

Chapter 2

When Popular Religion Becomes Elite Heritage: Tensions and Transformations at the Shrine of St. Padre Pio of Pietrelcina

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Introduction

Tensions exist between what we can call “elite” heritage and popular culture. These stem not necessarily from an intrinsically elitist meaning, but rather the way in which that meaning necessarily shifts the types of interactions between the heritage object and people. In particular, this is a shift from being intimately enmeshed in “popular culture,” in which the object is valued for the way in which it interacts with, and often is seen as, one of the people, to, very generally, something different: an object of heritage that is set apart, viewed, and conserved. This is largely an epistemological shift; that is, it is not a shift in the level of value that the site is believed to possess, but rather a shift in how that value is perceived: what meaning the object has, through what means and what types of interventions best highlights or emphasizes those meanings, and, most importantly, through what sort of interactions—and through which bodily senses—is that meaning most effectively or appropriately elicited.

These tensions are particularly high when popular culture takes on a spiritual or religious dimension—that is, when the object is perceived to be sacred for popular religious devotion. Both heritage practitioners and especially heritage theorists have traditionally held an ambivalent stance towards the sacred in heritage sites, particularly Western ones. To wit, while a UNESCO study (1994) found that its earliest World Heritage sites were predominantly European religious constructions such as cathedrals and religious artworks, they were deemed to be evocative of universal heritage not for any understanding of their sacredness, but rather for their refined aesthetics, innovative architectural design, or socio-historical significance.

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This ambivalence towards the sacred may stem from the secularization of Europe—and indeed the West—but it might also have to do with the scientization of values that are inherent in what Svetlana Alpers (1991, p. 27) calls the “museum effect,” in which objects that are designated to be of heritage are valued precisely for their historical, political, aesthetic, anthropological, and social value. Discourses and practices of tangible heritage often are incumbent on preservation; an object is of such scientific value only if it remains physically present on earth. Its value thus lies in its authentic materiality, not its spirit—which, as some indigenous peoples (i.e. the Zuni) argue in their struggles to have museums repatriate their religious relics and human remains, reaches its fullness only if it is released through the death or destruction of the cultural property itself (see Ferguson et al. 1996). Thus, material cultural heritage in the traditional paradigm is of this world, not otherworldly, and its values lie in and of this world. Likewise, the ways in which we can tap into these values must also be of this world: empirically verifiable with one’s own eyes.

Yet, paradoxically, while the process of heritage valorization serves to desacralize the traditional religious object, it also re-sacralizes it as unique, affective, and valuable. Thus, its sacredness has not changed; what changed is the meaning and value of this sacredness, as well as how one can tap into it. Tensions therefore spring up from the confusion and uneasiness with dissonant directives concerning how the once-religious object ought to be consumed as heritage.

This chapter examines such a tension-filled shift from something of popular culture to one of heritage through an analysis of the changes that have occurred at the religious shrine to the Catholic saint, Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, in the small Italian town of San Giovanni Rotondo. Padre Pio was a twentieth century Capuchin mystic and stigmatic who was an object of extreme popular religious devotion—so much so that Vatican authorities, including Pope Pius XI and Pope John XXIII, saw him and his popular religious movement as a threat to Vatican hierarchy, teaching, and obedience, and periodically suppressed his cult. Indeed, while the Catholic Church had a difficult and ambiguous existence in the twentieth century—from marginalization by newly secularized nation-states such as the Italian Republic, to its collusion with Fascism, from the growth of skepticism, secularism, and scientism that threatened the cosmological fabric of Catholic belief systems to its controversial renewal in the Second Vatican Council—Padre Pio presented a simpler and more “seductive” (Di Giovine in press) popular theology that was able to galvanize the masses, capturing the attention and imagination of Catholics and non-Catholics alike.

Padre Pio and His Cult

Pio was born Francesco Forgione in the small southern Italian town of Pietrelcina, in the impoverished province of Benevento, where popular myth holds that he experienced diabolic attacks, ecstasies, and heavenly visions as a child. After a period of illness associated with his entry into the highly ascetic Capuchin Order—an illness, his diaries indicate, that stemmed not from his difficulty with the extreme discipline

of the novitiate but rather with his growing embrace of what scholars have called “victim soul” mysticism (Giloteaux 1927; Kane 2002) that was popular among prophetic individuals during the collectively traumatic and tumultuous early twentieth century. In 1918, when he definitively moved to a very small Capuchin monastery in San Giovanni Rotondo—never to return to Pietrelcina again—he received the stigmata after an ecstatic vision of Jesus while praying before a large crucifix. As early as 1918, people considered Pio a living saint, and worshippers flocked to his monastery high atop the arid cliffs of the Gargano Peninsula for the opportunity to confess their sins to him; he was said to know their transgressions even before they were uttered. A sign of his distinctive charisma, Pio would continuously suffer from these highly visible, bleeding wounds on his hands and feet throughout the rest of his life. They are reported to have inexplicably left him a week before his death without any trace, further confirming the supernatural nature of the wounds in the minds of the faithful. Indeed, after his 2008 exhumation, forensic experts reportedly could find no trace of them in the remains (Galeazzi 2008, p. 16).

As social processes, pilgrimages have a destabilizing quality (see Turner 1974); promising direct and unmediated experiences with the divine, they explicitly circumvent authorized religious institutions and are therefore looked upon by religious authorities warily (Di Giovine and Eade, forthcoming). Pio’s popular movement was no different. As word spread of a seraphic father akin to St. Francis, the faithful began to flock to San Giovanni Rotondo, raising suspicions in the Vatican. Under Pope Pius XI, the Vatican feared he was sewing “spiritual confusion” (Ruffin 1991, p. 192) and barred him from celebrating Mass in 1923. A decade later, the Vatican reversed its stance and Pius XI personally lifted the injunction. After growing and internationalizing during the period immediately following World War II, Pio’s movement again was suppressed, this time by the equally charismatic Pope John XXIII, who believed Pio to be a charlatan sent by Satan himself (John XXIII 1960, p. 127; quoted in Luzzatto 2009/[2007], pp. 369–370). But subsequent popes Paul VI and John Paul II encouraged pilgrimages to the shrine.

Upon his death in 1968, Pio was buried in Santa Maria delle Grazie, a larger church he constructed at the end of his life to accommodate the crush of pilgrims, tourists, and other gawkers who came to see what all the fuss was about. Pio’s charisma—integral to any popular saint—did not wane after his death in 1968; on the contrary, the cult became even stronger and international, taking particular hold in Ireland and the USA (see Grottola 2009). He was canonized in 2002 by Pope John Paul II, who himself was a pilgrim to Pio in his youth; the canonization Mass in St. Peter’s Square was reported to have drawn one of the largest crowds in history. In 2008, the Capuchin friars exhumed Pio from his tomb below the church and put on display in what the Church calls an ostension (*ostensione*).

The 2008 exhumation, and subsequent 15-month exhibition (*ostensione*), were extremely controversial. Devotees—particularly those who had met him, or who made multiple trips to visit his tomb—complained that the friars were trying to commodify his tomb to make it a tourist site (see Di Giovine 2012b; cf. De Lutiis 1973; Margry 2002). A faction even sued the friars in Italian court for desecrating the body. They also feared—correctly, it turns out—that the friars were going to

move his body to a new mega-church built by internationally renowned architect Renzo Piano next door. Inaugurated in 2004, this ultramodern basilica could accommodate nearly 30,000 devotees inside and outside, and featured cutting-edge modern art and sculpture by some of the leading artists in Italy (see, for example, Piano 2004; Oddo 2005; Saldutto 2008). It also featured scintillating golden mosaics by liturgical artist and priest, Marko Ivan Rupnik, depicting the lives of Jesus, Padre Pio and Saint Francis—who was the first to have the stigmata—in parallel. These mosaics were made by melting down the golden rings, necklaces, and jewelry that were given by devotees as *ex votos*—objects donated in request for a miracle. Devotees complained that it was too luxurious, too self-congratulatory, too modern for Pio, who was just a simple friar who wanted to pray, and who donated the money given to him during his lifetime to construct one of the most technologically advanced hospitals in Italy (Di Giovine 2012b).

However, it seems that the aesthetics of the Basilica was not the true source of these tensions. Rather, it was the way the basilica subtly, but materially, impacted the devotional habitus of pilgrims as religious authorities converted Pio's shrine from a locus of popular religiosity to one of cultural-religious heritage, and religious tourism. In conversations with site managers, I learned that they aspired for the shrine to become "the next Assisi" (Di Giovine 2012a, p. 164); Assisi is the burial place of St. Francis, who, before Pio, was the most popular saint in Italy and Roman Catholicism (the latest Pope, although from a different religious Order, the Jesuits, took Francis' name). Importantly, Assisi is a World Heritage Site, owing to its famous frescoes depicting the life of St. Francis by the Renaissance painter Giotto. One site manager was clear: In Assisi today, only 10% come for St. Francis; 90% come for Giotto (Di Giovine 2012a, p. 121). Just as Assisi remains viable as a heritage tourism site in a largely secularized Europe, so too, it seems, San Giovanni Rotondo plans to mitigate the decline that seems to befall other saints' shrines from growing societal secularism on the one hand, and the emergence of newer charismatic individuals such as the late Pope John Paul II and Mother Teresa.

Thus, rather than simply being uneasy with a stylistic change in the way in which Padre Pio is memorialized, it seems that the extreme tensions at the shrine grow out of three interrelated shifts in the way in which devotees are made to conceive of Pio's worth, and, consequently, how such conceptions shape the ways in which they interact with the saint. These shifts include the objectives of material exchanges at the site, the ways in which devotees are bodily disciplined, and the types of memories that should be invoked when interacting with Pio's body.

Shifting Values of Exchange Between Popular Religion and Elite Heritage

The first and most obvious shift concerns material exchange at the shrine, and what devotees consider to be the commodification of the saint. Seasoned pilgrims from Italy, the USA and Ireland, who often make one or more pilgrimages to the shrine

per year, often argued that the exhumation and promised veneration was merely a thinly veiled excuse to garner more tourism dollars in response to a decline in pilgrims after Pio's canonization. Indeed, in the frenzy of mass tourism that occurred in the years leading up to Pio's canonization, the town of San Giovanni Rotondo saw the construction of some 125 hotels (Meletti 2011), though it is clear that investors overbuilt. Hotels and guesthouses lay half-constructed, the older generation of hoteliers complains to me about the devaluation of their property, and *The New York Times* reported at the opening of the *ostensione* that occupancy rates in San Giovanni's hotels are the lowest in Italy. Tourism ministers, such as Massimiliano Ostillo, the head of tourism planning in the region of Puglia, were clear: "This is an opportunity we have to turn religious tourism into mass tourism" (Fisher 2008, p. 1); it was his hope that Padre Pio would draw visitors who would then tour other sites in the region.

Consistent with the Church's stance on popular devotion, several religious leaders had been vocal in their critiques of the shrine's commercialization, which nets over €120 million a year through donations, subscriptions to the Capuchin Order's magazines, books, and television stations, and through the sale of touristic tchotchkes such as Padre Pio rosaries, prayer cards, and cigarette lighters (see Di Giovine 2011). During Pio's canonization celebrations, Bishop Alessandro Maggioni critiqued the "corrupt" (*cattivi*) friars stating, "Jesus Christ threw the merchants out of the temple, but now I see they've returned..." (La Rocca 2002). The international media is particularly vocal about the shrine's commercialization, too. A *Le Monde* article states, "Padre Pio is a business. San Giovanni Rotondo nourishes it" (Bozonnet 2008), while the *Los Angeles Times* called San Giovanni "Las Vegas of the faithful" (Holly 2002, p. A7). By linking San Giovanni Rotondo to the USA's theme park-cum-gambling mecca—famous for its life-size re-creation of elitist heritage sites around the world, such as Venice, ancient Rome and Luxor—these authors' statements also include veiled critiques on shrine's commercial inauthenticity. This reaction is not necessarily unique to Pio's cult; "popular anti-clericalism" and direct opposition to the religious hierarchy is notably strong in Southern Italy, France, Spain, and Portugal (Riegelhaupt 1984), as they continue to privilege direct and reciprocal relations over more rational, economic, and legalistic ones instituted by the Council of Trent (Badone 1990, pp. 13–15). However, Irish Catholics—who exist as minorities in an Anglo-British milieu, and who count among the most devoted to Pio—are generally more receptive to forms that reveal the wealth and strength of the cult, and the Church in general (cf. Taylor 1985, 1990). One Irish man said, "Somebody might disagree with the amount of money that was spent on Piano's basilica because there's so much poverty in the world—but in Ireland, in times past, there was poverty and famine. The only things that stood out and remained past those generations are the churches. Hopefully it'll outlive [our generation, too]" (Di Giovine 2014, p. 159).

These tensions stem not from commercialism itself but rather from the purpose of commercialism at the shrine. For this, we must examine the exchange of money and material objects through the lens of Maussian gift exchange. While the Vatican's reaction against commercialism in the Council of Trent was theological in

nature, and argued that salvation stems from faith manifested through good works, deeply entrenched popular devotional praxes attempts to construct a strategic bargaining relationship with the divine in which pilgrims seek to tie the saint or deity into a mutual obligation through gifting (Di Giovine and Eade, forthcoming; see Mauss 2000). The conversion from a popular religious site to a heritage tourism destination, therefore, shifts the very cosmology of the shrine. Rather than facilitating a direct and immediate relationship with the divine at an axis mundi that links heaven and earth (Eliade 1959), these same priests and vendors of mass-produced souvenirs and common touristic services become the unavoidable middlemen in a new cosmos, the global capitalistic market.

Pilgrims are thus forced to innovate new practices that attempt to “restore” the sacrality of their commercial exchanges by invoking public rituals of *inventio*. In Catholic liturgy, *inventio* is the official act of deciphering and authenticating a saint’s relic. Yet here, it is used as a way of turning souvenirs into relics themselves. The most important one occurs in the English Office among Irish pilgrims, who purchase these religious objects in bulk so that they can then touch them to the relic of Pio’s glove (kept in a see-through plastic bag), hoping to transfer its ‘contagious magic’ (Frazer 2008/[1922]). They would then distribute them to their friends and loved ones, particularly those who are sick, back in Ireland and who could not come in bodily contact with Pio’s body or his mitt. Another popular act that converts these souvenirs into relics in the minds of the faithful occurs at the pilgrimage’s completion, usually during the final Mass or on the bus to the airport. Priests will ask devotees to hold up their bags of souvenirs, sprinkle holy water on them, and give a benediction; this practice transcends the national origins of the priests and the pilgrims. Pilgrims will often become anxious in the days and hours leading up to this benediction, often pestering the priest to quietly bless them beforehand; they will also nervously ask if the benediction is still valid if their souvenirs are locked away in their suitcases underneath the bus. Theologically, one needs only to pray for God’s benediction, and both Italian and Irish priests confide that their aspersion rituals are but a formality. Yet, these elaborate rituals not only invest the object with a spiritual narrative (if not also power) but also serve to unite the congregation around a collective reinterpretation of its value.

Disciplining the Senses

These practices are indicative of tensions that arise through a second type of shift: that of their habitus. That is, the conversion to a heritage site disciplines the senses in a way that conflicts with that of religious devotion. In this case, the interaction is more along the lines of post-Enlightenment, modern tourism—except that the theme happens to be religious, rather than “heritage” or “cultural” or “culinary.” Importantly, the Enlightenment shifted the locus at which Western society obtained Truth about itself and individuals’ existence from God to the material world, ushering in a paradigmatic shift in Western society’s understanding of where, and through

what means, reality could be effectively perceived. Rather than privileging the haptic—or the sense of touch as in popular religion—Enlightenment-era thinking privileged the optic sense—the visual—and relegated the “proximate” senses such as touching, hearing, and smelling to lower levels (Synnott 1991, p. 70; Ong 1991). The religious relic was replaced by the artifact as the locus of knowledge, which could be unlocked through expert viewing—or what Conn (2000) calls “object-based epistemology” (see, especially, Classen and Howes 2006, p. 199)

This is a very specific way of interacting with objects and places that is different from the religious mode, in which, at least in popular pilgrimage, one encounters the sacred bodily, both interiorly and exteriorly (see Coleman and Elsner 1995; Di Giovine and Eade forthcoming; cf. Adler 2002; Frank 2000). Tourism, predicated as it is on “sight-seeing” (see Adler 1989) or what Urry (2000) called the “tourist gaze”—also privileges the sense of sight over the other senses, particularly that of touch. People are often not allowed to touch things of high touristic value: one cannot touch Stonehenge; one cannot touch Michelangelo’s *David*; one cannot touch Giotto’s frescoes. Tourism is therefore a very museological form of interaction; it is no coincidence museums and tourism grew up around each other, and that museums and interpretative centers are nearly always found near a tourist site (or included on a tourist itinerary).

Yet, the gaze is not simply the privileged form of obtaining knowledge in this world, but, as Foucault argues in his discussion of Velázquez’s *Las Meninas*, it has become the modern, Western form of constructing social relationships. Whereas in traditional religious pilgrimage, visitors enter into a relationship with the sacred through their bodies—often through bodily suffering and the exchange of indebtedness with the Divine—through the gaze, the boundaries between spectator and object are broken down; as the spectator thus becomes part of the spectacle the “observer and the observed take part in a ceaseless exchange. No gaze is stable ... subject and object, spectator and model reverse their roles into infinity” (Foucault 1970, p. 5, quoted in Reinhardt 2014).

Whereas before; pilgrims would visit Pio’s tomb—kneeling and praying at it, touching it, placing flowers on it, and leaving notes of supplication to the saint—during the exhibition of his body, Pio was placed in a glass case, elevated at eye level, blocked off by those typical velvet ropes that often surround an important artifact in a museum, and pilgrims could only walk around it to look at it, much like a museum object on display. Visitors were even hurried along by guards periodically barking, “keep moving, please!” as if they were tourists in the Sistine Chapel looking at Michelangelo’s ceiling frescoes. Thus, the site managers transformed pilgrims’ haptic devotional practices shaped by popular religion to secular, museological tourism practices that privileges the optic.

We can understand, therefore, the reason why site managers intending to create a “new Assisi” chose to employ architect Piano to create this new basilica. The Pritzker Prize winner has made a name for himself in designing cutting-edge, monumental public edifices since at least the 1970s. Importantly, many of his most well-known constructions are museums: the Pompidou Center in Paris, the Beyeler Foundation Museum in Basel, the NEMO Science Museum in Amsterdam, and the

modern wing on the Art Institute of Chicago. Likewise, the Upper Basilica's liturgical adornments were also designed by contemporary sculptors whose work is well-represented in art museums but not in devotional settings. In fact, as a testament to Pomodoro's inexperience with liturgical art, his monumental cross that hung above the sacrificial altar was unceremoniously removed in 2010 and replaced by a non-descript crucifix; no one informed him that such an altarpiece required an image of Christ on it (see Loito 2010).

The Capuchin Order's selection of these well-known professionals over more obscure, yet technically more proficient liturgical artists, demonstrated site managers' absolute desire to become "the next Assisi"—a cultural heritage-cum-tourist site, a vast open-air museum in which the objects to be studied, talked about, and visited were not holy relics, but monumental buildings, fine art, and a famous body. The selection of these artisans indicates a transformation in the very significance and value attributed to Pio by his Order. This is an epistemological shift away from utilizing Pio as a locus for obtaining certain universal truths concerning one's own spiritual path to salvation to one that considers Pio as an object of cultural heritage embodying certain facts about their history, culture, and social relations. Such a shift, furthermore, requires pilgrims to discipline their bodies in alternative ways (cf. Asad 1993), sparking extreme internal tensions which were articulated in the form of these critiques over the materiality of the basilica.

Particularly during the veneration of Pio's exhumed body, the pilgrim was specifically disciplined to gaze on Pio as a museum object, both through the tactics of displaying the body and through the semiotic framing elements. Pilgrims would first be constrained to tour his former monastery, which was turned into a literal museum; like anthropologists or curators, tour guides would explain the history of the convent, Capuchin theology and ritual, and Pio's biography. They would pass his cell and confessional encased in Plexiglas, the crucifix in the choir loft under which he received the stigmata, and into a series of rooms filled entirely of exhibit cases, where Pio's personal effects, bloody bandages, clothing, and ex votos were displayed. Of particular impact is an entire wall of letters sent over a three-month period in 1968, illustrating just how global and popular he was at the end of his life. While no doubt interesting to most pilgrims (only a very few, if any, voiced irritation by this detour during a typical trip), this pathway was a framing mechanism, one that disciplined the pilgrim to approach Pio and his relics as objects of epistemology rather than virtue, to privilege the optic over the haptic. When they finally arrived at the crypt, pilgrims were sufficiently cued to employ their gaze, a selective form of looking, as Foucault (1970) reminds us. Indeed, as with Günther von Hagens' global blockbuster *Bodyworlds* exhibitions, in which plastinated human bodies are displayed in suggestive, highly aesthetic poses, visitors to San Giovanni Rotondo commented on the transcendent experience of "seeing" the genuinely authentic, despite the fact that the object of their gaze was highly mediated (see Di Giovine 2009a). Pio was not injected with polymer, but rather fully covered in robes, shoes, and mitts; his face, which had suffered decay, was covered by a silicone mask.

Pio's placement in the Basilica's crypt blended these two disparate expositionary styles. During the translation, Pio was transferred to a new silver, jeweled

sarcophagus by Soviet-born Georgian artist Goudji. Goudji is also not a liturgical artist but a jeweler–artisan whose works are displayed primarily in art galleries and museums in France, where he is now a citizen. Yet, unlike the other works of fine art in the basilica, the sarcophagus was only partially on display: it was entombed within a mosaic-covered pilaster at the center of the new crypt, just behind a small altar. This pilaster had a large gash—Americans have commented that it looks like the trademarked swoosh on Nike sneakers, though it most likely was made to represent Christ’s, and Pio’s, side wound—through which the faithful can get a glimpse of this work of funerary art. They were also free to approach it, and pilgrims file past Pio’s entombed sarcophagus, taking photographs through the gash, dropping letters of supplication inside it, and sticking their hands inside to caress the silver casket and to touch their souvenirs to it.

It is a rather awkward affair, shaped by conflicting cues on how Pio should be epistemologically and ritually approached. As pilgrims proceed down to the crypt, they pass through a veritable gallery filled with Rupnik’s museological mosaic cycle and encounter guards who once again urge quiet. The juxtaposition of narratives comparing Francis and Pio requires the interested pilgrim to read the informational labels next to each frieze, step back, examine the image, then examine its parallel on the other side of the narrow gallery: a basic museological technique. That visitors are disciplined to employ the optic over the haptic is evident, considering that in other venues—both inside churches and out in public piazzas—they would touch, stroke, or kiss images and statues of the saint. Once inside the crypt, pilgrims are then somewhat confusingly confronted with a semi-traditional liturgical space, a church with an altar and a pilaster with Pio’s reliquary inside, that they are relatively free to touch.

But the space was not designed for this type of traditional, tactile interaction with Pio; the line of pilgrims block the entrance, the swoosh was too small to allow for many supplicants reaching in at the same time, and the sarcophagus itself was placed just a little too far back behind the opening, forcing some shorter devotees to stretch and contort their bodies in order to touch it. Thus, the placement of Pio’s crypt existed midway between two conflicting paradigms for interacting with relics, liturgical and museological—exemplified on the one hand by Assisi, in which St. Francis’ body is completely encased within a pillar around which pilgrims circumambulate and can touch at any point with equal effect—and on the other by Guarino Guarini’s eighteenth century chapel housing the shroud of Turin, which was innovative for maximizing the impact of the museological gaze by creating a pathway that facilitated large groups of pilgrims walking from one end of the shroud to the other (Guarini 1737; see Momo 1997; Meek 1988).

I am not suggesting—as many pilgrims do—that the basilica is poorly planned. What I am suggesting, however, is that the progression of exhibitionary tactics regarding Pio—from his first tomb, to his temporary exhibition, to his re-interment in his new basilica—reflects a deeper, yet necessarily ambivalent and tension-laden, process of transformation for the shrine as its managers ambitiously refashion their site as a secular religious tourism destination akin to Assisi. It seemed that site managers did not take into account the very visceral, embodied, shifts in interactions

that come with such transformations, and which, I would argue, is a symptom of “religious tourism” in general. Yet, there slowly emerged the recognition that these two forms of interaction must be managed better, that in this specific form of religious tourism at San Giovanni Rotondo, pilgrims’ religious needs must necessarily be married with the secular practices of tourism. In 2013, site managers significantly enlarged the opening through which visitors could touch the silver sarcophagus; in mid-May, they announced that Pio’s body would be placed on permanent display. As of late 2013, Pio’s body has been taken out of Gaudji’s silver sarcophagus and returned to his glass enclosure, and the hole through which pilgrims could touch the casket was extended down to the floor. In particular this exhibitionary style seems to marry both types of interaction styles. Pio is back on display, in a museum-style case, perhaps to accommodate and emphasize the museological expectations of tourists—who come to *see* Pio and the new, would-be artistic and architectural heritage sites they have created around him. Yet, unlike other traditional museum exhibits, this style also facilitates the kinds of haptic interactions that religious devotees expect; the barriers to the tomb largely removed, visitors are once again free to touch, kiss, and leave notes of supplication to Pio. It is regrettable that it took several years, and several lawsuits, to come to this conclusion.

Lieux de Mémoire

The reactions of pilgrims who attended the translation of Pio’s body from his former resting place to Piano’s new basilica also suggest a tension between competing sets of identity claims. This is predicated on a third transformation, that of a shift in the type of memories that should be evoked while visiting the site. While Pio’s popularity—both when he was alive and after he died—was predicated on the cultivation of individual memories of specific interactions with the saint, his tomb, and with friends and family who knew or met him, as a new heritage site, these memories are purposefully erased, replaced by an authorized discourse about Pio and his historical value for the Church and Catholic culture more generally. In short, it is a shift from individual, personal memory to social memory.

On April 19, 2010, thousands showed up to watch the solemn ceremony and procession as Pio’s body was transferred to the new Piano basilica. Several protesters handed out leaflets and searched for media to give interviews; thinking I was a journalist, one approached me with an old, photocopied clipping. It was a story about him, and the miraculous cure he received after meeting Pio half a century earlier. Others crowded the central piazzas for a glimpse of Pio’s new silver casket pass by. Notably present were self-described locals from San Giovanni Rotondo and the surrounding province, those from his hometown of Pietrelcina, and others from afar. Many locals talked of remembering the times they met Pio in the old church, while others recounted the various pilgrimage experiences they had venerating his tomb. “Let’s say this place is holy. The other church is really pretty inside, but I don’t know—I remember this place. This place is special,” one local from the provincial



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