MEMORY, HERITAGE, THINGS AND A SENSE OF WHO WE ARE



BBC magazine article today on the nostalgia business – it is big and growing.

BMW's new Mini – after the 60s icon – is very popular here in northern California.

Raleigh's 1970s "chopper" bicycle was relaunched last month.

Now some people have a problem with all this – because they see nostalgia as some kind of pathology, or because a nostalgic heritage industry, resurrecting and celebrating the past, is seen as some sort of ideological horror that sets spectacle, easy entertainment and inauthenticity against what really happened in history. (Robert Hewison pushed this line in the 80s in his book *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline*, David Lowenthal in the 90s in his book *Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*.

But let's think of our contemporary sense of history and the past – historicity, rather than history itself. Our sense of history is not primarily a narrative at all, though it may be made into one. Today we experience history as a kind of tide that sweeps us along, alienated (we see it on TV an have no part, or are simply subject to its forces). On the other hand, with united will, people can change things and make history (1989 in eastern Europe).

It's not just that we want to know what happened in the past. In Heritage, value is

placed on all sorts of relationship with the past that may have little to do with knowledge. Personally I don't have a problem with this. In principle – that is, unless there is pretence or subterfuge.

I enjoy this indulgence in the everyday minutiae of a rolling past, memory-like, that becomes something alive now, as we take it to heart.



Like memory, this is re-collection – the past not as a linear record, but an indeterminate collection of whatever comes to mind, *now, and with hindsight*. What we can work upon.

I also do wonder what my American friends make of Nostalgia Central – a tremendous collection of the 60s to 90s in the UK. (Note though the overarching narratives that set everything in place – I would have stopped with all the tiny lapidary and faceted fragments.)

The opposition to heritage and nostalgia often comes from those who uphold high cultural views of history (they usually take the form of master narratives) and despise what they see as mass culture – these indeterminate collocations.

I prefer to rely on people's creative critical faculties – they are not so stupid as to believe anything offered to them in the culture market; though sensibility may be stunted because ridiculed and undervalued.