

DOING PUBLIC HUMANITIES

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PRESERVATION'S EXPANDED FIELD

The Hacking Heritage Unconference and the Fogarty Funeral

Marisa Angell Brown

Introduction

For four years, the John Nicholas Brown Center for Public Humanities and Cultural Heritage (JNBC) has organized an annual participant-led unconference called Hacking Heritage. We picked the first weekend in March because no one else schedules events at this time in New England—just as the rest of the country is relaxing into early spring, our late blizzard season is just getting going. When we started out, we thought that attendees would propose sessions on topics related to preservation, history and heritage and convened a steering committee which included the directors of many of Rhode Island's preservation and heritage organizations. But a funny thing happened once session proposals started coming in online: creative, thoughtful and provocative questions about heritage practice were being asked by architects, archivists, artists, activists, digital and new media specialists, students, and business owners in addition to the historians and preservationists who served on the committee.

One early session proposal asked, "Who decides what is important, what is preserved, and which stories are told?" Another wanted session participants to share their views on using digital tools to engage new publics with history and heritage. A third inquired how American and international heritage policies should be updated in the face of Al Qaeda's and ISIS' destruction "of heritage objects for theater and spectacle." A fourth invited attendees "interested in preserving Latino history and heritage beyond collecting oral histories" to collaborate. None of these participants defined themselves as preservationists—or worked for preservation organizations—yet the questions they posed remain critical to the field of preservation.

In the years since, “non-preservationists” have asked how power structures inherent in archives can be deconstructed and made more participatory; if neighborhood history can be used to build a sense of community; how to reconceive cemeteries, vacant lots and wild spaces as community centers; whether podcasts might be used collaboratively to tell local histories; and how “sites of environmental degradation” might be interpreted to create a public history of climate change. In response to a recent reflection form asking why they attended this event every year, one preservation staffer wrote, to “talk about...things I’m not supposed to talk about at work.” Another, in response to a question about the impact of this day-long event, replied that it is “an opportunity to think about big ‘Why’ [questions] not ‘How’s.’”

The conversations that take place at Hacking Heritage are dynamic, collaborative, wide-ranging, and difficult. Participants air critiques of the histories and impacts of preservation practice in regard to gentrification; overlooked sites and stories related to the history of slavery, structural racism, environmental pollution and other uncomfortable truths; and the field’s own extraordinary lack of diversity. These have been healthy and generative discussions and they have benefited from the many voices of the “non-preservationists” in the room.

These discussions have continued outside of the conference and some have developed into collaborative projects. As a result of the session on Latino heritage at the first conference, Rhode Island Latino Arts and Providence Preservation Society partnered to develop a Latino-focused project titled *Exploring Places of Significance to Rhode Island’s Latino Communities* with funding from the National Trust for Historic Preservation; project outcomes include an ongoing series of maps and walking tours titled “Este Es Mi Barrio” of LatinX heritage sites in Providence. A 2018 session seeded the idea for a year-long city-wide exploration of the history, life and culture of Providence in 2019 called *Year of the City: The Providence Project*, which catalyzed over fifty different public projects related to the city’s neighborhoods over the course of the year, from months-long exhibitions to pop-up events and tours.

Reflecting on the history, theory, and practice of preservation and cultural heritage is central to the Public Humanities—and conversely, theories and practices that guide the Public Humanities are deeply beneficial to the field of preservation and cultural heritage. Yet, this relationship is not always clear. Within the Public Humanities—especially among students entering the field now—preservation is seen as disengaged and retrograde, a field focused more on buildings than on communities, and one that exacerbates gentrification and forced migration. At the JNBC, I teach a course called *Critical Approaches to Preservation and Heritage*. Reflecting on how she defined the work of preservation at the start of the class, one student says, “Traditionally, preservation was (and still is) a predominantly white, wealthy field that focuses on saving white, wealthy places and stories. I think this is why people in our program [at the JNBC] tend not to work in more traditional historic preservation fields.” As

another put it, “I thought historic preservation was the most elite wing of public history work...[and that] it was all about maintaining sprawling estates and histories of elite white people.”

In preservation circles, the questions about the field, its history, and its impact that are posed by those “outside” of the local, state and federal authorities at non-profit preservation organizations seem, to those inside, to be uninformed abstruse with no practical application on the ground. But preservation and the Public Humanities have large areas of overlap, and these synchronicities growing as preservation becomes more interpretive, more interdisciplinary, more experimental, more participatory, and more engaged with social and political issues as they relate to place—and as the “spatial turn” within the humanities centered the study and use of place. As the field changes, there is a need to develop new theories and methodologies for doing more engaged, community-centered preservation work that is informed by museum practice, public history, contemporary art, and community activism.

The disciplinary borders of a “field” are often an illusion, one that is strategically crafted by practitioners in order to claim authority. In the 1960s, the work of preservation and cultural heritage was defined by its advocates to be “factual and objective” with a minimum of “value judgments or ratings.”¹ Preservation offices and organizations were to produce surveys, inventories, drawings, and photo documentaries of America’s most significant sites for a specific public local, state and federal planners and public agency bureaucrats—paperwork that could be considered along with opposing paperwork that might argue for demolition of those sites to expedite the aims of urban renewal or large public works projects. This is the genesis for the National Register of Historic Places which remains one of the field’s core programs. In the ensuing fifty years, however, critical questions have emerged about the field around issues of power and equity and attendant questions about what we choose to preserve, how and why—questions that challenge the notion that preservation can ever be “factual and objective.” Preservation is now understood to be a public benefit and powerful tool of public history. It is our way of remembering our past public and inscribing this past into our cities and landscapes. This has become a large and expanded field of practice indeed, and it will require deep structural change at levels of preservation and heritage practice.

Preservation and Cultural Heritage in an Expanded Field

In the United States, the field of historic preservation was institutionalized with the creation of the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 1949 and then the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act in 1966. The accelerated pace of urbanization and development and the demolition that went with it—especially the highway and road infrastructure that was built to support the automobile—generated the advancement of the field just as the destruction

European cities during World War II precipitated the establishment of UNESCO in 1945. Since this time, the most significant development to impact the field has been the growing understanding that preservation, conservation, and heritage work are not neutral, objective fields of practice, but are shaped by ideology and are often used as tools to achieve specific ideological ends. This viewpoint emerged out of postcolonial theory and Marxist geography in the 1980s, and their argument that preservation and heritage practice are shaped by both nationalism and by the global capitalist economy which combine to protect and conserve places that extend power.

Two early books significant in the emergence of a critical understanding of preservation practice are *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, and David Lowenthal's *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (1985). They propose very different views of how history is operationalized. In his introductory essay, Hobsbawm argues that "invented traditions" are designed to achieve specific ends, such as to cement social relationships, legitimize institutions, or socialize people to certain beliefs, while Lowenthal has a more benign view of our relationship to history—but both argued that we intentionally construct the past to suit the aims of the present. As Lowenthal writes, "Why do we need the past? What do we want it for?"²

Within academia, this logic has evolved into the nascent field of Critical Heritage Studies, which brings together scholars and researchers across departments of archaeology, anthropology, history, public history, preservation, museum studies, and the public humanities. An Association of Critical Heritage Studies (ACHS) was established in 2012, and the founding members issued a "manifesto" at its first conference that year. They asked participants to "question the conservative cultural and economic power relations that outdated understandings of heritage seem to underpin and invite the active participation of people and communities who to date have been marginalized in the creation and management of 'heritage'...Heritage is, as much as anything, a political act and we need to ask serious questions about the power relations that 'heritage' has all too often been invoked to sustain."³

ACHS draws members predominantly from universities rather than from preservation offices or organizations, but it is becoming increasingly difficult for those in the preservation and cultural heritage field to ignore the question of how their work establishes, cultivates, and sustains dominant ideologies. In many urban centers, this issue flares up through contentious conversations about the link among preservation, gentrification, and displacement. Studies on both sides show that historic district designations or other landmark protections can have negative, neutral, or positive impacts on communities, measured by affordability and racial diversity.⁴ But the perception remains that preservation works for business and cultural elites, and that the field has done little to effect positive change in low-income neighborhoods and communities that are bypassed because their building stock and cultural landscapes do not fit easily with the field's focus on material

"integrity" and architectural pedigree.⁵ If preservationists focus only on buildings or landscapes that have this pedigree, and were constructed with long-lasting, and expensive, materials on sites that have changed little through time, critics argue, we will only protect sites built by and for those with wealth or power. This one-sided archive, in turn, produces skewed architectural and local histories.

In response, there is an emerging attention to preserving and interpreting "sites of conscience" and difficult or hidden histories, or reinterpreting existing sites to center these stories at preserved sites. The International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, founded in 1999, played a central role in articulating the public significance of these sites of "traumatic memory," and creating a framework to connect institutions that use these historic sites as "the starting point for facilitated conversations" about critical contemporary issues around human rights.⁶ The organization began with nine member institutions—the British National Trust, the District Six Museum in South Africa, the Gulag Museum in Russia, the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum in Chicago, the Maison des Esclaves in Senegal, Memoria Abierta in Buenos Aires, the Tenement Museum in New York, the Terezin Museum in the Czech Republic, and the United States National Park Service—and has since grown to include over 250 member organizations around the world. In the U.S., this new trajectory is part of what Max Page calls "a new commitment to uncovering the places of pain and shame in the American landscape, one of the most important developments in the historic preservation movement in the past three decades."⁷

What is significant about this new turn is the overt recognition that heritage and power are closely linked, and that preservation work may be used to help dismantle unjust systems by shining a light on inequity. Rather than extending power, preservation can tell critical truths about the past and assist in building a more equitable future. New such sites include the National Memorial to Peace and Justice in Montgomery; Shockoe Bottom in Richmond; the Tule Lake National Monument in Newell, California; and the Whitney Plantation in Wallace, Louisiana. At the same time, older sites are re-interpreting their own histories, centering slavery and histories of enslaved people in their public tours, exhibitions, and programs, such as James Monroe's former plantation, Highland, in Virginia; Monticello in Charlottesville; the Owens-Thomas House in Savannah; and the Aiken-Rhett House in Charleston. In addition, state historic preservation offices are surveying overlooked neighborhoods and sites or revising old surveys to include sites of African-American history or other underrepresented histories. This work is just beginning, especially for small non-profits and local preservation offices that don't have the historians on staff or the resources to develop and execute new interpretive projects. The African American Cultural Heritage Fund, established by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 2017, is one new and significant resource that will fund such work.

As preservation becomes more reflective of difficult and underrepresented histories, it is also moving toward greater engagement with contemporary art and

architecture. Given the fact that preservation emerged in opposition to modernism, this synchronicity is actually quite radical. The photographs chosen to illustrate one of the foundational documents in the American preservation movement, *With Heritage So Rich* (1966), portrayed this relationship clearly, casting Society Hill Towers, designed by I.M. Pei and Associates and completed in 1964, as the advance guard overshadowing colonial-era New Market in the historic district of Philadelphia. A few pages later, a more explicit photograph shows the destruction of the Beaux Arts Chicago Federal Building to make way for the Dirksen Federal Building, designed by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and also completed in 1964.

While post-modernism has generally been seen as the next generation of architects' critical response to modernism, the more sustained counter-movement may in fact have been historic preservation, which was framed at this important moment in the mid-1960s as a strategy of modernist containment. Both movements were critical of the perceived ahistorical, "mechanized and stereotyped" appearance of modernist architecture which, over the preceding decades, came to dominate architecture culture in the media, in the museums, along Park Avenue, and in the leading architecture schools in the U.S.⁸ Post-modernist architects articulated a new aesthetic around traditional building materials, historical pastiche, and the use of graphics to communicate meaning, while preservationists tried to rally support for the protection of two values that were seen to be antithetical to modernism: "beauty" and "history." To be a preservationist was to be an anti-modernist in the 1960s.

The relationship between preservation and modernism is changing, however. As modernist buildings and spaces pass the fifty-year mark and are therefore more favorably regarded for inclusion on the National Register, state historic preservation offices and preservation non-profits are taking up research and advocacy projects around buildings that were once anathema to the field. Conversely, architects, architectural historians, and the modernist design-loving public find new allies in preservation offices to further public understanding and appreciation for modernist—even Brutalist—buildings. Ironically, the Society Hill Towers were listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places in 1999, while van der Rohe's Dirksen Federal Building has become a local landmark, with Alexander Calder's *Flamingo* (1973) installed on the plaza in front.

The oppositional relationship between preservation and modernism hindered preservation from absorbing important aspects of the modernist avant-garde project. Now that the lines separating them are thinning, preservation may become more modernist—more critical, more future-focused, more provocative, and more experimental. In fact, the kind of "experimental preservation" that has been articulated by Jorge Otero-Pailos links preservation and contemporary art practice by creating new space for preservationists to develop projects that "test [objects] potential as heritage" in critical and creative ways.⁹ Otero-Pailos' installation

series *The Ethics of Dust* (begun 2008, ongoing) models this new approach. The art works consist of ghostly sheets of semi-transparent conservation latex and "pollution": the latex is applied to historic monuments and buildings where it picks up years and years of accumulated dust and dirt. In this way, pollution itself, which Otero-Pailos calls "the most enduring monument constructed by our civilization" is preserved and put on display, forcing viewers to think critically about what we choose to preserve and what we choose to ignore, as well as about how ideology imperceptibly shaped these choices.¹⁰

Another significant development in preservation and heritage practice focuses on democratizing processes and programs by building community participation into the work of the field. Referred to as "public heritage" or "community heritage," this new publicly engaged practice ideally generates projects based on community priorities, with community input and outputs that give some measure of control to community collaborators.¹¹ This kind of

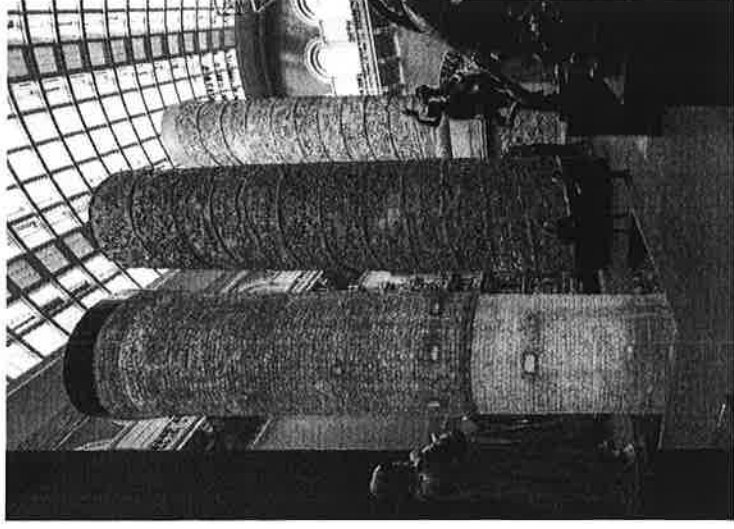


FIGURE 4.1 Jorge Otero-Pailos, *The Ethics of Dust: Trajan's Column* (2015). Commissioned by the V&A Museum.

Photograph courtesy of Peter Kelleher and the V&A.

work asks preservation and heritage professionals to cultivate partnerships across different communities and to imagine new ways to design and execute projects that invite participation without also obliging communities to contribute considerable amounts of unpaid labor.

In both practice and theory, participatory or social practice art—art-making in which social interaction is itself the medium of the artwork—is charting the course of collaborative community-shaped practice in the Public Humanities. While “public preservation” is still marginal within heritage practice, participatory art has come to occupy a central place in global contemporary art since the 1990s (see Smulyan’s essay in this book, “What Can Public Art Teach Public Humanities?”). Many artists working in this field see their work as a nexus of art-making, community collaboration, activism, and performance, as do Tania Bruguera and Rirkrit Tiravanija. In *Relational Aesthetics* (1998), the art critic Nicolas Bourriaud described relational art as “the place that produces a specific sociability” in a world in which relational public space is diminishing: in his reading, participatory art proves itself inherently democratizing, as it invites participants to have a hand in creating the artwork.¹² Since, there has been a rich conversation about the history, politics and ethics of participatory art, as critics have argued that social art’s “participants” are unpaid collaborators with little agency and that the elite art fairs, galleries, and museums that display or host participatory art projects are not the relational public space that Bourriaud describes. As Claire Bishop puts it, “artistic models of democracy have only a tenuous relationship to actual forms of democracy.”¹³

This conversation needs to happen among preservationists, who have been slow to think critically about their approach to community engagement, and even more slow to design “public preservation” projects with local partners and community members that involve community input from the start, rather than leaving it for the end. To do this work effectively, preservationists may have to flip their thinking about preservation, understanding their work as a tool that may be used by communities to achieve specific ends rather than as an aesthetic end in itself that communities would do well to get behind. It may also be that preservation offices and organizations will need to rethink their compensation policies, and begin to compensate citizen historians and community activists just as they compensate strategic planning consultants, exhibition and website designers, and academic panelists for their participation in the work of preservation.

Over the last forty years, preservation has become an object of critical and historical inquiry. The field is not yet in the crosshairs of arts activists who are working to bring change to museum practice and management, like the Decolonize This Place collective. It is clear, however, that preservation practice is on the same uncertain ground as museums, facing some of the same questions about its history, its impacts, and its relationship to structural racism. It is right to ask these questions, both of museums and of preservation practice, given their power to shape culture, identity, and history.

Preservation and the Public Humanities

Preservation and cultural heritage practice are changing, but not quickly, and not at programmatic and staffing levels in a widespread and sustained way—yet. This new kind of preservation practice requires skills and interests on the part of preservation organizations’ staff and leadership in the field of public history and the Public Humanities, rather than just architecture, engineering, and the building sciences. Most graduate programs in Historic Preservation are housed in architecture schools and departments. These programs award an M.S. degree, and usually require courses in architectural and preservation history and theory, conservation, building technologies or preservation law and economics, with no required courses in the theories and methodologies of public history, public humanities, or museum studies. As preservation becomes more interpretive, more critical, more engaged with issues of equity and social justice, more “experimental,” and more participatory, the work of these fields becomes more essential.

Preservationists need to start thinking about preservation not as a self-contained field that is adjacent to conservation science and history, but as an integral branch of the Public Humanities. What does this mean in practice? It means that preservationists need stronger competencies when it comes to research and interpretive work as well as an understanding of the theories and methodologies of participatory community-engaged public work. They should attend conferences, read journals, and participate in conversations in museum studies and public history, where issues of decolonization, equity, and diversity have advanced more quickly than they have in the field of preservation. In some ways, the field is in a Catch-22 situation: many in the rising generation who have these skills and interests are not going into preservation, as they don’t see these issues being addressed adequately—they are going to work for museums, historical societies, libraries and archives, and non-profits whose missions align with these themes. The field is losing out on exactly the people it needs in order to evolve.

Graduate programs in historic preservation must change, moving some courses from electives into required core courses, and adding electives in participatory public work. One model for these changes might be Public Humanities programs, and their curricula, requirements, course work, and community partnership projects. Preservation offices and organizations need to rethink the profiles of their staff, hiring historians and education outreach directors with experience in working with communities to develop public programs from the start, rather than designing programs that “educate” communities about institutionally-led projects. Preservation should also diversify their staff at all levels, and reassess the make-up of their boards and advisory committees, centering diversity, leadership from neighborhoods outside of the wealth centers, and academic and citizen historians whose work focuses on difficult local histories.

Neoliberal policies at the local, state, and federal levels have ceded increasing responsibility and power to private markets to determine public outcomes in

preservation. If historic tax credits given solely to income-producing properties remain a central vehicle for preserving historic spaces in the United States, we will continue to have a system that is biased against those with fewer resources—which has racial implications given our country's systemic racism. This problem isn't confined to the U.S., as international bodies like the World Bank and UNESCO, beginning in the 1990s, began to treat cultural heritage sites as drivers of economic development, "so like bauxite, coal, or rainforest hardwoods, the material remains of the past were seen as an economic resource."¹⁴ Local activists and communities aren't wrong, then, to view preservation practice skeptically when it is employed as a tool to generate profit, primarily for private speculators and for public coffers through higher taxes.

This neoliberal ideology has become so dominant that some preservation offices and organizations adopt the language of the marketplace to explain and to measure their work. One particularly extreme example is the 2014–2016 strategic plan adopted by Virginia's Department of Historic Resources, which defines its stakeholders as "customers" and its "customer base," and envisions a future in which the state department is "a nationally recognized historic preservation and customer service agency that provides the tools and the leadership to inspire and assist property owners, developers, local governments and public agencies to ensure that Virginia's historic buildings, districts, sites and other historic properties" are protected.¹⁵ If preservation offices see their work as a service to property owners, to developers and to public agencies, this leaves out a large number of people who should also benefit from the preservation of sites of historic and cultural significance, including renters, public housing residents, the homeless, and others who live off the grid of property ownership.

Viewed critically, preservation practice operates as a system designed to extend power through the generation of profit or the promotion of specific and instrumental notions of identity. However, preservation offices and organizations could play a significant role in critical conversations about history, culture, and justice. In fact, the field may be uniquely positioned to do so in a world of declining civic space and public dialogue. Fights to preserve, interpret, re-interpret, or rehabilitate historic structures define our shared history and culture. This is partly what makes these fights so divisive, but it is also what makes them so important. For example, recent disputes over preserving, moving, re-interpreting, or demolishing monuments to historic figures linked to slavery and the Confederacy have precipitated a national dialogue and national reckoning with racism in America. But communities across the country hold micro-conversations every day when local landmarks are threatened with demolition or change. Preservation organizations and citizen activists attend public meetings, circulate petitions, write op-eds in the local newspaper, and try their best to save a piece of public history.

In many communities, these campaigns attract a degree of civic engagement that is becoming increasingly rare. When a site reminds us of important and

difficult truths, we can invite, perhaps even compel, the public to confront injustice and inequity through local history (as we can see in this volume's essay on hyperlocal history). Is there an appetite for this kind of activist approach to preservation within the field today? Many preservation offices and organizations tell their own institutional histories through the lens of activism, with origin stories that trace back to citizens' fights to save specific buildings or neighborhoods from demolition. These are usually David and Goliath stories of citizen triumph over powerful organizations.

But preservation offices and organizations have not shown an appetite for interrogating their own histories and grappling with the ways in which their surveys, publications, programs, and campaigns created, and continue to create, more racially and economically stratified neighborhoods—and further even, may have expressly designed these programs to achieve inequitable ends. This is why "off the record" gatherings like Hacking Heritage are so valuable, as they bring critics and practitioners, experimental and traditional preservationists, those new to the field and those who were part of its formation in the 1960s around one table, to have difficult conversations like these with honesty and with mutual respect.

One thinks of preservation's adversary as demolition, but demolition might be better seen as an important part of the preservationist cycle as it spurs action, attention, and resources. In fact, preservation's adversary may be institutional critique, a practice that has become part of museum culture more readily than it has been absorbed into preservation practice. If preservation offices and organizations aim to truly center justice and equity in the work they do, they will need to understand, come to terms with, and possibly make amends for the ways in which the work they have done—and the work they have not done—has contributed to economic, social, and racial stratification in the communities in which they work.

Preservation in and of itself has no value—its value lies in what, how and why we choose to preserve, and these choices are inherently moral, political, and ideological. This insight, which emerged out of postcolonial theory and critical heritage studies, cannot be unseen. Preservation and cultural heritage offices and organizations have no choice now but to grapple with the implications and challenges as they relate to their own institutional and local histories, and the evolution of our shared national story, the sooner, the better. How can historic sites become places that catalyze reflections about power? How can preserved sites be intentionally conceived as "a place that produces a specific sociability," in Bourriaud's words—a place that generates positive social relationships? Can preserved sites become "agents" that are resistant, oppositional spaces, co-created with communities? How can experimental approaches to preservation ignite new conversations with new communities about what is at stake in this work? How might activists advance their aims by centering issues of equity around the demolition or preservation of particular places and sites? *What are heritage sites*

and objects that tell the story of environmental destruction, and how might we preserve and interpret them to create a public history of climate change? What are heritage objects that tell the story of gentrification, including the role of preservation in sometimes extending displacement?

These were not the questions of preservation practice in the past, but they are the questions of today. What is needed as we get from here to there is more opportunities to ask questions together—more conferences, less conferences. One through line of the approach to preservation at the JNBC today is the centrality of questions. We ask that Hacking Heritage sessions be proposed as questions, and many of the projects that have evolved out of this annual meeting have also been driven by shared questions, such as the important work of charting LatinX heritage in Providence, and the Fogarty Funeral. In classes on preservation and cultural heritage, we center questions in order to provoke students to think critically and creatively about the field, and to start to chart its future.

This essay began with the assertion that a public humanities approach to preservation and cultural heritage practice is emerging, and that this heightened focus on history, interpretation, experimentation, and community co-creation will enable preservation offices and organizations to expand the field in creative, dynamic, and productive ways. At the same time, framing the work of the Public Humanities as preservation practice connects local history, identity, and culture to particular sites, and prioritizes the question of how stories about place instrumentalize ideology.

Preservation Happenings and Public Memory

At the JNBC, the integration of preservation and the Public Humanities invites conversations, creates connections, and produces programs that range across disciplinary and institutional boundaries. The partnerships and projects that have grown out of the annual Hacking Heritage un-conference suggest some of the productivity of this approach. One of the projects in particular that originated with a conversation at Hacking Heritage in March 2017, “Funeral for the Fogarty?” became, six days later, an outdoor memorial service for Providence’s most significant Brutalist building, the John E. Fogarty Memorial Building, built in 1967 to house the state’s Department of Human Services.

The 40,000 square foot cast concrete behemoth covered an entire block of downtown Providence, often referred to as the state’s “welfare office,” and housed state social workers and administrators who administered benefits established during Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society programs in the 1960s. The large lobby, with two entrances from Calender and Matthewson Streets, was filled with cubicles and lobby seating for benefits recipients who needed to register a change in their situation, or provide the department with more information. The second and third floors were open, with stations for social workers, case aids, and clerical staff in the middle, and glass-walled supervisors’ offices at the four corners. Barbara Dobbyn, who worked in the building as a social worker in the early 1970s recalls a “dynamic



FIGURE 4.2 *The Fogarty Funeral*, 17 March 2017. Photograph © Christian Scully/Design Imaging Studios.

atmosphere” that could get confrontational when benefits clients came to the building because their benefits had been improperly or suddenly cut.¹⁶ She remembers the staff as primarily white women, “generally very young, very liberal, people who wanted to go out and help the poor,” and that the clients were women of all races, who often brought their small children with them.¹⁷

The lead architect, Michael Planka, was a partner at a local firm, Castellucci, Galli & Planka Associates. A 1952 graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design, Planka “was a very progressive man and was looking to do something different and a little left of center—he was looking to break the mold,” his daughter, Jana Planka, recalled at the Fogarty Funeral. Planka had envisioned the building to be concrete poured in place at the site, like many of the best Brutalist buildings of the time, but ultimately the façade was constructed with less expensive precast concrete panels.¹⁸ Planka specified that the concrete walls visible at street level be “bush hammered,” like Paul Rudolph’s well-known Art and Architecture Building (1963) at Yale in nearby New Haven, to produce an uneven, textured look and feel that revealed the hand of the artisan, and this element was incorporated into the final design.¹⁹ For many architects of the time, Brutalism embodied a public-minded response to the glass-and-steel corporate architecture of the previous decade. Brutalist buildings were heavy, textured, sculptural, and inspired by classical architecture and its association with the origins of democracy.

In 1999, the Department of Human Services moved out of the building; the state found use for it as a middle school for a few years, but this ended when students complained of breathing problems and the Department of Labor and Training found health violations. A local developer, The Procaccianti Group, purchased the building in 2005 and finally succeeded in securing a demolition permit from the city in 2017 to build a Marriott Residence Inn.

Fogarty Funeral was prompted by a Hacking Heritage session proposal submitted by Caroline Stevens, a 2016 graduate of Brown's Public Humanities M.A. program and the Director of Doors Open Rhode Island, a semi-annual free festival that gives the public access to some of the state's architectural and community landmarks. Her hand-written proposal said, "What do you think a Fogarty Funeral should entail? My vision for this funeral is to use it as a means of building community, connecting people to place, fostering dialogue around our built environment, and challenging perspectives of what constitutes 'beautiful' vs. 'ugly' architecture. What's your vision?";²⁰

Eleven people gathered to discuss the idea, and by the next day, there were four committed organizers: Janaya Kizzie, an archivist, artist and writer; Steven Lubar, a Professor at Brown University who was the founding Director of the JNIBC and was formerly Chair of the Division of History and Technology at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History; Caroline Stevens; and the author. When demolition began more quickly than had been anticipated, the group moved into high gear and chose to stage the memorial service on Friday, 17 March, across the street from the site, within view of the building's half-demolished husk.

From the start, we conceived the event as a public memory and "preservation happening" that would gather individuals with a connection to the building through its life to mark its passing. In intent, the funeral had affinities with the art happenings of the 1960s, staged theatrical events that were held both inside and outside of galleries and traditional exhibition spaces, and that were often open to spontaneous audience participation. Eight eulogists delivered short speeches in remembrance of the building's service to the community, including Planka's daughter; one mourner came wearing a black lace veil, and there were "portraits" of the building in its youth, with an ornate funeral wreath.

Some elements of the event were campy, including the kazoo parade around the building following the conclusion of the memorial with "Danny Boy" playing on the PA system, and the printed memorial given to all participants, which narrated the "life" of the building in human terms:

The John E. Fogarty Memorial Building, of 111 Fountain Street, Providence, passed away on Monday, March 13 after a protracted and debilitating illness. It was 49 years old and the beloved child of the Rhode Island architecture firm Castellucci, Galli & Planka Associates...As a young building, the Fogarty was part of an enthusiastic family of Brutalist government buildings



FIGURE 4.3 *The Fogarty Funeral*, 17 March 2017. Photograph © Christian Scully/Design Imaging Studios.

that expressed the energy and confidence of Lyndon Johnson's 1960s Great Society programs. To its neighbors, the building could be difficult, challenging—abrasive, even. It had a strong personality and was not always easy to engage with.²¹

The organizers invited a representative from the Procaccianti Companies to attend, but they declined. Another real estate developer in Providence turned down the group's request to use a large parking lot adjacent to a building he owned for the memorial service, writing to the author in an email on 16 March 2017, "Unfortunately the partners...don't think the event you are describing is respectful of all the effort, time and resources being put in to the new development proposed by the Procaccianti Co on the site of the Fogarty Bldg and therefore we are not willing to authorize your gathering on our property." The event was attended by about 40 people, and was covered in the local newspapers and on local television.²² The National Trust for Historic Preservation invited the organizers to submit content for a "toolkit" for planning a building funeral, which was published on their website on 19 April 2017.²³

Historian Neil Harris writes that "building rituals are linked almost exclusively to the beginning rather than the end of life," and that the preservation community needs to develop "better ways to honor and recall our buildings."²⁴ In proposing *Fogarty Funeral*, Stevens found inspiration in a funeral for a demolished row house in Philadelphia organized by historians and artists connected to Temple Contemporary at the Tyler School of Art. That project, titled *Funeral for*

a *Home*, began as a public art project to reflect on the fact that 600 houses were demolished each year and 25,000 sat vacant in the neighborhood of Mantua.²⁵ The 2014 event brought together over 400 community residents, and included eulogies by neighborhood residents and leaders that reflected on the particular history of the house at 3711 Melon Street, and what its demolition augured for the neighborhood. The funeral's organizer called the co-created community event a synthesis of public history, public art, and community collaboration, "preservation activism" in action.²⁶

There is critical potential implicit in these kinds of events, as framing the demolition of a building as a funeral invites the public to ask who killed it and why. This kind of memorial event uses the passed building to share stories of the lives lived inside, and to reflect on how these individual stories reveal larger truths about our culture and our politics. In the case of the Fogarty Building, the state, the city, and a local real estate developer orchestrated the end of the building because they saw it as obsolete.

Since *Fogarty Funeral*, there has been discussion of organizing similar preservation happenings. A one-year commemoration of the Fogarty building's demolition staged as an art installation and performance in a hotel room looking out over the site, a hospice ceremony for the unoccupied Industrial Trust Building (1928) in downtown Providence, and a memorial service for McCoy Stadium (1942) in Pawtucket around the 2020 departure of its minor league baseball team to nearby Worcester have been raised, often at Hacking Heritage. All would be events bringing together a range of participants to share their memories of these places and to reflect on how places come to be deemed obsolete, by whom, and for what reasons.

Asking these questions has particular valence in our capitalist regime, when obsolescence is deployed strategically to devalue, then revalue space, through demolition and subsequent development.²⁷ Asking such abstract questions within the context of a "death" that is felt personally galvanizes community participation in ways that non-participatory, non-performative preservation events might not. It might seem odd to consider these kinds of events as preservation programs because they take place after demolition, but they are. At the nexus of public history, public art, community organizing, and preservation practice—the Public Humanities—building memorials presents the potential for asking critical questions about power, space, and preservation.

As a former JNBC student put it, "preservation has the greatest potential to visibly decenter previous [elite] narratives and start conversations about history and memory at a local level," adding that preservation practice "has the potential to radically reshape what communities value." As they enter the field, these new preservationists will continue to push preservation practice in new directions, centering issues of power, equity and justice, and finding creative ways to connect the work with local communities. Getting from here to there will require institutions to reckon with their own histories, and the ways in which they have defined and carried out the work of preservation.

Notes

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5

HYPERLOCAL HISTORY

Linking People to the Past through Class, Race, and Memory

Ron M. Potvin and Marjory Gomez O'Toole

Introduction

Alfred Benoit was a mill boy growing up in a New Bedford tenement at the turn of the twentieth century. Jane was an enslaved woman living and working on an eighteenth-century farm in Little Compton, Rhode Island. They barely left marks on the historic record but their stories are worthy of preserving and sharing. Alfred's and Jane's histories are *hyperlocal*, and illuminate broader issues of class and race in ways that are personally meaningful to audiences—important outcomes for public humanists.

The term "hyperlocal" originated in the early 1990s to describe news coverage excessively oriented around small, geographically defined communities within limited time spans.¹ Historical precedents were paper-based and include almanacs, which provided geographic and temporally oriented advice to their readers, and "publications" like church bulletins and neighborhood association newsletters that were hyperlocal in their coverage of current events for defined communities.

In 2007, three entrepreneurs founded Patch Media, a digital hyperlocal news source, which gained a national audience when AOL purchased it two years later. By 2010, *Patch* included more than 500 websites that consolidated information about local government, yard sales, and lost pets, which previously existed in print or through a variety of *ad hoc* digital media.² Patch Media helped to democratize local news from election results to Little League scores using community coordinators and crowdsourcing, often in place of reporters. Platforms like *Patch* added "hypertext" to the hyperlocal model, but the rapid growth of social media has since called into question the efficacy of any attempt to create a centralized hyperlocal news platform.³