

social and geographic system, or of the unwillingness or inability of present-day actors to take historic roles. There are modern myths to avoid, or temptations to sugarcoat the past, to forget the caste rigidity and social isolation of a military post, for example. How can children be induced to play the way they used to? Who wants to demonstrate a shameful or unwanted past, particularly if the show is for some presumably “superior” group of spectators? The villagers of delightfully retarded Stensjö, put on the national payroll when it became a Swedish historic area, soon wanted to enjoy modern facilities, and, when rebuffed, they simply moved away. Reconstructed environments exist today and not in the past time they mimic, and they are filled with modern tourists.

Passive demonstrations are the rule: the visitors gape and move on. Such enterprises would be even more effective if the observers were instructed to become the actors. The ordinary equipment of the time should be available for use. However clumsily, visitors might smooth with an adz, wear old clothes, cook and eat according to old recipes, dance the quadrille, plow with oxen, or warp a yardarm around. In that way they might begin to penetrate into some sense of the life of an earlier time. Were the visitors given the opportunity to live for a week as the people of that time lived and to suffer, at least temporarily, some of the real pleasures and penalties of adequate performance, the penetration would be deeper. A small group of high school students recently spent five days in a one-room cottage in the reconstructed Plimoth Plantation in Massachusetts.⁸ They wore heavy Pilgrim clothes, ate the coarse Pilgrim food, cooked it over an open fire, hauled wood and water, scoured pots with sand, read and sewed by firelight. It was a difficult but instructive week. Even then, they knew they were not threatened by starvation, disease, or Indian attack.

The settings should illustrate not simply the “great” moments of the period but the full spectrum of its culture. Re-created pasts ought to be based on the knowledge and values of the present. We want them to change as present knowledge and values change, just as history is rewritten. One danger in the preservation of environment lies in its very power to encapsulate some image of the past, an image that may in time prove to be mythical or irrelevant. For preservation is not simply the saving of old things but the maintaining of a response to those things. This response can be transmitted, lost, or modified. It may survive beyond the real thing itself. We should expect to see conflicting views of the past, based on the conflicting values of the present. Diverse environmental museums might present divergent interpretations

of the Civil War, for example, or the Yankee and Irish views of what it was like in Boston in the 1850s. They would look at the conquest of the West through Indian eyes as well as those of the white pioneer. If so, it should be possible for a student to go from one presentation to the other, in the same way that he can compare different verbal interpretations. Environmental preservation has always had political as well as esthetic and educational motives. Groups in power save prominent symbols of their prestige, while others must be more discreet. But plural meanings could be made explicit in reconstruction.

The city itself can be a historical teaching device, an aim now served by the occasional guided tour or plaque. That “William Blake lived here” is trivial, unless the visible structure influenced what Blake did, or expressed his personality, or unless its location had some bearing on his personal history. The city can be enormously informative, since the pattern of remains is a vast if jumbled historical index. Signs, tours, guides, and other communications devices can bring out the latent history of a complex site, with little of the interference with present function that may be caused by massive physical reconstructions. The kingly bypass of a rebellious City of London by the water route from Westminster to the Tower can be demonstrated, or the successive flights of middle-class residents before the oncoming workingmen. Illustrated walks can be laid out, and crucial remains made visible—incorporated in other structures or underground or even underwater. The past can be shown in immediate relevance to the present: old-fashioned clothes in a clothing store, former work methods in a factory, previous illustrations of a site on the site itself. Indeed, the resources going into communication should be as large as, or larger than, those devoted to preservation.

The image of the physical environment has been used for centuries as a mental peg on which to hang material to be remembered, from the memory system of Simonides of Ceos in 500 B.C. to the imaginary walks of S. V. Shereshevskii in this century.⁹ In the sixteenth century, Camillo actually built a memory theater in Venice, a wooden structure whose seats, gangways, and images had the sole purpose of symbolizing man’s knowledge of the universe. Martin Pawley has recently suggested a “time house”—a family dwelling unit that automatically records and on request replays the sights and sounds of the life of the house. The thought that family life would be continuously watched and recorded is a little chilling, but it is quite reasonable to think that the real remains of a city, in conjunction with print, film, and recording, might consciously be used to retain and teach what