

# Experiential Preservation as Critical Heritage Practice

## On Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye in Ruins

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### Introduction

If modernity has been associated with progress, a considerable part of its built legacy is facing rapid decay. Caught up in entropic forces of modernist architecture, industrial wastelands and relics of overthrown political systems are turning into *recent ruins*, challenging the preservationist imperative of saving culturally significant objects for an eternal future. While the aesthetic and critical potential of ruination have been richly addressed within art and philosophy, the field of preservation which deals with the flesh of ruination itself almost univocally equates decay with neglect, directing its research and practice at material stabilisation.

This chapter asks what conception of heritage might evolve from a preservation practice that acknowledges layered temporality and decay as aesthetic qualities and subversive potential. The chapter illuminates the question with the case of Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye through the lens of its lifecycle, from its gradual deterioration to its status as a listed and fully restored piece of modernist architecture. Specifically, the chapter draws on architect and thinker Bernard Tschumi's experiential interpretation of the building's state of decay as a point of departure to reflect on the affective qualities of ruination and its dissonance with modern preservationist ideals.

### The paradox of preservation

In theory, preservation values time layers and the unintentional qualities of places. It is a field fundamentally based on the awareness of the gradually fragmentary nature of the built world. Despite this intimate link between preservation and fragmentation, preservation in practice often seems to deny these fundamental aspects of temporality and transformation, all too often restoring places to their allegedly original condition. This is furthermore often framed as a self-explanatory act of care if the object of intervention is already canonical or enrolled in what Laurajane Smith has termed the 'Authorised Heritage



Fig. 1: Colosseum in Rome, before becoming as bare and bald as we know it today. The site once contained a wild untamed garden with over 420 plant species growing among its ruins. François-Marius Granet: Interior View of the Colosseum in Rome. 1804. Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Discourse’ – referring to the governmental and official choices of heritage that current generations ‘must’ care for.<sup>1</sup> Preservation work is, however, discursive work, where each intervention is a choice and an amplification of an object as heritage, often at the expense of other seemingly less significant objects. While ruination in its abject, smelly, and uncanny form can seem alienating to the subject encountering it, so can preservation in its makeover of this.

This chapter suggests an exploration of newer and more recent ruins as a possible counter-site to the ancient and neatly sanitised heritage object, where decay has long been arrested (see Fig. 1). As has been argued by Gavin Lucas, ruins of the recent past offer an ‘unfamiliar familiarity’, which might position them particularly well for asking questions about the nature of ruination and our relation to its preservation.<sup>2</sup> Unlike classical heritage ruins, where decay has been kept at bay for centuries, we are consciously witnessing the process of ruination with modern ruins. Living with contemporary ruination thus poses the potential for an exploration of alternative approaches that contests normative preservation strategies. Here, a different attentiveness to how history is brought forth to us at such evolving ruins is key, one that emphasises history as a sensed and frictional reality rather than being bound up in so-called historical records. This might also imply letting go of control and using doubt and uncertainty instead of completion and resolution as the leitmotifs of preservation. As architect Andrew Ballantyne puts it: ‘If we think of buildings in connection with the life that produces them, then we can see that when we look at the ruins of buildings, we are

1 Laurajane Smith: *Uses of Heritage*. New York: Routledge 2006, p. 29.

2 Gavin Lucas: Ruins. In: Paul Graves-Brown, Rodney Harrison and Angela Piccini (eds.): *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of the Contemporary World*. New York: Oxford University Press 2013, p. 2.

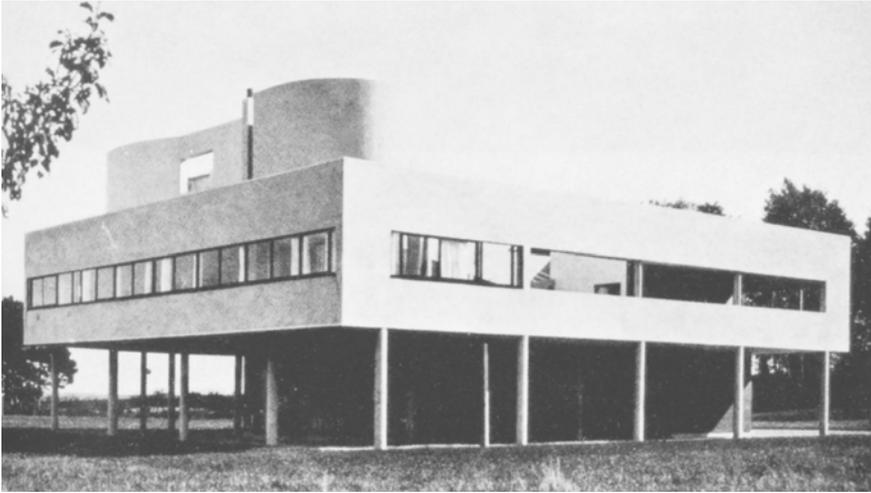


Fig. 2: Villa Savoye by Le Corbusier in the French town of Poissy shortly after completion around 1929–30, view from the north from the exhibition album 'Modern Architecture: International Exhibition'. Museum of Modern Art, New York, 9 February through 23 March 1932.

looking at powerful and incontrovertible evidence of *something*; but evidence of what? It is often difficult to say.<sup>3</sup>

## Le Corbusier and preservation

Now considered one of the most recognisable and renowned examples of the modernist international style in architecture, Villa Savoye in the French town of Poissy was designed by Swiss-French architect Le Corbusier and his Cousin Pierre Jeanneret between 1928 and 1931 (see Fig. 2). The building was home to the Savoye couple, but after only a few years living there, they left the villa in 1938. Interestingly, from the very beginning the Savoyes continuously complained about structural damage as well as leaking roofs.<sup>4</sup> In this way, decay was almost built into its 'original' state. From 1940 to 1945 the house was used by the German occupying forces, followed by the Americans; it was finally used as an agricultural warehouse. Upon abandonment, the villa gradually deteriorated and was eventually scheduled for demolition by the municipality of Poissy, who had bought the property in order to build a school on the site (see Fig. 3 and Fig. 4). In the early 1960s, architect and critic Bernard Tschumi visited Villa Savoye, describing his evocative encounter with the weathered and abandoned site in his 1976 essay 'Architecture and Transgression':

- 3 Andrew Ballantyne: Architecture as Evidence. In: Dana Arnold, Elvan Altan Ergut, Belgin Turan Ozkaya (eds): Rethinking Architectural Historiography. London/New York: Routledge 2006, pp. 36–50, here p. 36.
- 4 Kevin D Murphy: The Villa Savoye and the Modernist Historic Monument. In: Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians 61 (2002), 1, pp. 68–89, here p. 72.



Fig. 3: Villa Savoye around 1960. Rene Burri/Agentur Focus © F.L.C./VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2022.

By the late 1960s one of Modernism's defining buildings, Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye near Paris, came under threat of demolition, resulting in many young architecture students demonstrating in favour of saving it. I was one of them. When I visited it, something incredible happened; the building was amazing, it was quite astonishing in its state of decay – in its state of complete dereliction from many years of neglect. It occurred to me then that perhaps architecture is not only about perfection and the realisation of an abstract concept; it is also about the sensations of the occupant, including making room for an interaction between building and feelings/body. I therefore began to press for a resolution through which the Villa Savoye could be preserved in the state in which it was at the time. The building stank; it was filled with graffiti; it embodied a very different presence than that conceived by Le Corbusier [sic!], and more emotional change than contemporary design could achieve. Amusingly enough, the building came to be completely restored, but the restoration was so pure it was shocking, prompting a programme of de-restoration – restoration with less 'make-up'.<sup>5</sup>

Tschumi's retrospective writing is interesting as it entails two views on the architectural: first, it is seen as a demonstration of architectural principles, as a materialisation of an idea; and second, it is architecture as an experiential evocative reality. In theory, thinking on Le Corbusier's style and vision for his building, Tschumi's first response as a student of architecture was to advocate for the preservation of the building, understood as a stabilisation of the material, turning

5 Bernard Tschumi: Intervention 1: Advertisements of Architecture. In: Louis Rice, David Littlefield (eds): *Transgression: Towards an Expanded Field of Architecture*. London, New York: Routledge 2015, pp. 10–16, here p. 10.



Fig. 4: Villa Savoye around 1960. Rene Burri/Agentur Focus © F.L.C./VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2022.

it back to its original form. Upon the affective encounter of the *actual* building in its state of decay, however, Tschumi's view on the building changed. Instead, he was imagining a non-interventionist 'preservation' in which the olfactory and sensuous qualities of the building's decay became the object of preservation. A clue about the subversive and critical potential of such an experiential encounter with decaying architecture can here be elaborated by New York-based artist and architect Vito Acconci: 'If the space presented is complete, what's left for the viewer is to relive the space – this is the domain of fiction, the impulse is preservation (conservative); if the space presented is not yet complete, what's left for the viewer is to try out the space, attempt the space – this is the domain of essay, the impulse is change (radical).'<sup>6</sup> What Acconci refers to is a move from architecture as representation in its completeness to architecture as a performative space in its incompleteness – performative in the sense of offering a void for the visitor to enact. What Tschumi's experience of incompleteness offers is the ruinous as a tool of reflection – in his case, reflection on the very architectural thing about architecture.

Ironically, given Tschumi's 'turn' in perception, the rescue of Villa Savoye quickly developed into an international campaign in which most of the architectural community took part, including Le Corbusier himself and the architectural historian Sigfried Gideon. In 1964 it was thus one of the first officially modern monuments. As Kevin Murphy writes: 'With its rescue from near ruin in the mid 1960s, Villa Savoye came to stand as a monument to the first phase of Modernism, which, by the time of the building's preservation, was perceived

6 Mikkel Bille: *Elements of Architecture: Assembling Archaeology, Atmosphere and the Performance of Building Spaces*. New York, London: Routledge 2016, p. 312.



Fig. 5: Villa Savoye after ‘make-up’ in 2015. Paul Kozlowski © F.L.C. / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2022.

as a historical phenomenon.<sup>7</sup> Gaining monument status prompted a number of renovation campaigns, with the most recent being from 1985 to 1997. Since the building gained monument status, the site has recurrently been open to visitors in between the renovations. As part of Le Corbusier’s broader body of work, Villa Savoye acquired the status of being a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2016 (Fig. 5).

### The public discourse of the ruinous Villa Savoye

Le Corbusier’s early ‘modern masterpiece’ stood finished in 1929, but already by 1937–38 it was abandoned for over 20 years until 1959. Nevertheless, when looking into the discourse of the history of the building, the building’s phase of non-intentional use and ruination, lasting over two decades, has been almost entirely left out in writings on the building. It is not an overstatement to say that this lack of attentiveness or even exploration of ruination points directly towards a more general and prevalent aesthetic hierarchy within preservation. The case also shows how deeming something significant is coupled with a cleansing aesthetic. In this way, the appreciation of the ruin as an object of heritage preservation is often expressed as an intolerance of its ruination. This resembles urbanist Kai Vöckler’s argument that ‘patina works well in the case of ancient ruins, but not in the modern architecture of the suburbs’. In examining the reception of Villa Savoye in its ruined state from abandonment in 1937–38 until 1958, Vöckler’s statement seems to be confirmed. A review of some of the most seminal works about the site shows that its state of ruination is dealt with either in negative terms or by way of simply leaving aside this part of the history of the building.

7 Murphy 2002 (see note 4), here p. 68.

The history of the building, beyond the intentions of its creator or its restorers, is described in only two sentences in the book *Le Corbusier: The Villa Savoye* by Jacques Sbriglio.<sup>8</sup> Here the author briefly states how 'the Villa Savoye was subjected to a series of defacements brought on by the various activities it was obliged to house'.<sup>9</sup> Although the author of the book is naturally a guardian of Le Corbusier's idea of the building, the blindness to aspects of weathering and abandonment might reveal how architects rarely envision the aspect of deterioration as part of the biographies of their designs. Similarly, a text about the building by The Getty Conservation Institute, an internationally highly respected institution for the preservation of monuments, only briefly mentions how the years of occupation by German and Allied troops caused extensive damage.<sup>10</sup> In a one-and-a-half-hour public lecture about the building hosted by the Institute in 2013, the speaker Pierre-Antoine Gatier likewise only had one picture of its ruined state, with the commentary: 'that is a sad view of the villa'. In the lecture, he also referred to how the French ministry of culture expressed embarrassment about the condition of the building at the time.<sup>11</sup>

The public reception of the building in its ruinous state is in no way surprising. On the contrary, it seems to be an affirmation of how architecture, seen as testimony, is bound up in discourses on material stabilisation in order to function as 'heritage'. The most recent renovation completed at the end of 1990s was based on the condition of the building as it was around 1930, as well as in 1965 after the first renovation, its most recent 'make-up' practically looking like a reconstruction when compared to its deteriorated state during abandonment.<sup>12</sup> About the restorations of Le Corbusier's collected works, the UNESCO World Heritage List states: 'In terms of materials, some sites have been restored and partly reconstructed in recent years, after neglect or disfigurement. Overall, the modifications can be seen to be reasonable and proportionate.'<sup>13</sup> The statement is symptomatic of the kind of change that is acceptable for architectural heritage to go through – not that of decay but that of transforming buildings into the documents that they are supposed to be.<sup>14</sup>

8 Jacques Sbriglio: *Le Corbusier: The Villa Savoye*. Basel/Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter 2008.

9 Sbriglio 2008 (see note 8), pp. 152.

10 The Getty Conservation Institute: *The Villa Savoye: A Manifesto for Modernity* (24 October 2013), [https://www.getty.edu/conservation/publications\\_resources/public\\_programs/villa\\_savoye.html](https://www.getty.edu/conservation/publications_resources/public_programs/villa_savoye.html) (accessed 05.04.2022).

11 Pierre-Antoine Gatier: *The Villa Savoye: A Manifesto for Modernity*. Video on the YouTube channel of The Getty Conservation Institute (20 November 2013), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xG5W3lkSVYk&t=45> (accessed 27.05.2022).

12 Gatier 2013 (see note 11).

13 UNESCO World Heritage Convention: Decision 40 COM 8B.31 Examination of Nominations of Cultural Properties to the World Heritage List. Report of the Decisions Adopted during the 40<sup>th</sup> Session of the World Heritage Committee (Istanbul/UNESCO, 2016), <https://whc.unesco.org/en/decisions/6809/> (accessed 06.04.2022).

14 Jorge Otero-Pailos: *An Olfactory Reconstruction of Philip Johnson's Glass House*. In: *AA Files*, 57 (2008), pp. 40–45.

As noted in Kevin D. Murphy's article on Villa Savoye, however, the ruinous state of the building in the 1950s was in fact just a culmination of a process of decay that began almost before the house was completed.<sup>15</sup> This information also stems from correspondence between Mrs. Savoye and Le Corbusier. Here Mrs. Savoye, as the client, complained about numerous leaks in the house even before moving in; and shortly before moving out in 1937 she wrote again: 'It's raining in the hall, it's raining on the ramp and the wall of the garage is absolutely soaked. What's more, it's still raining in my bathroom, which floods in bad weather.'<sup>16</sup> Previously Mrs. Savoye had described the house as 'cold and damp'.<sup>17</sup>

In their book *On Weathering*, architects Mostafavi and Leatherbarrow note how the main causes of weathering are inadequate instructions from the architect and poor execution.<sup>18</sup> Their observation is interesting, as it points to the authorship of the architect as a very selective one. Here, authorship of architecture most often pertains to the style and vision behind a building, which are aspects leading to an architect's appraisal within art history. The case of Villa Savoye, however, shows how, in fact, Le Corbusier himself seems to have been the 'author' of the deterioration of his own building right from the beginning, given the use of vulnerable materials. The examples of the public discourse around Villa Savoye in this way point to how modernism and its objectives for its architecture have been extended into the field of preservation of modernist architecture as well. Or, as Lahiji and Friedman conclude in their essay about the Villa: 'What the rescuers of the Villa Savoye preserve is not, in fact, Le Corbusier's *construction spirituelle*; it is rather their own corporeal ego, which projects itself in order to repress the one thing that constantly threatens to return to haunt the body: the abject, the "leftover"'.<sup>19</sup>

On a practical level, such considerations are particularly interesting in the context of steadily increasing renovations of recent modernist and post-war modernist buildings. The restoration of Ludwig Leo's Umlauftank 2 (1974) in Berlin, carried out by HG Merz Architekten and supported by the Wüstenrot Foundation, can be considered typical for current preservation practice of seemingly cutting-edge standard. The project has been communicated as 'experimental and pioneering' in its field – a kind of showcase example for the preservation of younger architectural heritage. However, according to the restoration architect Hans Günter Merz, the approaches when it comes to 20<sup>th</sup> century architecture are the same as with older architecture, although the materials might be different.<sup>20</sup>

On a closer look, the rhetoric around wear and tear and decay in the case of Umlauftank 2 was strikingly similar to the example of Villa Savoye as analysed

15 Murphy 2002 (see note 4), here p. 72.

16 Sbriglio 2008 (see note 8), here p. 146.

17 Sbriglio 2008 (see note 8), here p. 145.

18 Mohsen Mostafavi, David Leatherbarrow: *On Weathering: The Life of Buildings in Time*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 1993, p. 23.

19 Nadir Lahiji and Daniel S. Friedman: *At the Sink: Architecture in Abjection*. In: Nadir Lahiji, Daniel S. Friedman (eds): *Plumbing: Sounding Modern Architecture*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press 1997, pp. 35–63, here p. 36.

20 Wüstenrot Stiftung: *Ludwig Leo: Umlauftank 2*. Leipzig: Spector Books 2020.



Fig. 6: Interior view of Villa Savoye after 'make-up' in 2015.  
Paul Kozlowski © F.L.C. / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2022.

above: 'Modern building materials do not necessarily become more beautiful as they age',<sup>21</sup> was one statement referencing the found condition of Umlauftank 2 (see Fig. 6, 7). 'The Umlauftank has the problem that it was built from materials that age miserably', is the diagnosis in the publication about the process of restoration.<sup>22</sup> Although the different parties involved speak of wanting to preserve the 'historically marked substance', the washed-out light blue was returned to a shiny ultramarine blue, the rusty sheet metal panels were replaced, the 'Rosa Röhre' (The Pink Tube) – as the building was nicknamed – was returned to a bright pink colour (see Fig. 8). In this regard, the restoration of the 'Rosa Röhre' seems like just a continuation of how preservation of modernist buildings was defined when beginning restoration on Villa Savoye in 1965 – that is, homage and humility to the architect behind the building. In the case of Umlauftank 2, other approaches were hardly discussed. Meanwhile, the field of preservation continues to invest in research towards material stability and durability, and that without excuses: 'We didn't want to build a ruin.'<sup>23</sup>

21 Christine Habermalz: Sanierung des Umlauftank 2: Das Comeback der Rosa Röhre. Deutschlandfunk Kultur (26 November 2017), [https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/sanierung-des-umlauftank-2-das-comeback-der-rosa-roehre.1013.de.html?dram:article\\_id=401625](https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/sanierung-des-umlauftank-2-das-comeback-der-rosa-roehre.1013.de.html?dram:article_id=401625) accessed (06.04.2022).

22 Wüstenrot Stiftung 2020 (see note 20), here p. 207.

23 Wüstenrot Stiftung 2020 (see note 20), here p. 210.



Fig. 7: Ludwig Leo's Umlauftank 2 in Berlin before restoration (2012).



Fig. 8: Ludwig Leo's Umlauftank 2 in Berlin upon restoration (2018).

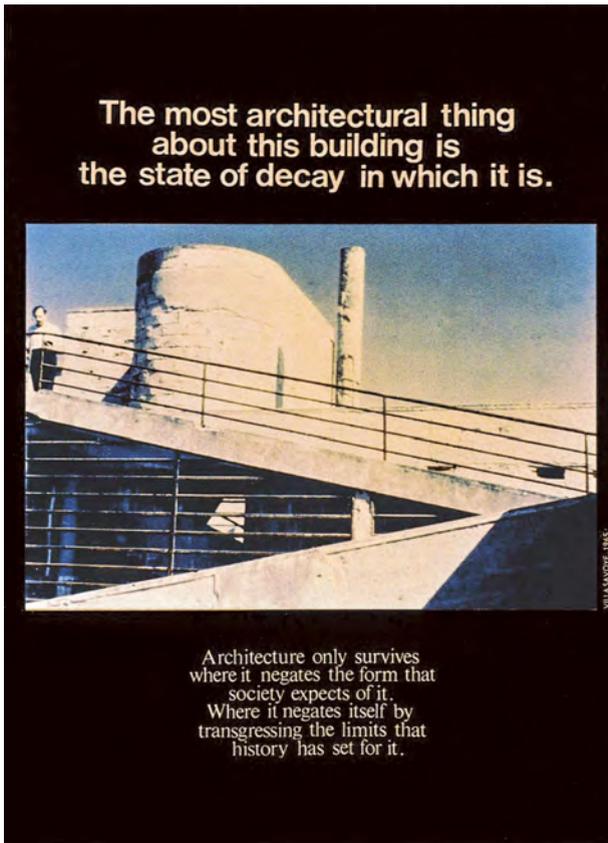


Fig. 9: Bernard Tschumi: *Advertisements for Architecture* (1976–1977).

## Bernard Tschumi and experiential preservation

Besides his essay, Tschumi also processed his experience of the ruined Villa Savoye in his work *Advertisements for Architecture* (1976–77), a series of postcard-sized text and image compilations that he produced in the 1970s (see Fig. 9). Each of them was a kind of manifesto dealing with the dissonant relationship between the immediate spatial experience and the theoretical concepts of architecture. The first advertisement was dedicated to Villa Savoye, the image showing its state of decay, the text reading: ‘The most architectural thing about this building is the state of decay in which it is. Architecture only survives where it negates the form that society expects of it. Where it negates itself by transgressing the limits that history has set for it.’<sup>24</sup> Tschumi’s wording is interesting, as it can be read as a direct anti-preservation manifesto. Not for the purpose of rebellion itself, but because preservation can be seen as an act of destruction depending on what we consider architectural. According to Tschumi, buildings only develop into architecture when they evade a controlled state.

24 Tschumi 2015 (see note 5), p. 11.

That the architectural quality evolves from the ‘unauthored’ and unintended is reminiscent of earlier thinking on preservation, before it became a codified practice. Austrian art historian Alois Riegl spoke of ‘age value’ as a monument value in and of itself.<sup>25</sup> Here, the monument does not represent a deliberate message or an event to remember, but functions as a kind of material memory, described with the words of Torgeir Bangstad as how ‘things literally perform the effects of their own pasts’.<sup>26</sup> To make age value productive as ‘memory’ is once and for all to detach the concept of heritage from material stabilisation. It requires an exploration of testimony as a different presence of a building than that of merely being a historical record. Going back to Tschumi’s description of his experience of the encounter with Villa Savoye as expressed in his essay, we can thus try to ponder this as a momentum for preservation to approach its object otherwise, even if this means viewing the buildings as slippery signifiers – something whose meaning and messy temporalities we cannot easily resolve. Tschumi’s valuation of the building in his essay operates from affect being evoked. The ‘amazing’ and ‘astonishing’, as described by Tschumi, is here not related to a historical event, a typology, a style, or a cultural practice, but rather refers to how the building testifies to its own history and has not yet been deemed useful as a collective cultural resource for us. Seen from a conventional preservation perspective, the building might thus be described as ‘unproductive’ of value in its phase of abandonment.

This, however, opens a vast field for thinking about cultural productivity differently, and the ruinous immediately becomes a field for reflection. The immediacy of experience for Tschumi might not be a contradiction to the building as a temporal and historical phenomenon. With reference to Brian Massumi and his concept of affect, immediacy is in fact intensively inclusive of the past, as it entails the *force* of the past upon encounter.<sup>27</sup> That Tschumi points at astonishment, and that something ‘occurs’ to him, is likewise directing us towards a sense of wonder. Just like immediacy, wonder is not a mode of cutting off the past, but maybe it is even a radicalisation of our relation to the past. As elaborated by Sarah Ahmed, ‘wonder allows us to see the surfaces of the world as made, and as such wonder opens up rather than suspends historicity.’<sup>28</sup> Le Corbusier’s Villa Savoye is not there as an idea: it is there as something made, made from wear and tear. In the experiential sense, heritage is uncovering its own material vulnerability, and through that, is transforming it from representational object into the domain of abject. In its decaying state, heritage becomes thrown at us as an existential condition. Tschumi’s *Advertisements* could here offer answers to a more considerate and non-interventionist preservation practice. Certainly, they are of critical concern for the materiality and, in a sense, ‘caring’ of the building, albeit in text and image.

25 Alois Riegl: Der moderne Denkmalkultus: Sein Wesen und seine Entstehung. In: Bauwelt Fundamente 80, Konservieren, nicht restaurieren: Streitschriften zur Denkmalpflege um 1900, 80 (1988): pp. 43–87.

26 Torgeir Bangstad: Beyond Presentism: Heritage and the Temporality of Things. In: *Ethnologia Europaea* 49 (2019): 115–132, here p. 129.

27 Brian Massumi: *Politics of Affect*. Cambridge: Polity Press 2015, p. 148.

28 Feministkilljoys: *Feminist Wonder*. (28 July 2014), <https://feministkilljoys.com/2014/07/28/feminist-wonder/> (accessed 06.04.2022).

## Patina and the modern: A preservationist leitmotif?

Not long after Tschumi's *Advertisements* project, the aging and weathering of modern architecture was the topic of the book by architects Mohsen Mostafavi and David Leatherbarrow, *On Weathering: The Life of Buildings in Time*.<sup>29</sup> Here they ask: 'But is weathering only subtraction, can it not also add and enhance? [...] From one point of view [...] the accumulation of dirt enriches; from another, it dissolves the building.'<sup>30</sup> In the book they therefore demonstrate how architectural changes caused by nature and time are perceived as destruction within the paradigm of modern architecture, also recalling urbanist Kai Vöckler's statement on how patina only works well with ancient ruins. As Mostafavi and Leatherbarrow note: 'Staining erosion, and surface faults seem to be antithetical to the modern movement's ideal of "whiteness"'.<sup>31</sup> With their observations they also refer to Villa Savoye, which occupies the first two images of the publication, one picturing the building as renovated, the other showing it in its deteriorated state. With reference to Le Corbusier, they draw the conclusion that, from the point of view of modernity, any life of a building post-completion – be it through uses or natural forces – would always be assessed as impairment.<sup>32</sup> On the contrary, Mostafavi and Leatherbarrow present an understanding of weathering as a creation of a new surface made by nature and the environment, and as a process which can productively change a building over time.<sup>33</sup> In this way, erosion of a surface caused by weathering also adds new surfaces set free by the very same material.

To 'save' a building and return it to its so-called 'original' state is the rhetoric used and employed as self-explanatory terms within much conventional western preservation practice, as elaborated by Laurajane Smith with the aforementioned 'Authorised Heritage Discourse'. This practice seems not to change with modernist architecture becoming embedded in heritage and preservation discourses. As with the case of Villa Savoye, the concepts of authenticity and integrity, which are two guiding parameters within UNESCO's preservation guidelines, once again refer to a single building or the broader oeuvre of Le Corbusier in its entirety. These are, however, concepts that could also be interpreted in favour of the aesthetic and experiential qualities of decay and ephemerality, pointing at how different elements and materials of a building also have their 'native' and authentic ways of behaving in interaction with their environment.

When looking to the Japanese concept of Wabi-Sabi, rooted in 15<sup>th</sup> century Japan as a process-based approach to objects, the western interpretation of authenticity clearly comes forth as a construction and anything but universal.<sup>34</sup>

29 Mostafavi, Leatherbarrow 1993 (see note 18).

30 Mostafavi, Leatherbarrow 1993 (see note 18), p. 42.

31 Mostafavi, Leatherbarrow 1993 (see note 18), p. 72.

32 Mostafavi, Leatherbarrow 1993 (see note 18), p. 82.

33 Mostafavi, Leatherbarrow 1993 (see note 18), pp. 26, 42.

34 The UNESCO World Heritage List operates from the viewpoint that its listed heritage should have 'Outstanding Universal Value' (OUV). See UNESCO World Heritage Convention: The Criteria for Selection, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/criteria/> (accessed 06.04.2022).

In the book *Wabi-Sabi for Artists, Architects and Designers*, architect and aesthetic philosopher Leonard Koren explains the Japanese concept, describing its principles as the acceptance of reality and the inevitability of the transience of life.<sup>35</sup> Here, the entire idea of completeness and perfection is completely questioned, and the 'original state' of an object is rather achieved by the very fact that things deteriorate and break.<sup>36</sup> This approach becomes particularly clear when compared to modernity: 'Modernity: purity increases its expressiveness; wabi-sabi: Corrosion and pollution intensify its expressiveness.'<sup>37</sup> What Tschumi addresses is the effect of the corrosion of modern architecture. He thereby calls into question the modernist ideology of purity, the idea of a pure original, and thus the conventional notions of monument preservation. Finnish architect and former professor for architectural theory at the TU Vienna, Kari Jormakka, summarises Tschumi's approach: 'He points out that modern architecture refused to recognise the passage of time. By decaying, Villa Savoye made the passage of time visible and thus transgressed the taboo of modernism.'<sup>38</sup>

With his manifesto, Tschumi not only questions the concept of material integrity, but also the claimed objectivity (operating for the common good) of monument preservation by way of his focus on the sensuous and subjective perception. In this way, Tschumi presents us a *modus operandi* of preservation that favours the moment of interaction between the building and the recipient instead of predefined categories. Accordingly, Tschumi's interpretation of Villa Savoye can be seen as an impulse for conventional preservation practices to approach their objects differently. Such an 'approaching otherwise' intriguingly seems to inspire contemporary critical heritage research. Until recently, a systematic critique of conventional and – as shown in this chapter – 'modern' preservation has come from Critical Heritage Studies, whose association contests what it sees as the privileging of the 'old, grand, prestigious, expert approved sites' within the domain of preservation.<sup>39</sup> Such criticism has, however, been strongly rooted in discourse analysis, whereas new developments within what has been termed 'experimental preservation' uses physical intervention as a way of touching the realm of experience, as a route to questioning dominant views on architecture as testimony.<sup>40</sup> Consequently, within this paradigm of preservation as a field of experimentation, the notion of intervention has gone from an objective of care and maintenance to becoming a play with boundaries, modifications, re-contextualisation and contrasting. Likewise, there seems to be a more practically oriented critique of authorised and governmental preservation

35 Leonard Koren: *Wabi-Sabi für Künstler, Architekten und Designer*. Köln: Wasmuth 1995.

36 Koren 1995 (see note 35), p. 47.

37 Koren 1995 (see note 35), p. 27.

38 Kari Jormakka: *The Most Architectural Thing*. In: Thomas Mical (ed.): *Surrealism and Architecture*. London: Routledge 2005, pp. 290–317, here p. 295.

39 Association of Critical Heritage Studies: *History*, <https://www.criticalheritagestudies.org/history> (accessed 06.04.2022).

40 Jorge Otero-Pailos, Erik Fenstad Langdalen, Thordis Arrhenius: *Experimental Preservation*. Zürich: Lars Müller Publishers 2016.

from the field of contemporary archaeology.<sup>41</sup> Closely connected to the field of preservation in its privileged access to the flesh of the fragment, this turn within archaeology favours subjective experience, as this emphasises the past not as a static relic, but as something to continuously negotiate the meaning of.<sup>42</sup> As Icelandic archaeologist Þóra Pétursdóttir shows, this kind of modern archaeology entails both a critique of modern preservation – in the sense of belonging to modern ideals, which are practically outdated – as well as offering practical methodologies for how to approach the ruinous heritage of the recent past in ways that are more attentive to the material as found, rather than to our ideas of how it should circulate effectively within the heritage industry.<sup>43</sup> Turning this attentiveness into an actual preservation strategy is the topic of cultural geographer Caitlin DeSilvey in her book *Curated Decay: Heritage beyond Saving*, which won the Historic Preservation Book Prize in 2018.<sup>44</sup> Here, DeSilvey addressed the care of sites at risk, many of the sites stemming from a recent past and actively decaying, as seen through the concepts of ecology and entropy. Through an explorative and subjective tone of voice she suggests preservation as a sort of collaboration with natural processes rather than a fight against it, looking into concrete management strategies pertaining to this.

These are all contemporary movements within Critical Heritage Studies, but they all seem to draw the contours of a critique that stems from the language of materiality, a language so bound up in conventional preservation itself. Essentially, these more recent theoretical developments could be interpreted as proposals for how to do preservation otherwise – preservation also entailing the mere work of documenting and interpreting a ruin creatively, just like Tschumi did. In this way, preservation could turn into a self-reflexive and epistemological project: one that is just as creative as a restorative field of practice.

## Abstract

### Experientielle Bewahrungsansätze als kritische Denkmalpflegepraxis

#### Zu Le Corbusiers Villa Savoye als Ruine

Das kritische Potenzial der Ruine wird in Kunst und Philosophie seit Langem behandelt. Die Denkmalpflege, die im Grunde in ihrer täglichen Praxis mit dem Wesen der Ruinierung befasst ist, setzt bis heute Verfall mit Vernachlässigung gleich und beschäftigt sich mit Fragen materieller Haltbarkeit und Stabilisierungen. Aus einer erfahrungsbezogenen, experientiellen Perspektive betrachtet stellt sich die Frage, welche Konzeption von Kulturerbe sich aus der

41 Rodney Harrison, John Schofield: *After Modernity: Archaeological Approaches to the Contemporary Past*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2010.

42 Harrison and Schofield (see note 41), p. 5.

43 Þóra Pétursdóttir: *Concrete Matters: Towards an Archaeology of Things*. PhD Dissertation, University of Tromsø UIT, 2013.

44 Caitlin DeSilvey: *Curated Decay: Heritage beyond Saving*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2017.

Anerkennung mehrschichtiger Zeitlichkeit und des Verfalls als produktive Qualität ableiten lässt. Eine Antwort darauf gibt die Gegenüberstellung des Lebenszyklus von Le Corbusiers Villa Savoye als restaurierter Ikone der Moderne mit der affektiven Begegnung des Architekten Bernard Tschumi mit der Stätte während des Verfalls in den 1960er Jahren. Diese Betrachtung führt zu Überlegungen über die Denkmalpflege als ein kreatives und nicht notwendigerweise restauratives Praxisfeld.