Burdens of the Past, Burdens of the Present:
Reflections on the Negotiation of Neglect

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INTRODUCTION
Although the locution ‘Negotiation of Neglect’ necessarily signals an important aspect of the work involved in identifying, restoring, and maintaining a monument or site, namely the financial negotiations that must take place between owner, identifier, and restorer — to oversimplify the three categories into which the key players fall —, it is not the financial aspect I wish to stress in this reflection. Instead, I want to look at certain other negotiations: the negotiation between the present and the past which I shall call History or Heritage; the negotiation between the future and the past which I shall call Restoration; and the negotiation between the future and the present which I shall call Use: in all cases, however, it should be reasonably clear that the real negotiation is between Attention and Neglect.

I look at these negotiations by proposing a number of questions which seem to me important to ask if, as historians, restorers, heirs, users and indeed (perhaps especially) governments, we are adequately and responsibly to apprehend and comprehend our pasts, our neglects and our responsibilities. It is manifestly clear from the opening remarks of the officers of Friends of the Environment at the ‘International Conference on Coastal Fortifications: Their History, Restoration and Use’ held in Mauritius in June 1996 that the Government needs to be sensitized to the deplorable situation of the fortifications and other monuments in Mauritius, though the mandate, ‘transform, improve, utilize’ needs to be examined carefully. It is essential, therefore, that the issues be put on the table before decisions are taken by fiat or out of benevolent ignorance. An example of the former is that in the Mauritian National Monuments Act of 1985, “national monument” means a monument designated as such by the Minister [to whom responsibility for the subject of culture is assigned]. An example of the latter (benevolent ignorance) was mentioned by the Minister of Tourism in his address at the Coastal Fortifications conference, that of a group of well-wishing students ostensibly out to help restore Ile de la Passe (FIG. 1).

FIG. 1. Watchtower on Ile de la Passe, Mauritius. (Photo: Philippe La Hausse de Lalouvière).

HISTORY AND HERITAGE
One palpable result of neglect is the Ruin, something that is not only neglected but altogether ignored; ignored by the individual and ignored by the collectivity. To ignore is to not act, to act with-
out knowledge. It is cognate with ignorance, which is demonstrating a lack of knowledge. It is in this double meaning of the Latin ignaron that resides the tragedy of ruin and of dereliction; dereliction comes from the Latin derelincuere and relinquere, to leave behind, to relinquish. It is a relinquishing, of possession, responsibility and patrimony. André Chastel, who has given the subject of heritage a great deal of thought, has underscored the juridical or legal aspect of Heritage. He defines inheritance (héritage) as the legal and institutional instrument of Heritage (patrimoine), inasmuch as it regulates the proprietorship of assets, wealth, property, land, structures and artifacts. He refines this by observing that objects of cultural or national heritage are better defined by custody and possession than by simple ownership. For Chastel, Heritage is as much something that possesses us as something that we possess (“un bien-qui-nous-possède autant et plus que nous ne le possédons”). It is a possession or custody because, by its very definition, it precedes and succeeds its pre-


sent custodian. So that a given fortification, say the Martello Tower (FIG. 2), or a given building, say Plaza, the Hôtel de Ville

FIG. 3. Hôtel de Ville, or Plaza, in Rose-Hill, Mauritius. Renovated for the Francophonie Conference held in 1994. (Photo: Robert Ng).

in Rose-Hill (FIG. 3), are both something inherited from those before, and something that will be willed to future generations. This of course also applies to such ‘natural’ sites as the newly established Black River Gorges National Park. By thus formulating the notion of Heritage, Chastel suggests that Heritage must entail Sacrifice in the two senses of the term:

first, something the preserving [of] which presupposes effort, or expense of some kind: a painful loss but one that is acknowledged as necessary. In this meaning, disregard for fashion, significant expenditure, mobilization of personnel, and so on, that ‘Heritage’ necessitates, amount, for our civilization, to renunciations, to propitiatory sacrifices, to death or mutilations destined to ‘save’ morally or materially, an essential object... This is because we are dealing here with something which can never perish without an accompanying sense of crushing weight and dereliction. Heritage: something the preserving of which requires sacrifices, and the loss of which is a sacrifice.

It is in this connection that the role of Government becomes important. It is admittedly not possible for Government to assume the entire financial burden of restoration and preservation but it is up to Government, in consultation with NGOs, parastatals, other institutions, and specialists, to lend legal and national weight to proposals and initiatives. Without government backing, in the form of properly formulated, promulgated and
enforced laws, properly trained and paid historians, archaeologists, and restorers, more harm than good is done.

Regrettably we must face a paradox (one of many): that we seem to have a morbid and almost universal fascination with the destruction of that which is valuable. This is something that has been observed by John Ruskin, by Marcel Mauss, by Georges Bataille, by André Chastel and others, but perhaps it is Oscar Wilde who best captures it when he writes:

Yet each man kills the thing he loves,
By each let this be heard.9

This craze to annihilate what one cherishes, to replace the old with the new, to sell a painting for material gain, to burn old books and furniture as kindling is a sad corollary to the national and international pastime of neglect.

Another paradox is the fact that it is dereliction, abandon and dilapidation that provoke sentiments of responsibility and remorse. In Chastel's words:

The modern soul suffers from schizophrenic tendencies that have never subsided: an intensification in the valorization of ancient forms on the one hand, and the concomitant increase in modern, mechanical, industrial intrusion on these very forms on the other.10

But what creates the so-called 'cult of monuments'? What produces this impulse to preserve and restore monuments, to edify the edifice, to (re)build the built? For the German archeologist George Dehio, it is fundamentally nationalism, a notion of national belonging — to that belonging is then attached a sentiment of national belongings, objects that attest to a shared past. The need to authenticate and exhibit the collective memory in and through that which edifies follows naturally: tombs, forts, battlefields, stately homes and residences become the obsessive objects of focus. Hero-worship is grafted onto and sustains the cult of monuments.11

Dehio believed that nationalist sentiment was the root of the impulse to preserve and to restore but Aloïs Riegl took it a step further when he suggested that the mere fact of age or antiquity also engendered the impulse for restoration, that moderns liked to collect what was old and venerable.12 In this way, he explained the presence of Egyptian obelisks in Paris; and we would be able to explain the transplantation of parts of several medieval monasteries and chapels from Europe to Upper Manhattan—the Metropolitan Museum of Art's medieval annex, The Cloisters.

For Riegl, it is only at a (much) later stage of cultural development, one that postdates nostalgia and cultural imitation, that we can maintain a historically honest position, that is, to preserve monuments in their 'present' state, to preserve them without effacing what history has already itself effaced.

Every structure is imbricated in Time. This is what is important and what makes the preservation of an object desirable, not only for its significance, but also in its actual state, without allowing the evidence of its historical diversity to be erased... Restoration should be subordinate to the truth of history.13

RESTORATION

Restoration is the noun form of restore, the basic meaning of which is to return something to its original form. Chastel argues that in many cases, it goes beyond that, entailing

a desire for 'complete restoration' [restitution intégrale] which oversteps the bounds of any prudent restoration. A symbol, in this view, must be whole, explicit, and bear eloquent testimony in order to satisfy the collective conscience. Scientific considerations become secondary.14

An example of this kind of symbolization is the Mosque of al-Hakim bi-amr Allah in Cairo, currently being 'restituted' by the small Shia Gujari merchant community, the Dawudi Bohoras.15 The Egyptian government handed over the stewardship of this 11th century Mosque to the Bohoras, who busily replaced old bricks with new ones and, if my informants are to be believed, have sacrificed architectural and engineering wisdom and replaced it with religious zeal. The Bohoras see themselves as the direct descendants of the Fatimids (regn. 909-1171) and are trying to restore and rebuild, literally, that link in stone.

This is the kind of restoration John Ruskin deplored in his 1849 work, Seven Lamps of Architecture. For him, restoration represents the most complete form of destruction that a structure can undergo. Modern practice for him consisted in neglecting buildings first and restoring them afterwards. He believed that a structure should be cared for and if for whatever reason that was not possible then its last hour should be dignified and not belittled by false and falsifying intrusions.16 Ruskin's view is seen as extreme. Those who respect it modify it and ask for knowledgeable and sensitive interventions. The restoration of ancient monuments is not and cannot be a mechanical exercise. Knowledge and sensitivity are essential.... All it takes is one clumsy placement to quash [annuler] a monument.17 This view calls for minimal restoration,
a restoration that is silent, invisible, transparent. It brings into serious question the advisability, the viability and even the meaning of ‘true’ or ‘faithful’ restoration.

There is, therefore, a need for a guiding principle, a Prime Directive, a series of guidelines about how and what to consider, inventory, restore, or isolate; a charter to bind individuals, communities and nations; a thinking, a right thinking, to direct and decide. These do exist: the creation of the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments in 1908; the Venice Charter of 1964; the 1972 UNESCO decision to inventory and protect ‘World Heritage’ sites, such as the citadel of Bahla in Oman (FIG. 4), Quebec City, and the port city of Dubrovnik (which, in spite of of this ‘protection’ was

FIG. 4. The citadel of Bahla, Oman, included in the UNESCO World Heritage List. (Photo: André Stevens)

subject to an unconscionable military siege and onslaught several years ago); the French Inventaire générale; the Archaeological Survey of India; the National Monuments Act of Mauritius, and so on.18 The Mauritian Minister for Arts, Culture and Leisure has made reference to the establishment of a National Trust Fund for the Preservation of Historic Buildings and Other Structures. Such a move is welcome, though one would want to see clearly defined criteria governing ‘aesthetic and architectural’ decisions, and governing the selection of structures of ‘historical and public interest.’

Max Dvorak has identified another issue which contradicts Riegl’s non-intervention. He calls for a clean-up of dirty monuments and streets, not in a bid to restore them but to restore the ambience they create.20 For Dvorak, what matters is not the edifice itself, but the environment of which the edifice forms part and to which it contributes in various ways. What also becomes important is to situate the edifice within an architectural and spatial history. It becomes important to underline not the authenticity of the edifice but its personality. A good restoration will then presuppose an interpretation of the object not just a taxonomy. The Mauritian Minister of Tourism’s remarks about the conviviality of the recently restored Martello Tower at La Prenesse come to mind, though conviviality was probably far from the builders’ minds.21

Riegl identifies three types of monuments. The first type is the ‘purposeful’ or ‘intentional’ monument, a work intended by its creators to commemorate a precise moment or a complex event of the past. The second is the historic monument, a work which also commemorates a historical moment or event but the choice of which is determined by (our) present-day and subjective criteria. The third type is the ancient monument, any structure, regardless of its intended purpose, that has demonstrably suffered the ravages of time. It is clear that directly implicated are current notions of value, valorization, ‘public interest,’ ‘historical significance,’ and so on.22

Nathalie Heinich has noticed three ‘enlargements’ (extensions) in the conceptualization of historical monuments. The first is a straightforward chronological one that necessarily enlarges one’s purview from the unicity of the unicum or individual edifice to the series or cumulative ensemble, which Chastel has described as follows:

But for those of us now interested in the ‘content’ of history, in the experiences of past generations, in the practicalities of life and death, in the realities and ruptures of experience, in the ‘non-eventual’... hasn’t the time come to add to the historical account a consideration for space, to elicit from heritage a precise groundwork, a system of forms and structures that overshadow Time?23

Resistance to the restoration of the isolated monument in a move to privilege architectural areas or historic sites is nothing new. Williamsburg, Virginia has, since 1926, been the object of a scholarly and expensive restoration and reconstruction. The entire city has been reconstituted, complete with period costumes and the use of colonial English by the inhabitants/employees. It is a massive monument to, and slice of, American colonial history
and life. Another comprehensive—and spectacular—preservation is that of the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy of Frank Lloyd Wright’s ‘Fallingwater’ and the surrounding grounds.

The second enlargement, according to Heinrich, is the shift of attention from grand and prestigious objects to include also objects that are more mundane, more everyday (and more numerous): crafts, furniture, signs, mines, factories and so on. The need to look at these types of artifacts, to understand the human element behind the monumental — as has been stressed especially by Colonel Carles, curator of the Musée de l’Infanterie in Montpelier and archaeologist Carmel Schrire (Professor of Archaeology at Rutgers University) — is already translating into the actual training of those directly involved. In the Department of Historic Preservation at the University of Pennsylvania, for instance, the programme includes coursework on Vernacular Architecture, comprising the study of houses, farm buildings, churches, factories and fields as a source of information on folk history, vernacular culture and architectural practice, and coursework on Material Folk Culture, comprising the study of domestic furnishings, gravestones, quilts, boats, pottery and so on.

Some forms of preservation and restoration are extreme. The Temples of Kyoto, for instance, have been repeatedly restored and kept identical throughout the ages. They are an eloquent example of so-called permanent or occult restoration. The opposite extreme is remembering through effacement. For instance, the Saudi government has transformed the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad into a storehouse, to prevent veneration of and at the site. What is interesting is that the authorities are not oblivious to the historical value of the site but have chosen to preserve the memory of an event in time-and-place by effacing the place, by dissociating a cosmic event from the worldly structure.

**UTILIZATION**

When a car or any machine breaks down, we repair it, to the extent that we are able; when that is no longer possible, it is consigned to the junkyard. The motives behind restoration are very different: here, we are guided by the cultural value of the object, not its utility. But the utilitarian argument does have to be considered. As archeologist Pieter Flore has pointed out about one of the sites he has visited, ‘its use is also its protection.’ Indeed, naval bases, forts and other installations still occupied and utilized by the military seem to have had a better fate than those turned over to non-custodial organizations. This immediately provokes the question: should structures, especially ones that are still or easily occupiable, be preserved through use? (FIG. 5).

Is it then a problem that Fort Georges is a Mauritian govern-

![FIG. 5. Castle of Good Hope, Cape Town, South Africa. The oldest surviving building in South Africa—built between 1666 and 1679. It is the object of an extensive, ongoing restoration and preservation programme. It houses the regional headquarters of the South African Army in the Western Cape. (Photo: courtesy of the Castle of Good Hope)](image-url)
issues must immediately be addressed. Can one responsibly allow access to fortifications and ramparts to a potentially overwhelming number of tourists? I have walked on the ramparts of Old Jerusalem in the company of stern Israeli Defence Forces and zealous pilgrims and have wondered about the wisdom of this concession. Can the rule ‘take nothing but pictures, leave nothing but footprints’ be applied or even enforced? Are not footprints enough to cause damage? Pictures certainly are. Countless museums and monuments do not permit snapshots. I remember seeing drawings in the Valley of the Kings (Egypt) that had been destroyed by flash damage. What about Fort Adelaide? Should it continue to be used for reggae concerts? Is the intention behind the building relevant, essential, important? Buildings surely do not need obligatorily to be turned into memorials.

That these sorts of issues can be complicated—in the transitive sense—is amply demonstrated by an article that appeared in a Mauritian daily. It seems that the fledgling African Cultural Centre wishes to make a historic watchtower its official seat and headquarters; it currently occupies a makeshift, temporary building on the outskirts of Port Louis. According to the article, the Ministry of Culture has approved in principle the request, a compromise between abandonment and the use to which it was apparently put in the Sixties—as a night-club. Like the halls at the English dockyards, uses were of a widely varying nature. On the other hand, there is obvious virtue in the proposal to return the wind-driven mill built by Labourdonnais to grind wheat to its original working condition, a project being undertaken by the flour millers, Les Moulins de la Concorde Ltee. Of course, this project does not consist in restoration alone, but also reconstruction and construction. Indeed, the relationship between those three forms of recovery must be carefully evaluated and costed before responsible decisions can be taken.

And what do we do with objects and edifices already restored? Is it our responsibility, then, to de-restore, as it were, to excise all embellishments? Do we put in new bricks; remove new bricks? In an 1874 article, Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu averred, ‘With proper care, a monument can be made eternal thanks to the substitution of an old stone with a new one.’ Do we scrape the newer paint, break the new stained glass? And if we do, can we still be faithful to our initial aim of being faithful to the historical? What, in fact, are our responsibilities? Do we do our utmost to prevent vandalism? Is there not a paradox, however, in prosecuting the writer of last week’s graffiti, yet thanking the writer of past centuries? Would we then have inscriptions on the fortifica-

**ATTENTION**

Whatever we do, it seems fairly clear that we must educate the collectivity, and restore with conscience and circumspection. I would like to suggest that what we must do is described by the synonym of neglect, namely attention. We need to draw attention, for example, identifying, cataloguing and providing inventories of monuments. Robert Musil has observed that ‘among the numerous characteristics on which monuments pride themselves, the most striking, paradoxically, is that we never notice them. Nothing more invisible in the world.’ We need to pay attention, for example, to provide for and train restorers, especially in our institutions. I am thinking—in the context of Mauritius—of the Ministries of Works, Tourism, and Culture, of the Mahatma Gandhi Institute, of the University, of the Mauritius Institute, of the various Museums, of the regrettably ill-defined, ill-funded and ill-managed Cultural Centres, and of the future National Library and National Archives. And we need to be attentive, by producing the correct social environment for the work that lies ahead in restoring our heritage. It occurs to me, in closing, that focussing on the word ‘attention’ is appropriate, as the word ‘monument’ derives from *monere*, to remind, admonish, warn, advise, and instruct...

**REFERENCES**

* This article is based on ‘Negotiating Neglect’, a paper delivered at the International Conference on Coastal Fortifications: Their History, Restoration and Use held at Maritim Hotel, Mauritius, 18-21 June 1996 (the proceedings of which will be appearing later this year). I am grateful to Philippe La Hause de Lalouvière for inviting me to participate and for allowing me to use two pictures; The Hassam Toorawa Trust for having sponsored my participation; Gilbert Ahnee for having published a version of the paper under the title ‘Restoring our Heritage’ in the 12 August 1996 issue of *Le Mauricien*; Robert Ng, Andre Stevens, and officials of the castle of Good Hope for so kindly giving permission to use their pictures; and especially Edward Harris for soliciting the article and encouraging my reflections. The title is adapted from W. Jackson Bate, *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* (1970).

1. For instance, the paradox that increase in land value helps the historic site, but that as its value increases its economic sufficiency and opportunity must be justified.

2. ‘Transformer, améliorer, exploiter’, Jean-Noel Imbert, Foreword, *International Conference on Coastal Fortifications: Their History, Restoration and Use*, Maritim Hotel, Mauritius, 18-21 June 1996 (here-
after ICCF 1996).

3. The National Monuments Act 1985, Section 2, reprinted in National Monuments of Mauritius, vol. 1: Port-Louis District (1988), vi (emphasis mine). This volume is of considerable interest. Eschewing the thematic—classifying objects by their era or by their connection with great artistic, military, religious, scientific and political personalities or events; and eschewing the formal—classifying objects architecturally, thus tombs, columns, statues, etc., this book betrays on close reading a particular pactique of valorization...


7. In this way, Heritage becomes a marker and constitutive of identity. I am a Mauritian because the Martello Tower at Praslin, or Black River Gorges National Park, is something that belongs to me, as an inhabitant of Mauritius, and to which I, as an inhabitant of Mauritius, belong. (I am grateful to Edward Harris for raising this point in discussion.)

8. Chastel, op. cit., 220. He also makes an interesting argument—but this is not the place to discuss it—that Heritage is, in its elemental, original sense, linked to ancestral funerary practices.


10. Chastel, op. cit., 221.

11. Ibid., 221. 'Le culte de héros soutient celui des monuments'.

12. Alois Riegel, Der moderne Denkmalkultus, sein Wesen und seine Entstehung [The Modern Cult of Monuments, its Nature and its Origin] (1903). He, incidentally, distinguished between the artistic and historic value of monuments. He is explicit about religious statues, which he sees as totally divested of the possibility of perpetuating the moment, whether a specific act or an individual destiny. The historical monument, on the other hand, has referent human history, and is invested with a public, visible and grand 'monumentality'. For a very interesting discussion of collecting, nationalism, and veneration, see Philip K. Dick, The Man in the High Castle (1974).


15. See my 'Tahir Sayf al-Din', Encyclopédia of Islam, New edition, vol. XI (in press). The Mosque, which was completed by al-Hakim (d. 1021), was actually begun by his predecessor, al-'Aziz (d. 996).


18. The Archaeological Survey of India, like many of its counterparts elsewhere, is a lamentably underfunded body. On the consequences of this for the fate of an 11th century temple in Bojpur, for instance, see Bharat Desai, 'Write Off', India Today, XXI, no. 11 (15 June 1996), 153. India also has the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural heritage, and 'World Heritage' site initiatives in collaboration with UNESCO and foreign governments, such as the excavation of a 3rd century Buddhist temple in Sanchi.


22. It is interesting to note that the organization undertaking the reconstruction of La Confiance, the vessel of the corsair Robert Surcouf, chose the name 'Société de Valorisation Historique de l'île Maurice Littée' and the resonant acronym, SOVAHIS. On this reconstruction,

FIG. 6. Port-Louis Harbour, looking north. It is here that the Waterfront Development will take place and that the reconstructed corsair vessel La Confiance will berth. (Photo: Robert Ng) associated with the development of the Port Louis waterfront (FIG. 6), see Le Corsair, no. 1 (June 1994), passim.


24. This sort of undertaking involves tremendous cost. The local water-
front development and accompanying restorations is a case in point. For the details of this project, see ‘Le plus important projet sur le patrimoine maritime jamais entrepris dans l’océan Indien’ [The most important maritime heritage project ever undertaken in the Indian Ocean] in Le Corsaire, no. 1 (June 1994), 6-7.


31. The Mosque was restored ten times between 995 and 1524. In 1890, it was restored by the Committee for the Preservation of Arab Monuments. On this, and the Mosque in general, see Antoine Fattal, Ibn Tulun’s Mosque in Cairo/La Mosquée d’Ibn Toulon au Caire (1960).

32. ‘”[L’Hôtel de la Tour” à la Tour Koenig—L’ancien nightclub deviendra un centre culturel!’ [The ‘Hôtel de la Tour’ at the Koenig Tower—The former nightclub to become a cultural centre], Vibrations, supplement to l’Express (Sunday, 15 June 1996), 2.

33. Coad, op. cit.

34. This restoration forms part of the development of the Port Louis waterfront (see note 24 above). The reconstructed vessel La Constance will moor here; a bakery museum is also envisaged.


36. It is in France, in 1790, that the term ‘monument historique’ is first recorded; in the same period, the abbé Grégoire coined the term ‘vandalisme’. It is, in fact, in the context of the destruction and pillaging associated with the French Revolution that consciences were first

pricked: see Heinich, op. cit., 243.

37. Monique Koenig, ‘L’état actuel des fortifications côtières à l’île Maurice’ [The present state of coastal fortifications in Mauritius], ICCF 1996.