It was to the credit of the Revolution that it thoroughly enlightened people as to the errors of the worldview from which it had itself emerged. Belief in the ideals of the Enlightenment disappeared, the nineteenth century entrusted itself to a new spirit, the historical spirit. It approached the evaluation of things with a completely different standard. It penetrated every field of knowledge, even art subjugated itself to it – I will not here ask whether or not this was for the better. Under its leadership, the nineteenth century experienced the wondrous joys of discovery. One cannot say how much our picture of the world gained in depth of perspective. People were most pleased if they could demonstrate the survival of something old in the present. People looked for antiquities of language, for antiquities of law, for antiquities of custom; why then – in spite of what were admittedly very deeply rooted prejudices – should the antiquities of art not have joined the ranks, those that were able to proffer information on some of the most important and profound areas of national history, information that could not be derived from any other sources? This is the origin of monument preservation. It would never have been possible without the poets of Romanticism and the intellectuals of the Historical School, and with them it became a necessity. In the course of its further development and as it began to clarify as a discipline, monument preservation had to go to considerable lengths to rid itself of the Romantic illusions that were its dowry, and more so than any of the other historical disciplines. Indeed, it is not entirely free of them to this day; we ought never forget whence the basic mentality of our monument preservation stems, for it stands and falls with it.

Its essence can most easily be explained by way of a comparison with the activities of collectors from earlier ages. The collectors of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries collected for aesthetic reasons or for the sake of interests based on other reasons; there were artistic epochs that they privileged and others that they disdained, in many cases most of them. The standard of their judgements was always a subjective one. In principle, the monument preservation of the nineteenth century knows no such differentiations. Its ultimate motivation is the respect for historical being [Existenz] as such. We do not conserve a monument because we think it is beautiful but, rather, because it is a part of our national life [Dasein]. Protecting monuments does not mean looking for pleasure, but exercising piety. Aesthetic and even art-historical judgements fluctuate, whereas here we have an unchanging criterion of value.

Now, though, and from a quite different side, the idea of monument protection is showing that it belongs to a new age. Apparently merely conservative in character, as indeed corresponds to its origins in the Restoration epoch, it leads to consequences which, initially still unconscious but quite irresistible, push in an utterly different direction: I know no other name for it than that of socialism. It is not seldom this socialist tendency, and almost more so than its conservatism, that in practice brings the interests of monument preservation into conflict with liberalism.
If at the beginning of my lecture I said that works of visual art are in a poor position with respect to duration, then I now have to add the following: they are also in a poor position on account of our legal and economic systems. This is the result of their spiritual-material double nature. The prevailing law only considers them as material entities, and yet the general conviction is that their true essence is of a spiritual nature. The individual’s interest in them is by far outweighed by the interest of the totality – is this interest to be left unprotected? [...]

Enough! From the moment when a serious will to protect monuments came into being, one also had to be clear of the following: it would not be feasible without limitations on private property, limitations on the interests of traffic and industry, and on utilitarian motives in general. This is why I have called it socialist. [...]

The first law in Germany was that of the Grand Duchy of Hessen in 1902, which is also the only one at this stage. But Prussia is soon to follow. [...]

But along with monument preservation, its true daughter, the historicism of the nineteenth century also begat an illegitimate child: restoration. They are often mistaken for one another, although they are antipodes. Monument preservation wants to preserve the existing, restoration wants to recreate the non-existent. The distinction is decisive. On the one hand, a perhaps curtailed and faded reality, but always a reality – on the other: a fiction. Here, as it did everywhere else, Romanticism distorted the sound meaning of the conservative principle. One can only conserve that which still is – “what is gone returns no more.”¹ There is certainly nothing more justified than sorrow and anger over an artwork that has been disfigured and destroyed, but here we are faced with a fact that we have to accept, like the very fact of aging and death, and we ought not to seek comfort in delusions. Masks and spectres full of dread are to be seen mingling in the midst of honest reality. Are we to impose the limitations and sacrifices that monument preservation demands of us for the sake of this; in order to preserve monuments in which we ourselves no longer believe? For something like a bogus ancestral gallery? [...]

Also inherent to restorations and purifications is that they are steps that can never be gone back on. This is what differentiates them from similar attempts made with literary heritage. If someone today was to compose the missing pieces of a fragmentary work of literature, he does not thereby compel anyone to read them, and one will definitely not make a judgement of the work dependent on these additions. But if an architect adds a tower of his own imagination to a cathedral that has come down to us incomplete and without a tower, then the effect of the genuine old parts is thereby also unavoidably altered. A conjecture that has been added to an old text and has proven itself to be erroneous can be crossed out at any time; a botched monument remains botched. Restorations on paper are instructive; carried over into reality they bring an end to debate forever. Our contemporary artists are the first to declare the restorations of the last 40 or 70 years as deficient in every respect. What makes them so certain that their own will still stand up to criticism after 40 to 70 years? [...]

None of this is to be glossed over; one will not, therefore, judge these people too harshly. These monument doctors acted in good faith, just like Faust’s father, the dark man of honour. If one were to ask where the blame for these lies one would find that it was shared by many different factors. One might ultimately agree that it could not have turned out otherwise. It could not have turned out otherwise because public opinion, left in the dark as to the true essence of the monument, had been misled into the erroneous belief that this was a task for artists, while in fact it essentially belongs to the realm of historical critical thinking. If the care of monuments were to mean no more than the beautification of monuments—people actually held this view for a long time—then the artist would without doubt be the right man for the job. But if the emphasis of the task is laid on preservation, then the

¹ Was Vergangen kehrt nicht wieder ~ This platitude is taken from a poem by Karl August Förster (1783-1841), which continues, Aber ging es leuchtend nieder, Leuchtet’s lange noch zurück (but if in light it goes to rest it leaves its light behind). Lilian Dalbiac, Dictionary of Quotations (German) (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., n.d.), p. 342.
artist only has a say insofar as he is a technician and a connoisseur of style, i.e. an archaeologist—his artistic side has to remain silent. Does one have to be a poet to watch over the treasures of literature? The artist’s relationship to monuments is no different. If he is a clear-sighted, conscientious conservationist—and there have always been such, even among artists—then a second talent and intellectual tendency will also be evident, one that has nothing to do with the artistic as such, and is indeed strongly challenged by it. The artist— if he really is one—needs freedom like a fish needs water; how could a task that demands the renunciation of his freedom do him honour? When restorers who want to succeed have their ‘genius’ certified by their disciples, all I can say is: may God keep the monuments from the genius of the restorers! Between the task of monument preservation and the natural disposition of the artist there is clearly a tension that can never be entirely relieved. It may well be that the archaeological knowledge of our present generation of architects has been markedly improved in comparison to that of earlier times thanks to the excellent training they have received in the technical universities; it may have brought some individuals to an extraordinarily detailed knowledge of this or that historical style: but an artistic mind will never be transformed into an historical mind, to say nothing of this transformation being repeated back and forth from one day to the next.

This should be enough to make it clear that the all-pervasive [durchsäuernde] historical spirit of the nineteenth century, when it seized the artists and pushed on to monument preservation, nevertheless inevitably had to affect them otherwise than it did the intellectuals who had summoned it. There is a fundamental and insurmountable difference in the understanding of the essence of the monument here. To the artist it is always the work of an artist, to the historian it is a product of art and history; and the historian demands as much respect for these transformative forces as he does for a reality.

From this consideration of the course of things hitherto, I draw the following conclusion: carrying out the command ‘conserve, do not restore’ is the calling not so much of artists as of artistically and technically educated archaeologists, or archaeologists supported by artists and technicians. The twentieth century will not be able to make good all the mistakes that were made in nineteenth, but it will not repeat them. Opinions are even being clarified amongst the artists themselves; and a few recent and alarming relapses into romantic caprice should not prevent me from acknowledging this. That which nineteenth-century monument preservation tempted onto its erroneous paths was a result of abnormal circumstances in the creative arts; circumstances that cannot not last forever. We are on the track of the ultimate cause when we proceed from the perception that the different art-forms were negatively effected in very different degrees. Museums of painting and sculpture have long since ceased to be administered by painters or sculptors; instead they are administered by art historians with technical assistants. That a painter of rank should concern himself with picture restoration simply does not happen, and supplying a damaged sculpture with a missing arm or leg is now frowned upon—unless it be a cast, but this is never done to an original. How, then, is the completely different behaviour of the architects to be explained? The art history of the nineteenth century provides the answer. Painters and sculptors had gradually forged ahead to a relatively unique form of expression. Architecture could not cope with the manifestations of the historical spirit of the nineteenth century: for all the highly talented and noble minded masters that there were, as a whole it presents a picture of anarchy. It was both unfree and capricious at once. It knew all the dead artistic languages that had ever been spoken and availed itself of them alternately and as it pleased. It only lacked its own language. Everything can be explained from this point: both what was lacking and where the improvement has to come from. From the moment when we again have a clear and consistent architectural conviction, from that moment on, the subsidiary that erred from the mainstream of our creative arts, which threatens our historic monuments in the name of reconstruction, will return to its natural resting place.[…]