To the memory of Albert Leixner

There exist two fundamental answers, although only distinguishable instrumentally, to the question of the origin of the cult of historical monuments: an anthropological and a historical one. According to the former, respect for the relics of the past derives from human nature, from man's consciousness having generated not only memory, but also fear, and thereby also the need for self-identification by seeking support in the past. In this regard, the cult of relics of the past have accompanied man "since time beyond the mind". It is a modern form of ancestral worship. Monuments are modern fetishes with magic powers able to set up and protect social identity. According to the latter—the historical explanation—the cult of historical monuments is a relatively young historical phenomenon, a creation of 18th and 19th century historicism, when the cult of monuments came to be an explicit ideological programme. Relics of the past began to be considered not only worthy of adoration, but also of protection. As a consequence the cult of historical monuments became institutionalized. It is apparent that the two explanations are not mutually exclusive and they can easily be differentiated as two concepts of the monument in the broader and a narrower senses of the term. The

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explicit, institutionalized and specialized cult of monuments can be regarded as a modern variation of the anthropological worship of ancestors, as a typically bourgeois, secularized form of the cult of relics. However, within the framework of the historical answer, according to which the cult of monuments is a unique historical phenomenon brought about by unique historical causes (including, alongside historicism and nationalism, reactions to the ruthlessness of industrialism and, in the case of the bourgeoisie, its characteristic bias for science and specialization), two different interpretations of this historicity may be recognized: the first might be termed "progressivist". In the footsteps of Hegel's conception of development as progress as an unavoidable and irreversible process progressing from ignorance to self-consciousness, from suppression to emancipation, the history of the monument idea is apprehended as a transition from a prescientific stage, to a final (and present-day) scientific stage. This process is understood as taking a definitive recognition of the autonomous value of historical monuments, out of which results the necessary obligations for their protection. A logical consequence of this conception is the reliance on the possibility of setting up the care of monuments as a scientific discipline—purely a gnoseological and objective one. Its mission should be to gather, deepen and systematize knowledge of the objective principles functioning in the domain of conservation and to supervise their implementation. From this point of view, mistakes and deficiencies derive either from a lack of knowledge and unfamiliarity, or from ignorance and barbarity. Paradoxically, this conception not only absolutizes the present, conceding to future development the sole right to improve and complete the present, but also it comprehends science as a kind of dogmatism thus considering future knowledge only as a variant, a quantitative deepening
of appropriate items of knowledge. Last but not least, paradoxical is also the fact that an unquestionable fruit of relativism—a preservation doctrine of monument protection—is here regarded as an objective knowledge and an indisputable norm.

At the opposite pole stands a relativistic interpretation of the historicity of the monument concept. In this view, the cult of monuments underwent far more numerous and deeper changes than that of their progress from a prescientific to a scientific stage. The history of the monument idea does not appear as a transition from ignorance to wisdom, from subjection to autonomy, but as part of the permanent struggle of ideas whose end remains open. No conception, including our own, of a monument and its protection is, according to this interpretation, definitive. It is an objectification of the world outlook (Weltanschauung), an incorporation of a very definite axiology, because it maintains a complementary relationship with contemporary art and because it is one of the main instruments of ideology, a means of ideologizing very definite interests.

Relics of the past have not come to be valuable in themselves and not for purely anthropological reasons. They were recognized as valuable only when a particular time in history began to feel a need for them for very concrete reasons.[…]

After the communist rise to power, the problem of historical monuments and their protection shifted on to an entirely new plane. If, in capitalist society the monument's principal enemy had been the private property and its interests, where every law pertaining to monuments inevitably undermined the egoism of the private sector and the sacred nature of private ownership. Under the communist regime, the monument's arch-enemy became the ideology. Riegl's hope that socialism would permit monument
protection, failed to be fulfilled. Right from the beginning, monuments and the necessity of doing something with them proved an unwelcome burden and an ideological dilemma, difficult to solve for the communist regime. The relationship of communist power to cultural patrimony had, in principle, been resolved already by Lenin and Lunacharsky after the 1917 revolution. However, the snag lay right in the theoretical standpoint of communists towards the heritage of the ruling classes of the past. True, the contradiction regarding the attitude to be taken towards artistic relics of the former oppressors was resolved theoretically with the conception of two cultures—progressive and decadent. However, in practice, this conception, multiplied by a true lack of interest and a propensity for iconoclasm on the part of the new powers that be, resulted in unforeseeable damage. In the first stage following the communist take-over of power, the monument heritage was split into progressive, worthy of protection, and decadent, which need not be spared, but only according to the model of re-education of class enemies, should be exploited in a new way. A great number of monuments, primarily ecclesiastic, but also profane, fell prey to this semi-iconoclasm: numerous monasteries, and also manors were turned into old people's homes, caserns, granaries, and store-houses. The "re-functioning" of monuments of the past ruling classes represents an analogy to the reclamation of class enemies. But with an important paradox: the victims of communist iconoclasm were primarily the ecclesiastic monuments of pre-bourgeois, pre-capitalist, feudal periods. Communism claimed to be the heir of progressive traditions, therefore, it considered those monuments worthy of protection which corresponded with its self-stylization: Monuments of classical tradition—Renaissance profane art, and—paradoxically, but significantly—also bourgeois classicism, realism and naturalism.
However, efforts to set itself off as the continuation of European rationalism was not the only motivation of this paradoxical protective and affirmative relation to the heritage precisely of that class from which communism had usurped power. An important role was played here by a phenomenon which is often repeated in the history of art: The new power appropriates not only estates and possessions, but also the attributes of the defeated power.[…] This imitation of the way of life, values and certain ideals of the previous ruling class, however, becomes a heavy burden for communism: It is true on the one hand, that the pretence of realism, rationalism and democracy helps to mask the true antidemocratic, irrational and iconoclastic face of communism. On the other hand, however, this burden of feigning required a considerable investment and suppression of its own nature. This contradiction became also reflected in relation to monuments. In the second stage of communist dictatorships—after 1956—the doctrine of two cultures was dropped, monuments ceased to be classified into progressive, and worthy of protection, or reactionary, worthy of "re-education" or finally to be left to decay. The whole history of art was taken under protection, the conception of an anthropological essence and the national character of the entire cultural heritage was accepted. Nonetheless, there was hardly any change as regards the essential contradictory attitude of communism towards the cultural and artistic heritage. The political powers felt it as an unpleasant burden which—in view of the party's own ideological principles and shammed illusions—must somehow be taken care of. Being thus caught in the trap of its own ideological sham and deceit, the communist power had to take patronage over at least a minimum protection of monuments of art.[…]
The idea of monument complexes again became of topical interest in the sixties and this time was justified purely on theoretical grounds—by the argument of the theory of systems. It was then not so much making contact with the aesthetic conception, as it was an attempt to enforce and extend—by means of an improved theoretical argumentation—the concept born in the middle of our century, e.g. the concept of the so-called town reservations. This, however, came into being within the context of the first radical criticism of modernism—in the wake of totalitarian neoclassicism—in the fifties. As has already been intimated, the past was at that time split into one worthy and one unworthy of protection. Protection in turn came to be interpreted as an extraction of a model past and its purification from inferior deposits. The ideal past was again considered to be worthy of imitation, contemporary artistic production (socialist realism) again overlapped with monument protection. The search for monuments as documents of the national past again came into vogue. It was precisely these endeavours to obtain the most perfect and the purest image of the national past gave birth to a neo-romantic concept of monument reservations. Nevertheless, before the neo-classicist normativism had time to assert itself, it was disrupted by its own internal dissensions. The communist promise of a material paradise on earth compelled the party to tolerate the idea of functionality, utility, technocracy. At that stage, narrow-minded economism stepped in with its inclination toward ahistorical iconoclasm and started to make decisions. The nationalist core of ideological normativism did not remove this iconoclasm, but together with it made a noteworthy tandem: in the domain of monument protection, technocratic and utilitarian iconoclasm shook hands with neoromantic illusionism and reconstructivism. Thus, simultaneously with the demolition of entire monument zones,
there grew neo-historical reconstructions, and in the midst of desolate, inhumane functionalism, a few solitary specimens of the glorious national past appeared as orphans. (The tragic side of it is that also some art historians assisted in this. This implies that the question of neo-romanticism cannot be explained through naiveté. It is related to the process of the subsequent self-awareness of the nation. It seems that certain stages in the cultural development cannot be skipped over.) However, this monument eclecticism is only seemingly related to postmodernism. In reality it is a hybrid of utilitarian iconoclasm and neo-romanticism. In contrast to this, the postmodernist trend to eclecticism also in the monument conception is rather a radicalization of a historico-relativistic tolerance: Riegls idea of relativity and plurality of monument values which found expression in the doctrine of conservation, is brought to its consequent end. Not only all the pasts and not only all the values are equivalent and worthy of protection; in certain cases, also various protective doctrines may have their justification, may be utilized, depending on the situation. No monument doctrine may claim the status of being uniquely right. All the more so, as the very identity of a monument—as far as its authenticity and the range of the monument sphere are concerned—has no fixed definitive contours or boundaries. Not only because it is in itself historical (historically multilayered and permanently changing), but also because it depends on our interpretation and also on such irrational factors as our axiologic hierarchy, our "Weltanschauung", our "taste", of which we are well aware that these are not in themselves static. In this relation none of us will take away the burden of the creative risk involved in making a decision about monument care.

We have stated that modernism has enforced, for the sake of sincerity ("To each period its art..."), a strict delimitation of the present from the past, a clear division
between competencies of contemporary artistic production and the protection of monuments. [...] The failure of utopian modernism has drawn attention to the fact that monuments constitute a system which is a part of the global human environment. Every radical intervention into the historically-constituted system causes unforeseeable consequences, disturbs an equilibrium whose restitution will again require an extremely long process of patient trials and errors. Critics of the theory of systems reproached it as a concealed ideology or glorification of industrial society, an expression of the cult of the machine, and last but not least, for political radicalism—ignoring the unique nature of man and his world. Using the theory of the duality of history and nature, they protested against the dethroning of an anthropocentric humanism which began with Darwin's discovery of man's evolutionary appurtenance to nature, and continued through Freud's suspicion of an instinctive origin of rationality itself, and ended in Lorenz's and Popper's discovery of intelligence in the amoeba. The dualistic separation of man and nature ascribed historicity and uniqueness to the human world only and thereby argument in favour of the protective relationship to historic tradition. On the other hand, it ascribed to the world of nature a blind obedience to its laws, a pure reproduction of principles. From this serial repetition it concluded the frivolous premise of limitlessness, infinity and the valuelessness of nature. Nevertheless, that dualism failed similarly as did the avant-garde contraposition of the past and the present. If the failure of the avant-gardist utopia, of a world built up from zero, inevitably leads to the recognition of a system like character of tradition, the threat of ecological disaster reveals the uniqueness of nature in all its nakedness. It is evident, on the one hand, that nature has its history, and that, on the other hand, historical tradition represents a system of experience. Both overlap, are
interdependent, and both—monuments and the environment—need our protection. An enemy of this monument care is not solely short-sighted utilitarianism, and unsystematic thinking, but also the stupidity which feigns science. The ritual pretence of science non only substitutes incantation for problem-solving, but also helps to mask the arch-enemy—cynical egoism—and defends him from public and rational control.

It is true, the preservation of monuments is no science, nor can it become a science because it is part of our artistic and cultural life. Yet, monuments intrinsically need scientific concepts for their protection. Their protection needs the participation and involvement of all humanists, especially all historians, including those of art. However, if these are to lend effective help, they must have, besides wisdom, also social authority. But to obtain it, they must fight for it.