name of heritage came from the French historian Pierre Nora. In an ambitious project, Nora and a host of historians under his command set out to chart the history of memory in the modern French nation. In coming to his own, contemporary, period Nora found public memory colonized by what he termed les lieux de memoire – the realms or places of memory (Nora, 1984–93). Contrary to appearances, these realms of memory, far from allowing access to the historical past, obstructed historical thought: rather like heritage in the Anglophone literature, in the IC20, for Nora, les lieux de memoire promised much but delivered little, alluding to a past that could never be grasped, known, or experienced. In a contrary conceptual move, the English historian Raphael Samuel, tired of intellectuals exhibiting a characteristic snobbishness about the popular pleasures organized by the heritage industries, embarked upon an ambitious study in which he determined to demonstrate that heritage, far from being destructive of historical consciousness, worked as a great impetus for the arrival of a new form of historical knowledge. These controversies currently underwrite the entire governance or administration of the-past-in-the-present – be it among museum curators, or in the decisions to designate world heritage sites, or in local struggles to preserve a neighborhood artifact.

This politicization of the concept of heritage in the IC20 and eC21 rather confirms that the past is not quite as commodified as pessimists fear. What is clear, though, is that the concept of heritage signifies the organization of a new historical moment in the workings of historical time.

Bill Schwarz

See: HISTORY, MEMORY, TIME.

History

In the English-speaking world history principally signifies a retelling of past events which is professedly true, based (reputedly) on what really happened. “History” in this sense, together with its older generic correlates, histoire, hystorye, historye, and historie, came to be uncoupled from the more capacious idea of a story only in the IC15, with “story” henceforth signifying fiction or some wholly imaginative construct. Evidence of this conceptual division can be witnessed, for example, in the distinction between those of Shakespeare’s plays classified as histories, and those others, products only (it seems) of the dramatist’s imagination – comedies and tragedies, most of all. Antecedents of history-as-truth can be found in the idea of the chronicle, as well as in genealogy. The genealogical roots of historical thought in the Renaissance were evident in the attention paid to men of standing: history was about kingship, and the men with the capacities to rule states,
command armies, and conquer territories. The profound, but protracted, recasting of the idea of history, such that it came to embrace human self-development itself, in its totality, constitutes one dimension of what we call modernity. The clearest anticipation of this shift in meaning can be discerned in the field of philosophy in the C18, most particularly in the work of Giambattista Vico (1968 [1744]).

The idea of history as the enactment of human self-development found its most dramatic expression in the philosophy of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1956 [1831]), from which most contemporary debate still derives. Hegel not only construed the terms in which the idea of world-history could take effect. He also endeavored to supply his grandiose abstraction’s historical, empirical specification, as in his conviction that world-history, or the world-spirit, was manifest in the Prussian state, as it had been earlier (in Hegel’s view) in the person of Bonaparte, designated by Hegel as “the world-spirit on horseback.” Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1973 [1848]) adopted much of this system of thinking, attempting to turn it on its head and render it in material and secular terms: in so doing they launched a radical renovation of the idea of history itself, which spawned an array of new categorizations. Not the least of these was the notion of historical materialism, which came to act as an alternative term for Marxism. The debates within Marxism in the IC19, from before Marx’s death and in the years which followed, swung between competing readings of the historical process (itself an idea of history popularized within Marxism). On the one hand there existed a deep belief in the historical inevitability of social emancipation, an intellectual position which drew much from the contemporaneous vogue for natural history, and for Charles Darwin especially. On the other, there emerged a heightened faith in the capacities of men (and women) to make history themselves.

This centering of human agency in history can also be discerned in the traditions of historical thought which derived from the French Revolution, and which drew too from the spirit of Romanticism. The greatest inspiration in this respect was Jules Michelet (hugely influenced by Vico), who can claim to be the effective inventor of people’s history in the mC19. In Michelet (1847–53) too we can see a contemporary sensibility in his determination to honor the anonymous dead, and to rescue their memory from oblivion. In one of the great testaments to what (from this period) was termed the historical imagination Michelet claimed that the Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris worked for him as “the laboratory of historical resurrection.” The second half of the C19 saw the emergence of historiography, in the sense of a professionalized history, organized on agreed rational procedures (documented, footnoted), and the earliest indications of the figure of the historian, as opposed to the general man of letters, or to the amateur figure of the antiquarian.

As these developments to professionalize history were at their earliest stage, Thomas Carlyle was already condemning the “dry-as-dust” historian, while – echoing Michelet’s populism – J. R. Green was complaining of a history given exclusively to “drum and trumpet,” thereby condemning an entire mode of high-nationalist historical thought. One effect of the professionalization of history through the nineteenth century was the naming
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of a distinct genre of literary production: the historical novel (Lukács, 1962) – first viewed (by professional historians) as “romances,” appropriate for the feminine sensibility, but unworthy of serious intellectual attention. Nonetheless, debate raged within the historical profession between the “poetic” and the “scientific” dimensions of historical practice, with the latter (in the academy) winning the upper hand for much of the eC20. Professionalization brought an entire new lexicon to the study of history. History itself was divided first into ancient history and modern history, and thence subdivided into an increasing plethora of categories: ancient, medieval, early modern, modern, and, later, contemporary history. Archeology came to be defined as a separate specialism.

Alongside these attempts systematically to periodize human history, distinct subspecialisms appeared. Until much of the IC19 history was essentially what a modern reader would understand as cultural history, in that it took as its natural object of study the history of civilizations. One of the first to make the project of cultural history explicit was Jacob Burkhardt (1944). Thenceforth, in the eC20, the dominant forms of professional history included economic, political, and imperial history. Through the C20 the concept of history assumed a bewildering accumulation of new meanings and connotations.

Politically, deriving from its Marxisant interpretations, the idea of historical consciousness proved powerful (and was given philosophical rendition especially by Georg Lukács), in which men and women were deemed to become ever more conscious of themselves and hence of their historical tasks. This merged into more determinist readings, common in the 1930s, in which History (upper case) appeared as an unforgiving absolute: in this period, those who could read the runes of History – most often associated with the official communist movement – were wont to issue imperatives in its name. A later manifestation of this same sensibility can be discerned in Fidel Castro’s moving assertion, while on trial for his life, that “History will absolve me.”

In philosophy, history was centered as a preoccupation for at least some strands of thought for the middle period of the C20 – though not much in the Anglophone world. The term historicism became a matter of great philosophical contention, both because of its varied meanings, and because it attracted adherents and opponents in equal measure. Perhaps the predominant meaning of “historicism” lay in the intellectual endeavor to situate all systems of ideas (philosophy included) in their historical context, calling into question the formal properties of abstract thought. The greatest theoretical breakthrough in historiography in the C20 was represented by Fernand Braudel’s discovery (as he put it) that the object of historical thought was less “the past” than historical time (Braudel, 1972). In part this belief derived from Henri Bergson, in part from the mC20 interest in varieties of structuralism. Braudel came to imagine a history in which structural history (histories of the ecological world, economic systems, and state forms) would combine with conjunctural histories (the histories of events, as he put it). In this, he believed, lay the promise of a properly total history, in which every dimension of historical time could be reproduced in the narrative of the historian.
In contemporary times the proliferation of academic history has continued apace, with new species of historical specialisms arriving constantly. This continues a new-found engagement with the history of the oppressed which took off from the 1960s and 1970s (women's history, queer history, black history – many of which first took hold as an offshoot of oral history). A theme underlying many of these approaches to historical knowledge was the idea that the oppressed had been hidden from history: that, in other words, conventional academic history, focusing on the nation and/or on high politics, simply could not see that the oppressed possessed a history. This took many forms, the most influential conceptually falling within the realm, first, of feminist history and, second, of the group of historians in the Indian subcontinent who developed the school of subaltern history (Guha, 1983). While the promise of total history was never fulfilled, it did bequeath flourishing work in the field of mentalities, which connected with later, Foucauldian-inspired genealogical histories (in, for example, the history of the emotions, of sexuality, of the body, of medicine, of the symbolic force of single commodities, and so on).

At present, an immensely rich moment in academic history combines with an extraordinary popular appetite for knowledge about the past: in television history, for example, or in heritage sites or in other forms of commemorative practice. The idea of television history presents a limit-case for thinking about popular forms of historical consciousness. To what degree can a generation cognitively attuned to television gain a critical sense of the external, historical world? For pessimists, television is the principal means in the postmodern world for scrambling historical time, preventing the postmodern subject from reaching the past. For others, of more optimistic persuasion, television becomes the means by which the contemporary world, in all its aspects including its historical determinations, can be “worked through” and known. It may be instructive that this proliferation of knowledges about the past has tended to diminish the long-standing division between history and story, the fictional or imaginative properties of history becoming ever more conspicuous. And it is paradoxical that this profusion of representations of the past coincides with expressions of anxiety that – in the postmodern epoch – the capacity for human beings to reach their historical past is all the time diminishing.

Bill Schwarz

See: HERITAGE, MEMORY, TIME.

Holocaust

In the 1940s, when rumors of the mass murder of Jews throughout Nazi-occupied Europe leaked across the front line, the biblical term holocaust was recalled and redeployed to name it. That act had no precedent in recorded history and thus no established vocabulary name. A new name had to be coined for the act of categorial murder – the physical annihilation of men, women, and children on the ground of their belonging or having been