

INTERFERING WITH THE TRUTH

“If people have the ability to uncover or hide pieces of the past, how necessary is it that we maintain a legacy, through architecture, from a history that may not be built on truth?”

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Figure 1: Salem Chapel

Introduction

There are many conversations surrounding the issues and benefits of maintaining period structures and especially which buildings should be dismantled and which should be repurposed. The Salem Chapel in Hunslet, Leeds, shown in *Figure 1*, has been protected from demolition and this essay will use it to question why certain buildings are protected in this way. Salem Chapel is a listed building which “allows us to highlight what is significant about a building...and helps to make sure that any future changes to it do not result in the loss of its significance” (Historic England 2024). The reason behind listing a building is usually to celebrate its historical interest or to commemorate its architectural style, and particularly the link that the structure may have to previous technologies, purposes, or events. Certain period architecture has a style and a technical, detailed beauty that some more contemporary buildings do not have, be that due to different materials having been available, different economic conditions, or different skillsets that are no longer available. This provides a link to the past technologies used and art movements which are evident through the architecture and that a modern world might not have had access to. However, as much as these structures can connect through history to a moment in the past, we must ask how much these histories they represent can be trusted and if they truly are evidence of what occurred in previous times. All people, places and objects have a past and a history connected to the past. The problem is that no version of history can be true or access the full story and is just a retelling of a moment in time rather than relaying the actual event to a present audience. This makes the process of historiography a difficult one in trying to keep to the truth, as even writing history is relying on a limited amount of evidence. This requires an on-going discussion surrounding the meaning of the question and how the terms past, truth and history might

be defined in society as oppose to how they are being defined in this study. We can then question whether these links to the past, and architecture in particular, should be preserved if they are not providing a connection to the true past or are commemorating something that ought not to be celebrated in the modern day.

To answer this question, it will be important to dissect and define what the question is really asking, as there is a well-established argument that asserts people have the capability to reveal or veil aspects of the “past.” When looking at the “past,” there is this idea of a previous event that occurred at an earlier time and that happened before the present moment one is living in (OED, 1989). It can be the “before” of any person, event, object or place and anything that exists will have a “past.” The meaning of the past in relation to the Salem Chapel, would be the exact happenings from when it was built in 1791, including who occupied it, what physical damage occurred naturally and what purpose the building stood for, even though this has not been witnessed by anyone in the present. In any definition however, the “past” is something that cannot be altered or rewritten, as what happened has already transpired and nothing can be done to change it. Therefore, moving forward in this study, the “past” will be defined as an event that actually happened, as opposed to a perspective on a particular happening (i.e. history).

Understanding what is meant by the past provides an easier link to understand the meaning of “truth.” “Truth” would normally be defined as concepts or events that are an absolute for every human and would

be a knowledge reflecting what things are (OED, 1989). In simpler terms, the “truth” appears to be seen as the collective knowledge people have which represents the reality of things. However, it is difficult, or even impossible for a collective of people with differing perspectives to have this complete knowledge of past events and many factors make it challenging to fully know the truth. Given this fact, the “truth” must be redefined in the study as the stripped back, factual, abstract event with no added information from opinion or judgment. This definition therefore describes the past and the truth as the same. The poet John Keats writes, “beauty is truth, truth beauty” (Keats, 1819), but because it is complicated to get to the “truth” through opposing perspectives, society has tainted the idea of “truth” being beautiful. Instead, it has been turned into something untrustworthy because everyone’s perception of “truth” differs, alluding to the thought that “truth” is not truth at all. “Can two truths ever exist together?...Whose truth is true and is truth enough?” (Tempest, 2014).

The problems that cause this lack of true clarity are evident when looking back at anything in the past. Firstly, there is the simple problem that often we did not witness the past that is being focused on and so have only heard it through others. Furthermore, the human mind is not perfect as even when observing an incident, it can and will create its own “truth” about what was seen, heard, or experienced which does not necessarily line up with the reality of how things occurred. Finally, the experience of events is subjective to each human mind. People have opposing opinions about the past because of the way they experienced it. These problems all lead on to the concept of “history,” which depicts the issues when retelling the past of

certain people and places.

Although “history” aims to be a narration of the series of events that occurred in the life of a person, object, or city (OED, 1989), since it is told from a singular, or very few, perspectives, inevitably “history” is limited and does not consider the views of many others involved in the events. The information one may have left untold could also hold the “historical” perspective in a completely different light. Even the term “history” itself means different things to different people, seen especially when focusing on building work, as many people would not question “history” but assume it is all truth (Forty, 2000). Although the Salem Chapel seems to be an accurate record of the past, this record will not be from any eyewitnesses and so already produces a mask to hide the perfect truth and causes us to question why this period architecture should be maintained to preserve a never truly known story.

To apply these thoughts to buildings, period architecture like the Salem Chapel does seem to have some sort of timelessness to it and another view, helpful to examine later, arises from Adrian Forty’s writing when he discusses William Morris’ idea of “historical architecture.” Forty (2000) summarises that in one definition, “historical architecture” can be seen as architecture pointing to the future rather than looking back. Forty interprets Morris (1893) as defining “historical architecture” as “an architecture that would in the future be recognised as manifesting the mind of the present” (Forty, 2000). In which case, “historical architecture” is all about the present rather than the past and architects should have in mind the future

when designing and how to inform future people of the current day technologies and styles. This definition of historical architecture however, did previously produce some difficulty in creating new, original structures and gave people a reason to believe history should be ignored moving forward because of these issues. Forty wanted to showcase that “history” can mean different things and people do not necessarily think about this difference of perspectives when they define words like “past” and “history.” This is often the route to disagreements surrounding topics using these terms.

With all this to consider, we will define “history” here as a certain person or group’s perspective on events of the past, based on the information and evidence they have. Their evidence may not necessarily be the truth or contain the whole story of the past. Leading on from this, the term “legacy” is described as something that is part of the history that remains, perhaps an object linking the present to the past and maintaining the previous meaning that runs through the life of this object (OED, 1989). The issue that is noticeably displayed here, is that “legacy” not only depends on the past, but also depends on history which we have seen to be subjective and not always the truth. This introduces the question to be discussed: does a legacy of a particular person, place, or building need to be preserved if that legacy may not be built on the past but rather on an untrue history?

This question holds particular importance when thinking about architecture, as there is much discussion in society surrounding listed buildings and what should be preserved and what should be demolished.

Buildings and structures are normally conserved because of their history and link to the past as most previous architectural styles are seen as material evidence and a legacy of what came before and has remained. However, there are many reasons as to why this should or should not be based on history and again iterating this question of whether these links to the past, in the form of architecture, should be maintained when what they signify could be either an untruth, or even a veiled past that should not be remembered. We must question why history should be depended on in our decision-making when the history we are relying on may not be the truth of the past.

Chapter One

Having looked at how history is not always truth and depends on the single perspective of the one writing it, it is obvious that the power of a historian, or anyone telling a story of a past event, can be abused, and used in harmful ways. There are many ways in which the retelling of an event can be manipulated or even subtly bent to make the listeners believe certain things or share the writer's opinion through how the event is related. George Orwell presents this theme of rewriting the past and how societal leaders can abuse it by altering truth, to have power over people they govern through manipulation of the mind. Orwell uses the "Party" in his novel, *1984*, to bring this point into question, "who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past" (Orwell, 1949). This slogan of the fictional government conveys that power people desire is to have a control over the future and want to ensure they make their possibilities into realities. The future can be controlled by the past depending on how things happened previously. People might ensure the future follows a certain pattern because the past was considered idyllic or may deviate from that past way because it was thought to be damaging. To continue, the past can be controlled by those in the present because history is "a dialectic between the past and present, could only be made in the present," (Forty, 2000) meaning that the past can be rewritten and therefore adapted by people in the present to potentially make false claims about the past. In this way, leaders of the present may manipulate history to cause people to reinterpret the past, presenting it in a particular light and using it to drive their decisions for the future. City planners and architects also can do this and potentially manipulate the reasons for listing buildings to preserve a legacy that is not based on truth. Robert Bevan summarises this saying, "truth is common good...like water or air, even some politicians have polluted it"

(Bevan 2022), claiming that the truth has been tainted by lies and manipulation.

Continuing the theme of controlling history and therefore controlling the mind, Bevan presents the ways in how similarly, cities and countries can go even further and actually “destroy physical evidence” (Bevan, 2022) to erase people’s past through violence, covering up certain events and causing the public to be ignorant to what is happening in some cities and cultures. Bevan uses the example of China and the violence of the country against the Muslim community, in his *Monumental Lies*, to suggest how a cover up of this sort can harm people in more ways than one. He brings up the prejudiced acts of “the Chinese government having launched a campaign of cultural suppression of the Uighur language” and placing people in “re-education” camps, removing children from their families and forcibly sterilising women (Bevan, 2022). These camps were found to be dehumanising and brainwashing those forced into them, a victim proclaiming, “the strategy being implemented: not to kill us in cold blood, but to make us slowly disappear. So slowly that no one would notice.” (Haitiwaji, 2021). China also removed architecture that was a part of the Muslim community’s past like the “Silk-road City” (Bevan, 2022), shown in *Figure 2*, attempting to conceal the horrific occurrences that harmed so many of Xinjiang’s Muslims from the rest of the world. The Chinese government tried to erase the past of this happening and tell a new history, one that was a lie. It manipulated the opinions and minds of those on the outside, forcing people to be ignorant to the truth and creating their own version of the truth in their minds. Therefore, the past became temporarily rewritten into an untrue history. There is the possibility that this could happen again in extreme



Figure 2: Silk-Road City

cases.

The example of Salem Chapel can help us to explore this. Salem Chapel is known to be the oldest surviving non-conformist chapel in Leeds (aql, 2009), and therefore stands as physical evidence to the existence of this non-conformist community. It is therefore possible that those in power may one day want to eradicate the memory of this Protestant community, and to do this, might destroy the building. Whilst this may seem improbable or at least extreme, it indicates how damaging hiding information of the past and truth is, even on a less absolute scale, as people can be so easily persuaded to have a certain perspective to see not what is truth, but rather a history based on lies.

Additionally, when others find out these tragic events that occur, they may always relate the event to that city or nation, as the mind associates them together. This may give rise to further motives for preserving or destroying evidence, including architecture, for both the victim or the perpetrator. The victims, or those who were trapped in similar societies of propaganda, might want to create for themselves, a new identity and remove evidence of the past to avoid reliving it. In trying desperately to escape from the label or association with the past, one might create a new history that differs from the truth, or hide information from their past, to form a new identity that separates them from these true events. As well as having connotations to a tragic past, this reason for hiding can also link to a feeling of guilt. It is interesting that another use for “past” is when describing negative incidents that someone may have had in their life.

Everyone has a past, but when using the phrase, “they have a past,” there is a seemingly sinister undertone that the person has been involved in negative events. Therefore, perpetrators of these events may want to remove the evidence of their guilt and in shame of the truth, choose to rewrite the past and create a history that differs from the actual event. To counter this, victims may want to preserve evidence showing the crime of their oppressor and similarly, the perpetrator may want to preserve something as a monument to their perceived victory. However, all this again puts the control into the hands of the people to tell the story, rather than the physical and architectural evidence, showing that true links to the past should be preserved as evidence, rather than altered and twisted histories that society may connect to buildings.

Chapter Two

In exploring how people can exploit and manipulate history to influence the weak mind, there is the tendency to see history as a corrupt element of society. Over time, there has been much discussion over whether the learning and maintaining of history through architecture, has been beneficial to the contemporary world, or whether it has hindered future developments. For many architects in the 1890s, there was an unenthusiastic attitude towards learning more of history, as they believed “the sheer accumulation of knowledge about previous architecture hampered their scope for originality” (Forty, 2000). As mentioned previously, this is where Morris’ idea of the term “historical architecture” links to the architects’ pessimism towards future building as they believed it was near impossible to “escape from the burden of an excess of historical knowledge” (Forty, 2000). From these 1890s architects’ perspectives, the past works of architecture had been so idyllic, it became only natural that in their present day, they would try to recreate these structural styles, resulting in a never-ending cycle of the same work and so devaluing the beauty that this architecture should have. These architects believed that past buildings were presently pieces of historical architecture that embodied the minds of those living in the days when those buildings were built and “remembers the history of the past, makes history in the present, and teaches history in the future” (Morris, 1893). This caused the architects in their present day to feel obliged to create historic architecture that would be looked back on in years to come as “manifesting” an account of their present day (Forty, 2000) further preventing them from seeing history as a benefit to their work because they felt history provided pressure to produce more history.

It could be agreed that these architects were becoming too overwhelmed with this growth of knowledge of past architecture. However, this historical architecture did not need to be considered when trying to produce it. The thought should not prevent people from disregarding history as the point of architecture is to encompass the present so it can be looked back on in future days as a witness to future people of what the present was. As Gail Brenner (2012) states, “your present moment experience in the now is what keeps the past alive,” suggesting the present moment should inform choices and this will show what has come before through architectural development. There should not be the idea of looking at history to create “historical architecture” because we should concentrate on creating something in the present that will *become* historical, “for it claimed to be an architecture wholly of the present, embodying the consciousness of the age, such as would be recognised in the future” (Morris, 1893). Furthermore, by looking at history to create this historical architecture, it produces the complex that this history could be a tainted truth and so questions the reason for maintaining a lying legacy if the architecture connects to an untrue history. Understanding this, there creates more reason to produce historical architecture, as Morris understood it, by “embodying” the present rather than relying on an unknown past.

Similarly, to the architects’ views in the 1890s, Friedrich Nietzsche shared their opinions on obtaining an incessant amount of knowledge and how this could be dangerous. He believed that the world should “overcome history and forget it, to attain a supra-historical consciousness so as to live fully in the present,” (Forty, 2000). It appears Nietzsche believed all people aspired for greatness and that life was a “dark driving

insatiably self-desiring power,” (Nietzsche, 1874) in which people were striving to grow in knowledge, without experiencing the world or using their knowledge to enrich their living. Nietzsche then brings up the idea of “monumental history” that further develops his thoughts on people wanting to achieve greatness but in doing so, shows readers their ignorance of this goal because there were circumstances that allowed these “great” people like Caesar or Socrates, to name a couple of his examples, to become “great.” By overlooking these circumstances, people again change history in their minds, rewriting it to convince themselves that this “greatness” can be achieved as a matter of course. In holding on to this knowledge of these figures, “monumental history” prevents original cultural achievements because the accomplishments from history act as a barrier to stop one deviating from this successful model in the contemporary time. This form of rewriting history can therefore be dangerous, as it causes society to be oblivious and ignorant to what can be achieved, always living in disappointment, and resulting in attaining knowledge but not using it to enhance living. This causes people to lose sight of the purpose of their work.

However, Nietzsche did not want to completely eradicate the knowledge of history as he also believed it could be beneficial when used in the right way. He wanted people to look at life as a creative engagement with the world rather than trying to accumulate all the historical knowledge that sometimes causes a feeling of inferiority (Nietzsche, 1874). The example he mentions is through the composer Richard Wagner, who Nietzsche believed represented an outlook on life where creative genius could run free. Wagner appeared to engage with the world through music, as well as explore his creative side from regenerating the culture of

music that came before him (*Figure 3*). In looking at the history of music to progress and create something new without acquiring too much knowledge, Wagner used history in a beneficial way to enrich his life and prevent thoughts of inferiority as he learnt more of history. This seems like more of a positive perspective on the idea of history that could be applied to architecture, using it only to push the creative mind further “to produce meaningful architecture” and “not to parody history, but to articulate it” (Libeskind, 1994). In any case, Nietzsche still seemingly refused to believe that many people could achieve this balanced state of enriching life whilst learning from previous times and preferred to see this historical knowledge as something not to be obtained. These thoughts all point to the opinion that there is little necessity in preserving architecture based on the building’s history. It seems these figures believe the present day should be informed by present happenings, showing the transition of old to new discoveries through architecture and new builds that progress from what has come before. The pressure to make history caused them to feel inferior, resulting in the idea that ancient architecture has no need to be preserved through renovation and rather contemporary structures should be created, allowing production of designs coming from an unspoilt, creative mind.



Figure 3: Wagner Music

Chapter Three

To counter these opinions of Nietzsche and the 1890s architects however, there are many arguments to present the dangers that can unfold if the historical knowledge of certain elements, and in particular architecture, is not obtained. As previously mentioned, Bevan presents ways in which it is necessary to uncover the truth, through a discussion on conflict and how the erasure of history in times of conflict, causes damage later. Already seen through his example of China and their lies to hide their violence from the rest of the world, this distortion of the truth by creating a false history, poses many following damages to the people involved. However, to link this to architecture specifically, Bevan discusses how China wanted to even destroy the Uighur Muslim “heritage, such as historic quarters of the ancient Silk Road city...and other towns across the Xinjiang region,” (Bevan, 2022) showing that eliminating these buildings from the past, would eliminate the way of life for these Muslims. This suggests an identity is connected to these buildings and the destruction of them is removing evidence of past events, taking away the reminder of those people and their culture. Although the history may not be truth or exposed for everyone to see, these buildings would still incite a connection through memory to the events they supposedly stood for and each person would have an individual relationship to these buildings that connected them to the experience that they may believe to define their identity.

Potentially, in the Salem Chapel’s case, someone could have a connection to it that reminds them of an event from its previous life as a church. If it was taken down, those memories with it would be missing and individuals could lose a piece of their past as the building that acted as a reminder disappeared. In

this way, it is important to learn the history of cultures so that architecture can be preserved to act as a reminder of events that occurred and connect communities to a personal event of the past that they relate themselves to. Further than this, people who may not have personally experienced events that have given them this identity, still may want to learn of who they are so they have knowledge of their place in society. John Agard, the British-Guyanese poet, claims personal experiences, “bandage up me eye with me own history, blind me to me own identity” (Agard, 2007). Agard discusses in his poem how colonised people were forced to learn more of British history and nothing about important figures and events from their own history, causing a blindness to their ancestry. It suggests why covering up the history of events creates a danger that people will not know where to place their “identity” because they do not know what past events have informed their culture. This provides a reason why people should not distort the truth through destruction of original architecture that could hide an individual’s own past from them. Everyone has past events that hold personal value and architecture that symbolises these events allows the past to be remembered without fallible human influence, rather than a fabricated history.

It is interesting to see how physical materiality, especially in the form of building structures, is a contribution to history and speaks to the present of what once was, so “cities become historical texts” (Rossi, 1966) themselves. *Figures 4* and *5* show the shift across time in the language of Leeds through architecture that may not have been able to be obtained from human knowledge. Having discussed that one problem with the truth of the past is that sometimes no one from the present is an eye-witness,



Figure 4: Historic Hunslet



Figure 5: Modern Hunslet

architecture becomes material evidence for the past as Bevan believes “it is vital to keep...the material past as historical evidence” (Bevan, 2022). Individual societies and government leaders have the power to manipulate the way the rest of the world will see their actions and the events that happened in their cities, showing why it is important to preserve as much evidence towards the truth of the past as possible. As language and opinions can be so easily altered and manipulate the mind to judge a certain way, physical evidence that has been untouched is a helpful tool in providing information from the past. Architecture then becomes something “containing evidence of a comprehensive knowledge of past architecture,” showing that present architecture holds the memory of the past in its walls and provides people with connections to past events, becoming evidence of the past. However, by also having the power to change the appearance of architecture, this shows more significance in preserving original buildings in their damage and beauty to get a clear understanding of the past. Therefore, these structures should be left untouched by human hands so that they can truthfully link to events that naturally caused a disruption to the building’s form, evidencing these happenings through appearance.

In understanding the past, there is a clearer understanding of the present, where historical architecture can be created to inform future generations of their past, which is today’s present. Weizman, founder of research agency, *Forensic Architecture*, shows how “buildings might be among the best sensors of...change because they are...anchored in space, and in close connection with human bodies.” (Weizman, 2017). In the present, untouched architecture can show evidence of certain events, including where these events took

place, how much damage an event may have caused and other indications that may not have been seen by witnesses. To use an example, the Reichstag building in Berlin, Germany has not necessarily been untouched, but despite restoration, seemingly preserved the Soviet soldiers’ graffiti and bullet marks to the walls (Irvine, 2021) which maintained that connection between the Reichstag and its past. Through this, the building provides a connection to the Second World War which people living in the present may not be able to recall and therefore, acts as physical and material evidence to point people’s minds to the past.

Moreover, there may be this desire to preserve the genius loci surrounding the building which includes the “physical makeup” as well as what is “perceived” (Curl, 2006), therefore wanting the atmosphere and history connected to the structure to be maintained through conserving the physical evidence too. Aldo Rossi claims, “every city possesses a personal soul formed of old traditions and living feelings as well as unresolved aspirations” (Rossi, 1966) inferring cities are held together by “collective memory” (Rossi, 1966) of inhabitants as well as by the architecture itself, prolonging the building’s legacy through memory. However, as earlier discussed that it is often impossible to have all the knowledge of whether a building has been untouched, it is doubtful that the “collective memory” of the architecture will remain when there is no substantial physical evidence to ignite trustworthy remembrance. Therefore, it is unlikely that a full grasp on the truth of the past can be acquired and so this physical evidence may never truly capture the past, but only a history.

To deepen the investigation into how conserving history is encouraged through architecture, buildings need to be viewed as a work of art. Adding another definition into question, art is recognised as an expression coming from human's creative skill, usually aiming to use the imagination for people to appreciate the art's beauty and power emotionally (OED, 1989). When viewing architecture as a creative piece that humans have built to invoke emotional appreciation, there is a whole new angle acquired in the need to preserve this beauty and especially that of a former time. Forty (2000) summarised Burckhardt's (1872) view that architecture was an "evidence of the human mind's capacity to reflect on its own existence" (Forty, 2000), saying that buildings are physical reminders of how humans have taken their life experiences and used that to express themselves creatively. In doing so, buildings contain design that, although could have been altered over time, speak of histories that show what informed these decisions. Furthermore, by coming from a personal experience of "existence," it is a personal truth reflected in the building from the past rather than from an untrue history. Therefore, history represented through architecture is beneficial because it is the link to many individuals' reflections on life that have collaborated to form a design through a building. The experience for society then, allows "the illusion of passing through the veil that otherwise separated the past from the present" (Forty, 2000), further enabling multiple, creative, personal views of the past to be felt, giving the present world a look into multiple expressions and interpretations of the past in one form. By maintaining this art in the form of architecture, it grants the spectator access to see the process of the past human mind reflecting on their life experiences (Forty, 2000), indicating that although everyone has their own perception on the past to form a history, these opposing perceptions can be seen

through this art and should be celebrated. The truth of how past designers and architects experienced life can still be observed through this art, even if the spectators differ in their views on it. The individual designer's emotions are still expressed. This is why it seems there should be no interference in the artwork and expression that can be viewed in buildings, meaning the buildings should be preserved to connect the spectator to the mind of the designer. This would also prevent destruction of the evidence of the past mind. History is shown here as beneficial in providing insight to the creative mind from the past, and preserving buildings allows viewers to experience the progression of the creative mind through time.

Chapter Four



Figure 6: Blue Plaque

Having seen how the knowledge of history can be either dangerous or beneficial to society, it is necessary to see how history relating to architecture affects the present day. There is much discussion surrounding the reasoning for preserving heritage buildings and a range of motives for why this happens. Buildings are usually listed so they can be “protected for future generations” (Historic England, 2024) and be a celebration of their significance in the past. A specific building may have been involved in a historic event or may stand for a relevant occurrence in the country or city that would give it a reason for being preserved and protected. To look at the example of the Salem Chapel, it was given a blue plaque (Figure 6) which highlights the key buildings that “shaped our history and heritage” (University of Leeds, 2023) and was given this to recognise its significance both religiously and architecturally. Like the Salem Chapel, many other significant buildings are listed and preserved so that they can be celebrated and a reminder of the purposes, events, or art movements that they linked to.

Another reason for potentially wanting to conserve certain architecture and history can be for the purpose of the city and the context around the building, “...to understand history is essential for the formation of the architect, since he must be able to insert his own work into the context and to take it dialectally, into account” (Rogers, 1961). There may be an aim to keep the city’s appearance in keeping with the urban landscape and the implementation of a building that is visually contemporary in place of a heritage building, could destroy the identity and link to its history that the city wants to maintain. However, by defining the term history and questioning the faith that can be had in a building’s previous story, there is an

argument as to whether these “significant” works of architecture should be protected.

The Salem Chapel, although stated to have importance architecturally and religiously, still has this importance based on a history that may not be the truth. As the church was built in 1791, there has been some damage to it over time and a change in some structural elements. The curved façade on the western elevation was added in 1906, so there is a deceiving quality to that 1791 date. This change in structure is shown in *Figures 7 and 8*. Without the entirety of the Salem Chapel being made from the original materials, and the renovated sections having been reworked to match the original, it could be argued that this building is pointing to its not entirely true past, creating a history that may hide the truth from a viewer of the church building. By materially altering buildings like this, the narrative surrounding the architecture can change and be controlled by those who have adjusted it. If people can have this control over the physical structures, linking back to dictatorships and city manipulation, then narratives of cities can be changed to what these leaders want to create to control those under them. This is shown by Bevan in his *Destruction of Memory*, “there has always been another war against architecture going on—the destruction of the cultural artefacts...as a means of dominating, terrorizing, dividing or eradicating it altogether” (Bevan, 2007).

Even though there is argument over how changing the physical materiality of a building can allow a change of architectural narrative, it is sometimes necessary for a structure to be renewed when the building is



Figure 7: Non-curved Salem Chapel



Figure 8: Curved Salem Chapel

unsafe or when too little damage has been done to necessitate replacing the whole building. In this case, it would be appropriate for sections of materials to be added or stripped back and it could be argued that these new pieces are not hiding the truth, but have become part of the building's past. As mentioned before, even though this does not point to one past through appearance, it could be that history is seen as a story told through time of all the changes and new information added or taken away, rather than a fixed narrative, pointing to events across time rather than a single point in time. Through this side of the argument, the history is not defined as an untruth, but rather a never certain story that is constantly changing as new information becomes unhidden.

Defining history as a constantly changing story however, there is a difficulty in suggesting that as nothing is certain and every perception of the past can change with new evidence acquired, nothing really has any meaning because there is no truth in it. Likewise, these changes to the architectural material of a building, like the Salem Chapel's addition of the curved façade, seems to have no reason or event behind them at all. It suggests the church was changed materially for no purpose other than potentially improving appearance which could be argued is not a significant enough cause. Through this occurrence, it could be said that the "historic" building no longer has any significance because it is made up of opposing sections from different times, standing for not one event or reason. This statement causes us to question whether this building, or any other that has been altered over time, should be preserved when it is a constantly rewritten history. The architecture is therefore only maintained because it is upholding a historical legacy

rather than the truth dictating the choice for it to stand. This again puts the life of the building into the hands of fallible people who create this historical legacy rather than a past legacy of naturally occurring events informing its significant truth.

Additionally, through these alterations to the building's appearance, some may ask if the Salem Chapel should be listed, conserved, and named in the same way, when it is no longer used for its original purpose. This argument links to the concept of Structuralism in linguistics that was developed by Ferdinand de Saussure, that everything is split into a signifier and the signified. In this instance, the signifier would be the word and sound used for Salem Chapel and the signified would be the actual Salem Chapel that is there and can be experienced (Saussure, 1916). However, Saussure claims that although these two elements have a relationship, they can never truly correlate because, as seen previously, everyone has a separate and different perception of what is heard to what is thought of. Saussure therefore depicts that meaning is separate from the actual thing and in this example, the *meaning* of the Chapel is different to the current standing *structure* of the Chapel. This presents the signifier of the Salem Chapel as a concept that may encompass an *idea* of what is there, independent to the *actual* building that can be visited and experienced. Through different information not known to everyone, the concept of the Salem Chapel may provide one thought, but as the building's appearance and purpose have changed over time, the signified Salem Chapel is now something completely different which contradicts the signifier. Therefore, in this example, the signified seems to have been altered and twisted physically so that it hardly resembles the signifier, which

causes us to question whether the physical signified Salem Chapel should be preserved when it no longer relates to its original purpose other than by name and certain original materials.

Expanding this concept of buildings holding onto a history that is not relating anymore to a defined past, it again poses the notion that the building does not need to be protected because there is no consistency of significance anymore. In linking back to historical architecture then, and “embodying” the present, it appears as though the Salem Chapel could be disregarded because it does not speak of this age but only of its history. If this history is not the truth and could be ever-changing, why should something new not be put in its place that captures the “consciousness of the age” (Morris, 1893) and rather speaks to future generations of today’s present and not what is past. It is understandable that the context of Leeds in this instance, would need to be protected and not create any new structures that disrupt the appearance of the city. However, with other buildings on the Hunslet site becoming derelict and with new proposals in place for contemporary architecture, the query is why should buildings like the Salem Chapel, Tetley Brewery and Bridge House, to name others listed on this site, not also be demolished and a new city of contemporary builds created. These contemporary builds in Leeds are already shown in *Figure 9*. If other schemes are in place to regenerate the area and create buildings with a modern visual appearance, it would make sense to stop protecting these heritage buildings whose physical appearance may speak of the past, but are not representing a true history of that past. If Leeds council wanted to keep a legacy intact, surely all the structures in the city would need to remain in their original state, but as the modern world



Figure 9: Leeds Skyline

progresses, so does building technology, resulting in a new age of architecture and therefore, a new art to be displayed. Historical architecture can then be produced in the current day because buildings of the past would not be listed, so a new art of this age could inform future generations, pushing them to produce contemporary technologies progressively. City planners would need to come to a decision about whether their identity is about the past, or whether their identity lies in the present that will become the past.

To continue the discussion, as the visual language of a city is important in sustaining the identity of the area, a lot of buildings are listed and protected because of the connection to the history of the city. If for a moment it was forgotten that this history could be false and have hidden elements to it, the buildings themselves could be a link to a past not worthy to commemorate. Already seen through Bevan's description of architecture as material evidence for the past, reading this physical language of the city assists in questioning the past to understand the present and perhaps being able to create a progressive future. A city with a prominent link to an aspect of history often presents this connection through the form of buildings from that period or monuments and statues. These structures, as discussed, act as reminders of a historic event or figure that informed the present state of the city or culture. However, there is an increasingly common argument coming to light that recognises some of these monuments as a celebration of people who committed violent acts or were involved in movements which are now seen as immoral in the present day. To highlight an example from *Monumental Lies*, "modern Britain was built on the back of slavery" (Bevan, 2022) which shows just one way in which negative events have brought the

modern world to its current recognition. This argument is difficult in making the choice of whether the monuments that now have connotations to a negative history should remain standing, especially when that history is what shaped the present city and culture that stands today.

Some communities would want their story to be shared so that it is constantly revisited and they are not silenced in relating their tragic history to the rest of society. Through this, they can prevent the danger of people in the present being ignorant to these horrific occurrences and hopefully avoid similar circumstances in the future. Alternatively, some communities would prefer these memories of their history to be hidden and infamous figures not to be commemorated for their wrongdoing, causing reflection on why this architecture celebrating negative events should still be preserved when it is keeping that damaging history alive. A figure that Bevan brings into question is Edward Colston, the slave trader whose statue had stood in Bristol since 1895 and was toppled over by Black Lives Matter protestors in 2020 (The Guardian, 2020). Bevan raises the question of why the statue was erected so long after Colston's death and the abolition of slave trade in Britain, not to mention the long wait in removing it from public. Perhaps this was for the city to commemorate the history and trade that brought them to where Bristol was in the present day, but this did not excuse the celebration of something that was no longer accepted nor the lie that surrounded the statue, displaying "Colston as a civic saint" (Bevan, 2022). The historic tales and events that some had associated with the statue, commended this slave trader as a hero, perhaps relating the way he would have wanted to be remembered in society and therefore creating a false history that identifies him



Figure 10: Edward Colston

as in the right. It links back to Nietzsche's idea of "monumental history" and humans convincing themselves that they can become great because their life is about grasping this "self-desiring power" (Nietzsche, 1874). Through the statue's narrative of proclaiming a now regretted moment of history, it emphasises the reasons people may have for not protecting historic monuments that are displaying events from an unpalatable perspective (Figure 10).

This brings us to question who has the right to be remembered in public society and how deciding what is to be recalled in the generations to come, will have an impact on the future of architecture. Future society is significantly influenced by what they believe about their past and what is preserved and what is destroyed matters. The concern is selection bias. As with a writer of history, those who choose what is to be commemorated and what is to be hidden away will allow bias to inch into the research and not decide based on the entire population. If each city can make a choice on where they want their identity to lie in relation to their history, each one builds on a bias that manipulates outsiders' thoughts towards them and can potentially hide the truth to build their identity on a covered past, resulting in an untrue history. If the buildings in these cities have no solid truth connected to them and may be built on a mistruth, it seems none of the buildings and monuments have reason to be preserved for celebration in any form, no matter what their credentials are. Bevan argues that society wants to see the fall of "monumental lies" (Bevan, 2022) so they can uncover the truth of the past without influence from imperfect human contribution. Furthermore, contemporary society has many views that, like history, are easily changed and twisted, raising

the likelihood that one day, future society may disagree with events from the past or even from the present that they used to agree with. Therefore, every building could easily connect to an event that is currently seen positively and later become something that people would rather not celebrate, indicating that all architectural structures could point to a history or past that people want to forget. If every building may one day have reason to be forgotten, none of them should be protected in the long-term. This would make history the wrong informer as to whether buildings should be maintained or not and suggests that the present should be providing insight to design decisions in a contemporary society, rather than the past.

Chapter Five

To return the conversation to the relevance in maintaining material fabric of original architecture as means to maintain connection to a certain history, there is a debate surrounding the preservation of heritage buildings that have been damaged over time. Society often desires to rebuild decrepit buildings that remind them of historic events and restore them to replicate the original structure. John Ruskin believed that “it is impossible...to restore anything that has ever been great or beautiful in architecture” (Ruskin, 1849). However, if the building holds a significant meaning for a community or ties them to memories of their past, a way of dealing with this loss of connection to the past may be to try to recreate what was once there, authentically rebuilding architecture.

Relating to the Salem Chapel which has undergone restoration over time, it could be asked if rebuilding to match the original, causes a loss of significance to what the structure represented and if it “conceals the reality of the present” (Bevan, 2022). The Salem Chapel was awarded the blue plaque for being architecturally significant, however, as there have been changes in the physical fabric over time, questions arise as to where this significance truly comes from. The award could be due to the Chapel’s original materials that have remained since 1791, or from the more recently added sections across the years. If the building has been commemorated for the original materiality it still possesses, the significance points to the physical past of the Chapel and provides the present with a view into the past that more likely speaks of the truth. However, if the significance is rooted in the Salem Chapel as a whole and the changes from restoration that have occurred throughout its life, the celebration is connected to the building’s

ever-changing history and not necessarily to events that actually occurred. As the building has had to be rebuilt and does not contain all the original elements, it could be said that its architectural significance is lost and it should no longer be preserved if it is not being commemorated for its truth, but rather its unnatural alterations that do not link to a significant event. In addition to this, thinking more abstractly into the religious significance that the Salem Chapel claims, if the building is no longer being used to worship God, then should it really be celebrated for religious significance? If the purpose of the structure can also become reason for it to be listed, the argument arises of whether this is enough cause to maintain it when the purpose of buildings is constantly changing. Unless society as a collective publicly recognises that the story and changes a building moves through over time are part of the history of that building, it seems unnecessary to preserve it when the reason to preserve has become irrelevant. The change of purpose as well as appearance gives reason to suggest that the originality has gone and the significance has deteriorated.

A building that should be part of any discussion surrounding restoration over time would be the St Marco Tower in Venice, which has had to receive much rebuilding across the years. Starting construction in the ninth century (Panwar, 2023) and collapsing in 1902, the original tower, shown in *Figure 11*, was replaced in 1912 and underwent other reconstructions after series of fires and lightning strikes. It was debated whether the new build (*Figure 12*), should be a replication of the original tower as the new architecture may not contain the memories, nostalgia and materials that pointed it to its first purpose and events that caused its



Figure 11: Original St Marco Tower



Figure 12: Current St Marco Tower

significance. It was suggested that because of the loss of those materials and its originality, there may have also been a “destruction of memory” (Bevan, 2007) and so the building provides an untrue history to observers through appearance because the current building is no longer associated with the original purpose of erecting it. This suggests that “reconstruction can be another way of erasing history” (Bevan, 2022). As the original tower was built so long ago, building technologies had advanced immensely and new ways to create more structurally sound architecture had evolved. Although the St Marco Tower was changed from the original in terms of materiality, this provided more chance of its preservation for future generations. Furthermore, although not containing that originality, the façade would still evoke a connection to that of before, still linking to the history and hopefully, the past. After its restoration, the tower became a symbol of advancing technology and celebrated the new ways in which the present could improve on the past, relating back to the unnecessary fears of the 1890s architects who were pressured by this need to create historical architecture. Contemporary structures should be using the past and past technologies to progress and inform the modern ways of building, without feeling a sense of inferiority at not producing something like the old. If technologies are advancing, it seems as though current builds should be celebrating the new that has been discovered, as well as the intact original, to show the movement through time of architectural development.

It could be argued further that seeking to replicate exactly what was existing there before does not necessarily result in authenticity and potentially deceives viewers through its appearance. However,

although restored buildings are not the same as what they once were, it is still beneficial in a practical sense to blend with the identity of a city through context. If a city wants to base their identity on visual language that associates with events that shaped the city’s present, they may want to preserve this by the style of their architecture, therefore replicating the original as it has been renovated. This assists in communicating the city’s visual language and therefore speaking to the world of what inspired the city’s architectural design. Even if the original materials are not all there, the new materials that resemble it still invoke a memory or connection to the event or era that the city is wanting to associate themselves with.

Although this method of restoration is beneficial in highlighting a city’s history, alternatively, Carlo Scarpa uses his renovation of the Castelvecchio in Verona to make it obvious what has been changed in the building and to see the movement and amendments through generations. The building was a large, medieval castle which Scarpa renovated with many “decisions balancing the old and new” (Kaszubowska, 2023). As the castle had a long history, Scarpa peeled back layers that had been added to the building over time, revealing original elements, as well as adding his own modern pieces that brought attention to these historical sections. He believed that an “authentic historical experience” (Kaszubowska, 2023) should be established in the building, celebrating what has come before by contrasting with what had been installed presently. Through this method, Scarpa decided to not commemorate the past with unoriginal restoration aiming to look like the original, but rather by highlighting the pieces that have remained and defining period architecture as a celebration of what has been preserved over time. This example demonstrates the belief



Figure 13: Castelvecchio

that conservation of architecture should happen by replacing what was lost and damaged, without trying to copy the original. By keeping those remaining original elements intact and purposely restoring a structure in an obvious, contemporary way (*Figure 13*), this shows buildings' changes over time and connects them to multiple moments of the past. It appears Scarpa believed in maintaining old buildings, not because of any connection to a false history but instead to produce architecture that tells a story across time of different glimpses of the past, informing future generations of the development of building from past to present that they can further develop.

Conclusion

To conclude this presentation of arguments relating to restoring buildings to maintain a legacy based on history, it has been shown here that human influence heavily impacts the answer to this question because of people's ability to manipulate the truth of history, whether purposely or not. An extreme example would be the Chinese government trying to eradicate the Muslim community and their memory by destroying buildings, therefore purposely concealing history. Some cities however, can manipulate the truth accidentally by restoring buildings to match the original state of the structure. This human interference often makes it impossible to know whether a building represents the past truthfully or if it will still portray the truth in the future because of society's changing attitudes. As the world progresses, events and people that shaped society may be viewed as unworthy of being commemorated, connecting symbolic structures to a disagreeable historical perspective instead of the true past that they aim to represent. As the narrative of any given structure can be changed over time, it is history that informs the decisions about the preservation of architecture rather than the building's actual past. This means the full and true significance of a building may no longer be known because of human influence. Therefore, the lack of clarity about the past may mean that historical buildings should not be restored in the traditional way because the uncertainty makes it difficult for this architecture to inform future generations.

However, although the truth of a historic building's past may not be known, such buildings still hold great value by showing insight into the creative minds of the past and acting as reminders for those who place their identity in events that architecture aims to symbolise. Therefore, although buildings have been

developed over time, maybe they should be preserved because they are artworks that inform the present by speaking of past technologies and styles, even if their original significance has been obscured through development. Rogers believed that “no ancient work has significance today unless it can resonate through our voice” (Rogers, 1961), suggesting that heritage buildings should remain if society can use them to invoke a response and develop them into new art of their age.

In the case of the Salem Chapel, it would be up to Leeds council to decide whether they wanted to preserve part of the city’s legacy through its history, even if that history may not be truth or whether they want to show the progression of architectural technologies evident in its structure. They must question whether the significance of the Salem Chapel is found in its original materiality and whether this is worth maintaining to give future generations insight into the architecture of the past. If the Chapel is left in its original state, it will further inspire progression of technology and art. People could then engage with the world and develop design through physical architecture without acquiring too much knowledge of history to progress, challenging Nietzsche’s theory on the dangers of an excess of historical understanding. This would also solve the worries surrounding the creation of historical architecture as people would not lose sight of their work, but rather use idyllic styles of the past to inspire modern building.

Ideally, historic buildings should be protected from any human interference that would distort their past and rather be carefully restored in a way that allows them to be a reminder of the past whilst utilising

present technologies. Leeds city planner should not interfere with listed buildings unless necessary for restoration and even these repairs should speak of the present rather than the past. This would establish listed architecture as celebrations of multiple events in time and preserve a legacy through many stories rather than one. In this way, historical architecture becomes a work of art that commemorates old and new and retains its significance because it “can resonate through our voice” (Rogers, 1961).

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