

[12]
Mnemonic
Value and
Historic
Preservation

Jorge Otero-Pailos



INTRODUCTION

Jacques Austerlitz, the fictitious retired professor of architectural history in W. G. Sebald's eponymous novel, was both fascinated and tormented by certain buildings that triggered unsettling memories in him.¹ Austerlitz was "always irresistibly drawn back" to London's old Liverpool Street Station, where his recollections became increasingly vivid with each successive visit. The peak of intensity, and the turning point of the story, came when Austerlitz walked into the disused Ladies' Waiting Room of the station, where he experienced an elaborate flashback in which he saw himself as a child, sitting next to a couple of strangers who would become his parents. The revelation confirmed his suspicions of having been adopted, and sent him on a search for his true identity. In this story, the original function of the station as transportation infrastructure was relegated to a second plane when Austerlitz recognized the building's more critical function as a catalyst for his memory. In his eyes, the station began to function more as a monument, a word derived from the Latin *monumentum*, meaning "that which recalls remembrance," and assists the mind in the act of recollecting the past. Sebald described the emergence of the building's monumental or mnemonic function as something circumscribed within Austerlitz's mind and its return to his repressed past.

The process of recognizing the mnemonic function of a building can also be a collective process governed by an economy of rules that are institutional, cultural, political, financial, legal, philosophical, and even ideological. The shorthand for that process is known as historic preservation. As a result of these interests, in the public eye the mnemonic value of a building may increase to such a degree that it serves as the sole justification for preserving the structure. In some extreme cases, buildings that become entirely impractical in terms of their original function (for example, old farms, fortresses, customs houses, and pre-jet-age airport terminals) might nevertheless be retained on the grounds that the value of their monumental function outweighs all the site's possible other uses [12–1]. The emergence of mnemonic value was possible within the framework of a powerful nation state capable of regulating financial and real estate markets, and capable of shielding

[12–1]

EERO SAARINEN,
TWA TERMINAL,
KENNEDY AIRPORT, NEW
YORK, 1962.

[JORGE OTERO-PAILOS]

TODAY, THE TERMINAL
IS WITHOUT PASSENGERS.
DESPITE THE FACT THAT
THE BUILDING CANNOT
ACCOMMODATE
CONTEMPORARY AIR-
LINE TRAVEL, IT WAS
DESIGNATED A NEW
YORK CITY LANDMARK
IN 1994 AND WAS
ALSO LISTED ON THE
NATIONAL REGISTER OF
HISTORIC PLACES IN 2005.

certain buildings from the forces of those markets for the sake of its own representation [12–2]. Historic preservation, like the canary in the mine, is most vulnerable to the waning of the power of nation states over their territories. In the context of globalization, private corporations are gradually drawing the usufruct from the collective value created by historic preservation. To better understand the fundamental transformation that historic preservation is undergoing today, this chapter reconsiders the question of the mnemonic value of places.

As Austerlitz's story unfolds we learn that, much to his chagrin, Liverpool Street Station was partially demolished only weeks after he experienced his epiphany, altered beyond recognition, so that further spatial recall is now impossible. This scene of architectural destruction is an apt preamble to a discussion of how the mnemonic function of buildings is collectively recognized. Despite Austerlitz's deep personal need for the station in the reconstruction of his individual identity, the structure was not declared worthy of historic preservation. Indeed, for a building to become an object of historic preservation its mnemonic function must transcend individual purposes and become useful for constructing a collective identity.

Collective political identity of the sort derived from historic buildings is contingent on the partaking of numerous individuals. But the process through which this affiliation is achieved is neither top-down, obvious, nor overt. The construction of collective political identity through preserved buildings is a much softer and indirect affair—although individual memory plays a big role in it. Yet, ultimately the memory that counts more in shaping collective identity is personal memory and less the recall of historical facts recited by tour guides or written on plaques. It is not that historical facts are unimportant. Historian like James Loewen have exposed the factual errors and appalling distortions that are presented in some historic monuments and sites. This kind of corrective work is an important defense against ideological manipulation. Loewen's effort is all the more critical since, as he notes, the majority of American citizens do not take a national history class after high school, and learn their history of the nation through family trips to monuments at various tourist

[12-2]

**WARREN AND WHITMORE,
WITH REED AND STERN,
GRAND CENTRAL
TERMINAL,
NEW YORK, 1913.**

[MARC TREIB]

AGAINST THE INTENTION
OF ITS OWNER,
PENN CENTRAL
TRANSPORTATION CO.,
TO INCREASE THE REAL
ESTATE VALUE OF THE
SITE BY DEVELOPING
A HIGH RISE TOWER
ABOVE IT, THE BUILDING
WAS DESIGNATED A NEW
YORK CITY LANDMARK
IN 1967.



[12-3]

**GUTZON BORGLUM,
MOUNT RUSHMORE,
NEAR KEYSTONE,
SOUTH DAKOTA,
1927-1941.**

[PUBLIC DOMAIN]

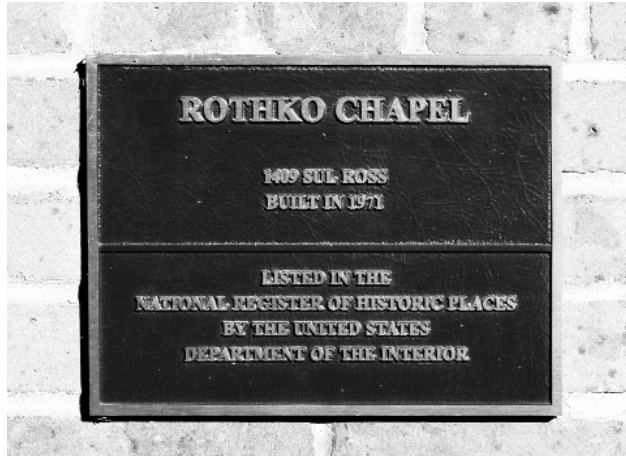
MOUNT RUSHMORE IS
ONE OF THE FAVORITE
DESTINATIONS FOR
AMERICANS ON FAMILY
VACATIONS. PICTURED
HERE IS THE REUNION
OF THE JOHNSON FAMILY
IN 2006.





destinations [12–3].² Undoubtedly, trips to historic sites are an important part of most family vacations, but parents do not put themselves through the ordeal of traveling great distances with their children to teach them a series of facts that they could have found more efficiently and economically on the Internet. People visit historic sites for the experience, not the facts. Consumer-oriented societies like that of the United States have been quicker to acknowledge this reality, and the last decade has seen the emergence of the Director of Visitor Experience at prominent historic sites where before there had been only a resident historian.

Despite its importance to most visitors, the question of personal experience is rarely addressed in preservation theory. As a result, experience is not recognized as a critical connection between preservation, memory, and the formation of collective political identity. Instead, the connection between preservation and that identity is understood to hinge on the legal act of designation. In countries with historic preservation laws in effect, the government uses its power to designate those places that should be made to endure and does so for the sake of collective memory, something that it considers a public good.³ Especially in the United States, a country that prides itself on its multiculturalism, the question of “What collective?” (“Whose memory?”) is often hotly debated. For instance, the 2001 addition of Manhattan’s Lower East Side district to the National Register of Historic Places was criticized for celebrating only the neighborhood’s Jewish immigrant



history, to the exclusion of other immigrant groups.⁴ Historic preservation theorists like Antoinette Lee have even likened designation to a process through which minorities can gain political visibility, legitimacy, and awareness of their own collective identity.⁵

It is certainly important to scrutinize and contest designations such as these. But by focusing exclusively on the act of designation, preservationists have tended to incorrectly identify the “collective” in “collective memory” as the group that pushed the designation or was cited in the accompanying report. This premise assumes designation celebrates the identity of (local) communities and not the power of the state. If we approach the question of social memory from the perspective of individual experience an entirely different picture emerges: one in which the state continues to figure prominently as the force that holds together and ultimately shapes collective memory.

To speak of personal experience in historic preservation is to shift the focus from the production of historic resources to their reception. The whole purpose of designation is to widen the reception of a building or site by publicly recognizing it as historical, as something that has endured [12-4A, 12-4B]. The language of designation is utilitarian: it names buildings and sites as historic resources, that is, as stocks or reserves to be drawn upon when necessary for the purposes of making history. Designation does not restrict who may draw upon that resource to make history—it could be a trained historian

[12-4A]

PHILIP JOHNSON,
ROTHKO CHAPEL,
HOUSTON, TEXAS,
1971.

[MARC TREIB]

[12-4B]

THE PLAQUE ON
THE DOOR OF THE
ROTHKO CHAPEL.

[JORGE OTERO-PAILOS]

THE PLAQUE INDICATES
A HISTORIC RESOURCE
DESIGNATED BY THE
UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE
INTERIOR.

employed by the government or an uneducated child. Also, designation does not determine what sort of history should be made from those resources—it could be the history of the nation or a child's personal history. Designation simply names and commits an object to a history yet to be written. What matters is who will write that history, for whom it will have been written, and how the buildings (the so called facts) will have served in its production.

In recent decades, these questions have been displaced by yet another: whose history? This question is repeated like a mantra every time a designation is ratified—as if to drive all other thoughts from the mind. But this important question implies that the complete history of the site has already been written, and that we are now searching only for its author. It is a search misguided by an inadequate understanding of the intention of designation, which is only to create the resources, the possibility, or the conditions for a future history. The question of “Whose history?” came to American historic preservation in the 1990s from literary criticism, and it was poorly understood and interpreted. Preservationists turned to the designation report for answers. Their search was guided by important questions, such as “Who wrote this report?”, “In whose interest?” But they did not stop to ask the fundamental question: is this report history? When American preservationists looked at their early designation reports from the 1960s, they encountered simple surveys of the physical conditions of the buildings, often no more than a page each. The desire to find history made many preservationists blind to the fact that these reports were not history, properly speaking. They insisted on seeing them as poorly written history which needed to be amended, expanded, referenced, and in short, turned into history. Contemporary designation reports run the length of academic architectural history essays and have the encyclopedic ambition to amass “all” the aesthetic, technological, social, economic, and political histories associated with the site. Thus, contemporary reports collapse production and reception, operating at once as instruments for fabricating historic resources, and as the first, almost instantaneous, histories of those resources.

There are limits to the kind of history that a designation report can become, however. Designation infers public recog-

dition, and therefore it must remain within the bounds of what is public—necessarily excluding private personal histories. In terms of the report, the question of “Whose history?” can only question how that document defines the public, which is understood as the intended audience of the document. This recurring question was motivated by a desire to rectify perceived asymmetries in how the public was implicitly represented in official designations—as a collective restricted to the WASP elite—and the more inclusive definition of the public that community and minority activists claimed should be restored to the process of historic preservation [12–5].

Within historic preservation discourse the designation report serves as the vehicle to transform a building or site into a public monument, in the strict sense of a physical resource from which the public may withdraw the facts of its history. But the public does not, indeed cannot, recall anything. The public is an abstraction. The “public” comprises what is customarily said, believed, and made by people, by anyone; in other words, by no one person in particular. The fact that a building is publicly recognized as a monument in a designation report does not make it function as a monument. For a building to function as a monument a person must experience it as such.

From the perspective of personal experience, a place is not a monument until we return to it. To serve its mnemonic function we must visit it at least twice. We must first have the experience of that place, after which time must intervene in fading our recall of that first exposure. When returning, we relive our memories of that first visit, enhanced by the full vividness of the place where we first lived it. The mnemonic function of places fills the holes in our fragmentary recollections.

In this sense, any place might serve as a monument, regardless of whether or not it is publicly recognized as one. We can have a meaningful experience anywhere. But here’s the catch: the places where we can relive our experiences are limited both by the internal circumstances of life (i.e. to the small number of places visited, and the smaller number of places to which we return) and by the external pressures exerted on those places by other people (who might, for instance, decide to develop the farm field where I used to play as a child), or by nature and time. Thus, the enduring places by which to



[12-5]

SLAVE CABINS,
BOONE HALL
PLANTATION,
CHARLESTON,
SOUTH CAROLINA,
19th CENTURY.
[MARC TREIB]

[12-6]

HENRY BACON,
LINCOLN MEMORIAL,
WASHINGTON DC,
1922.
[MARC TREIB]

rely memories are by definition rare, and their value is a function of that endurance and that rarity.

From the perspective of individual experience, publicly designated monuments acquire mnemonic value simply because they endure; not from the public history that is written about them in designation reports. Allow me to indulge in a personal experience to reinforce this point. When I returned to the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., the stark whiteness of the marble steps, which had been recently cleaned in August 2006, made me recall the ridiculous black-and-yellow-striped tank top that my Uncle John wore when he took me to the building when I was a child [12-6]. Because of the colors his outline stood out against the white steps, making him look like a big fat bee. I also recalled the reprimand I received after telling him about that likeness (he was very sensitive about his weight)—and that I didn't learn a thing about Lincoln except that he was thin. What triggered that memory was the whiteness of the building, which had endured. I would not have recalled any of this had not the yellowish streaks of pollution which afflict marble buildings been regularly cleaned from the building during the intervening three decades between my visits. The National Park Service invests dearly in this whiteness: the agency power-washes the statue of Lincoln twice a year. The details of my personal history are not what matter here. More critical is that the Lincoln Memorial increased in value for me as a result of its endurance, rarity, and the mnemonic uses it serves. Significantly, I had nothing to do with the building's endurance. That was the work of the state. But without that investment of state resources, the building would, no doubt, have a reduced mnemonic value. Here, we begin to see how historic preservation imbricates personal memory and the power of the state.

PRIVATE VERSUS PUBLIC

The increase in mnemonic value that I describe is related to, but not coincident with, what the Viennese art historian Alois Riegl (1858–1905) called “age value” in his 1903 essay “The Modern Cult of Monuments.” Riegl wrote this document as the basis for a new Austrian legislation for historic preservation, and today it is considered to be one of the foundational texts of modern preservation theory. Age value, for Riegl, was the

effect of the uneducated mass public's vague appreciation of monuments simply as objects that had endured the test of time. He thought this valuation of age was emblematic of the modern age, and concomitant with a transformation in the nature of the public, which had spread from a small, highly educated elite to a large, poorly educated mass.⁶ The mass public, argued Riegl, possessed only the most basic aesthetic sensibility. It lacked the prerequisite knowledge of history to value the building as a document, a fact, and a link in the great chain of historic evolution. Riegl lamented the decline in the historic value of monuments: "But is it already anachronistic," he asked, "to take into account the historic value [of monuments]?"⁷ For the early-twentieth-century Austrian mass public:

The monument is nothing but the sensible substrate needed to produce that diffuse impression on the spectator caused in modern man by the representation of the necessary cycle of birth and death, of the emergence of the singular from the general, and of its progressive and ineluctable return to the general.⁸

A monument achieves age value from its ability to provide the public with a feeling of memory, without the public's actual recollection of anything specific. Since the quality of memory is a function of its specificity it is understandable that, following Riegl's logic, the enlargement of the public from elites like himself (who used monuments to recall dates and styles) to the mass public (who allegedly used monuments to recall vague ideas of age) signified an important loss in the quality of memory. But I would argue that Riegl's conclusion issued more from his theoretical apparatus than from reality itself. Riegl failed to note that the public is no one in particular, and therefore by definition cannot recall anything, either specific or vague. Identifying himself as a member of the elite public, Riegl made his own personal experiences of the mnemonic function of monuments stand in for how the entire elite public experienced monuments. Incapable of associating himself with the mass public, on the other hand, he began to treat the public as the abstraction it really is, backing into the notion that the public—either mass or elite—cannot recall.

Riegl's meditation on age value stands as an important, albeit unintentional, step towards rethinking the relationship

between the individual and the public as a function of the mnemonic uses we make of the objects, and the environments that surround us all. This larger intellectual question, which was quite current in Europe at the dawn of the twentieth century, frames Riegl's thinking. It would take another decade for it to be adequately addressed in philosophy, however. Although this is not the place to discuss the relevant philosophical literature, it is worth mentioning José Ortega y Gasset's *Meditaciones del Quijote* (1914), which described how the appearance of objects is inherently unstable and changes in relation to the life projects of the person experiencing them, and conversely, how personal life projects are determined by the things that surround us. "I am myself and my circumstances," he wrote summing up his analysis. In later works, Ortega y Gasset described the public as something that was ontologically impersonal, a structure of given positions, attitudes and behaviors that individuals could freely take up or reject.⁹ Significantly, and more overtly than Riegl, Ortega y Gasset defended the role played by elites in establishing a critical distance vis à vis the positions, opinions, and behaviors present in the public.

Building on the recognition of the difference between the public and the individual, we can also distinguish between age value as an established way of recognizing monuments that pertains to the realm of the public, and mnemonic value as the importance that a place gains for a person when he or she uses it to recollect his or her personal memories. A Marxist analysis would conclude that age value is a form of exchange value, whereas mnemonic value is a form of use value. In *Das Kapital* (1867), Karl Marx argued that the value of an object varies depending on whether it was meant to be consumed privately in the regeneration of one's life, in which case it had use-value, or publicly for economic profit, in which case it had exchange value. Marx has been faulted by his critics for believing that use-value was an objective "absolute value" rooted in human labor, the biological effort of staying alive. In the early 1950s, Hannah Arendt argued that such "absolute values" do not exist. She explained that the very notion of "value" presupposed "universal relativity, that a thing exists only in relation to other things, and loss of intrinsic worth, that nothing any longer possesses an 'objective' value independent

of the ever-changing estimations of supply and demand.”¹⁰ Value, in other words, is an idea of the proportion between the desire for one thing versus the drive to possess another, and always concerns value in the process of exchange. For Arendt, everything, from human bodily labor to the work of making goods necessary for the life of the body, only acquires value once it is brought to the market where everything can be exchanged for something else—where all things are esteemed, demanded, or neglected depending on what else is available in the marketplace. “Value,” she wrote, “is the quality a thing can never possess in privacy but acquires automatically the moment it appears in public.”¹¹

Arendt’s analysis allows us to further nuance our description of mnemonic value. Strictly speaking, mnemonic value cannot be private. My personal experience of the mnemonic function of a place, insofar as it remains private, cannot give value to that place. Rather, it increases the meaning of that place for me personally: the place’s mnemonic function makes it significant to me. I recognize it as the outward expression of my interior recollections. But that meaning cannot have value because, unlike the place itself, the personal meaning of the place cannot be used to achieve something else, or exchanged for something else. The meaning that the place holds for me is intrinsic and unique to it. From a utilitarian point of view, the meaning of the place can only be a worthless end in itself.

Here we come to the crux of the question concerning how the private mnemonic meaning becomes transformed into a public mnemonic value. The mnemonic value of a place requires a process of reification, whereby personal remembrance is transformed into an object of memory. The process only seems natural. I activate the mnemonic function of a place when I recognize my memories there. Then a process of transference begins, through which I begin to identify my memory, something immaterial, with the material place. As a result of this reification, I come to identify the place as something that replaces myself as the vessel of my innermost thoughts. Sebald provides a vivid description of this process when he narrates how Jacques Austerlitz, recognizing his childhood memories in yet another train station, wondered if the building contained his memories irrespective of him:

What made me uneasy at the sight of it, however, was not how the complex form of the capital, now covered with a puce-tinged encrustation, had really impressed itself on my mind when I passed through Pilsen with the children's transport in the summer of 1939, but the idea, ridiculous in itself, that this cast iron column, which with its scaly surface seemed almost to approach the nature of a living being, might remember me and was, if I may so put it, said Austerlitz, a witness to what I could no longer recollect for myself.¹²

This passage conveys how the experience of buildings helps recall our memories, but also, and more disturbingly, confronts us with the holes in our memory, with what we cannot recall. As I locate the fragments of my memory of a place within it, the remainder falls silent. That silent fabric presses against me with the fullness of reality, yet I experience it as lacking content, something empty of meaning. In an uncanny reversal, what becomes significant is not what I recognize, but what I do not apprehend, for it begins to reorganize the fragments of my memory according to its own logic, helping me make connections that I could not have imagined, and holding out the promise of further revelations.

ENDURANCE

Mnemonic values emerge from the differences between what I can and cannot recall. That the place has endured guarantees its worth, in contrast to the disintegration my memory. That is to say, mnemonic value derives from the fact that it has endured. Because it has endured, I can use of the place to help me recall what I have forgotten. When we attribute mnemonic value to a place we look upon it a utilitarian fashion, in the sense that we regard the place merely as an instrument for us to achieve something else: a private recollection.

The existence of historic preservation as a practice testifies to the fact that places do not endure, but are constantly transformed to accommodate the changing requirements of our lives. Left alone they suffer damage by nature and fall to ruin. If endurance is the power that holds the self-same appearance of a place in time, then we must recognize that endurance itself is wholly artificial. For a place to endure requires ongoing financial investment in its preservation

[12–7]. But a fiscal intervention alone yields no mnemonic value; in addition we require the psychological investment of our personal memories. Financial and psychological investment rarely endure together over the long period of time required to yield mnemonic value from a place. Ancestral family homes, handed down through generations, are such singular examples. But most of us did not grow up in such homes. We have no guarantee that our psychological investment in places will be met with the resources required to continue their existence. Our memories of place are at the mercy of the real estate market—except where historic preservation is at work.



Preservation is usually associated with the state's power to subjugate and control private actions. The analysis is not entirely incorrect but it is unnecessarily restricted to the viewpoint of the law, to the restrictions imposed by designation. From the perspective of personal memory, historic preservation involves an entirely different form of state power. The return to a historic site does not reveal the power of the state in the same way as receiving a speeding ticket, or being denied entry at a nation's border. Preservation does not generate an experience of repression, but instead, an experience of endurance. More precisely it demonstrates the power of the state to sustain its built heritage, and ultimately to demonstrate the endurance

[12-7]

THE AUTHOR CLEANING
THE FORMER ALUMIX
FACTORY IN BOLZANO,
ITALY (1937) FOR
"THE ETHICS OF DUST"
(2008).

[PATRICK CICCONE]

A WORK OF EXPERI-
MENTAL PRESERVATION
COMMISSIONED BY
MANIFESTA, WHICH
RESPONDED TO THE
PROVINCE OF BOLZANO-
BOZEN'S FINANCIAL
INVESTMENT IN THE
PRESERVATION OF THE
BUILDING FOR ITS
MNEMONIC VALUE.

of the state itself. The mnemonic value of historic places is contingent on the state's power to make them last beyond their original functional viability. The state's long-term financial outlays in the preservation of historic places makes possible the psychological investment of visitors over their lifetime, and guarantees the endurance of the place long enough for it to yield its public mnemonic value.

Significantly, when we return to a place preserved by the state to recall our memories we cannot divorce our recollections from the experience of the state's power to make that place endure. Historic preservation reveals itself as the instrument through which the state exhibits its power to endure within the meaningful context of personal experience. These memories are most effective in the ideological construction of collective political identity precisely because they pertain to our personal identity, and on the surface they seem to have nothing to do with political affiliation. Historic preservation creates the material and politically charged stage for the reification of personal memory, and then offers it back to us in the guise of collective political identity, such that the memories that make up our own personal identity appear to us inextricably bound with that of the state.

EXCHANGE

If one aspect of historic preservation ensures mnemonic value (understood as personal meaning), a second aspect concerns its entrance into the public marketplace. Endurance, it should be recalled, is also a necessary condition for the production of exchange value. As Arendt noted, in order to enter the market commodities must be more permanent than the activity which produced them.¹³

Hand in hand with the massification of cultural tourism in the twentieth century, mass advertising has employed the publicly recognized mnemonic value of historic places to sell tourism services. To sell transportation tickets or hotel accommodations, by the early 1920s advertisers had begun experimenting with posters featuring beautifully rendered images of well-known monuments. These were the early days of so-called "product placement" in which advertisers sought to increase the exchange value of products by placing them in the meaningful context of iconic monuments. By

trial and error, those advertisers perfected the art of product placement. One of the famously unintentional breakthroughs was the scene in the film *It Happened One Night* (1934) in which Clark Gable took off his shirt to expose his bare chest—sales of men's undershirts plummeted. Like Clark Gable, cultural icons like the Alhambra can attract the popular attention. Their mnemonic value evokes feelings and emotions, for example, that can influence purchasing behavior. The technique of product placement also makes the public nature of mnemonic value clear. The memories we might expect to have at mature historic sites may actually precede our experience on-site. They exist there, publicly—inherited from previous generations, untraceable to any one person's own experience—an impersonal behavior, an established way of remembering a place that can be taken up and made our own. The clichéd pose that tourists assume before the Leaning Tower of Pisa (in order to appear in their photographs as if they are propping it up) suggests that responses to historic places replicate on site images established in the mind long before [12–8]. The novelist Don DeLillo expressed the feeling brought about by our acceptance of the established mnemonic value of a place:

Being here is kind of a spiritual surrender. We see only what the others see. The thousands who were here in the past, those who will come in the future. We've agreed to be part of a collective perception. This literally colors our vision. A religious experience in a way, like all tourism.¹⁴

By the 1960s, the governments of the United Kingdom, France, Singapore, and others hired David Ogilvy, the legendary advertising executive, to increase tourism revenues. His formula used pictures of sites with high mnemonic value, places that were unique. "People," he wrote, "don't go halfway around the world to see things they can equally well see at home."¹⁵ To advertise Britain, for instance, he showed a "mouth watering" picture of Westminster Abbey. Today, the tourism industry carefully monitors the public appeal of monuments around the world. Times Square, in New York City, tops the list of most visited sites in the world, with 35 million people per year, followed by Washington D.C.'s Mall and memorial parks, which draw 25 million visitors.¹⁶

Advertisers have come to recognize that some monuments attract larger audiences than some television shows.

Private companies vie to use the most famous world monuments as media devices through which to present and broadcast their brands in a meaningful context of memorable vacations. At the moment, a huge billboard partially hiding the facade of the Milan cathedral is rented out to advertisers like Camper Shoes and Vagari Watches, for example [12-9]. To allay the frustration of tourists, some explanatory posters at ground level explain that the billboards are only temporary, and will be removed when the conservation work is completed. In other words: preservation campaigns have become advertising campaigns.



[12-8]
TOURIST IN THE
CLICHÉD POSE BEFORE
THE LEANING TOWER
OF PISA.
[PUBLIC DOMAIN]

Benefiting from the fact that cash-strapped governments are increasingly unable to maintain even their most famous monuments, private companies are stepping in to finance preservation work. American Express awards yearly preservation grants to historic places around the world. In exchange for sponsoring the preservation of monuments, American Express receives the right to present its logo at the site, in the meaningful context of what their consumers care about. Down the line, governments still must pay for these private investments in public preservation when they are deducted

from their balance sheets as tax deductions. But, I would argue, the state pays an even higher price. Compared to what governments invest annually in historic preservation, the sums that private companies invest are only a pittance. Shrewdly, they invest only in those monuments and aspects of preservation that will yield the highest return on investment. Conservation campaigns are the most visible physical manifestations of the state's power to make places endure—they are only the tip of the iceberg, however. By encouraging private companies to literally put their flags on it, the state's power to endure appears symbolically weakened. As the instrument of this weakening effect, historic preservation shows itself to be part of the greater process of globalization, which is but a collective dream of the demise of the nation state. We are perhaps not far from wish fulfillment: It turns out that the 2006 cleaning of the Lincoln Memorial steps that I so dearly remembered was actually organized and financed by Goodyear Engineered Products and DeWalt Pressure Washers.



[12-9]

**A HUGE BILLBOARD IN
FRONT OF THE MILAN
CATHEDRAL TURNS
HISTORIC PRESERVATION
WORK INTO AN
OPPORTUNITY FOR AN
ADVERTISING
CAMPAIGN.**

[PUBLIC DOMAIN]

NOTES

1 W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, London: Penguin Books, 2001.

2 James W. Loewen, *Lies Across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999.

3 To be precise, designation can be made by more than a single governing body, as is evident in the various types of overlapping designations that exist, and that may coexist in a single building. In the United States they include national, state, and city designations, each regulated by a different level of government. In Europe, designations are national, although some regional governments have achieved sufficient power to create and regulate their own separate registries.

4 See Randall Mason and Max Page, "Rethinking the Roots of the Historic Preservation Movement," in *Giving Preservation a History: Histories of Historic Preservation in the United States*, Max Page and Randall Mason, eds, Oxon: Routledge, 2004, pp. 3–4.

5 Antoinette Lee, "From Historic Preservation to Cultural Heritage: A Journey Through Diversity, Identity, and Community," *Future Anterior*, vol. 1, n. 2, (Fall 2004), pp. 15–23.

6 Alois Riegl, *Le Culte Moderne des Monuments: Son Essence et sa Genèse*, 1903, trans. Daniel Wiczorek, reprint Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1984, p. 57.

7 Ibid., p. 76.

8 Ibid, p. 46.

9 See especially José Ortega y Gasset, *La Rebelión de las Masas* (1930), and *En Torno a Galileo* (1942).

10 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958, p. 166.

11 Ibid., p. 164.

12 Sebald, *Austerlitz*, p. 311.

13 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 136.

14 Don DeLillo, *White Noise*, New York: Penguin Books, 1985.

15 David Ogilvy, *Ogilvy on Advertising*, New York: Vintage Books, 1985, p. 130.

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