Rebuilding Cities in a Digital age: The Destruction and Reconstruction of Heritage in Palmyra, Warsaw, and Amsterdam

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Abstract

This paper investigates recent digital reconstruction efforts of Syrian heritage sites. These projects illustrate a Western saviorism emblematic of the colonial roots of archaeology and heritage practices. Rather than offering a solution, digital innovation further exacerbates the unequal distribution of knowledge and power. In order to de-naturalize narratives of technological progress, this paper compares the digitally produced replica of Palmyra's Arch of Triumph, first presented in London in 2016, to the postwar reconstructions of Warsaw and the Hollandsche Schouwburg, a Holocaust site in Amsterdam. By comparing digital and nondigital memory technologies, we can examine how Western conceptions of heritage are entangled with the very possibilities of destruction and reconstruction.

Introduction

On 19 April 2016, London's Mayor Boris Johnson revealed a scale replica at Trafalgar Square of Palmyra's Arch of Triumph. The Arch had been destroyed by ISIS less than a year before and was reconstructed using a computer model and robotic sculpting techniques by the UK-based Institute for Digital Archaeology (IDA). Johnson underlined the importance of this project by stating that "Syria's future depends on the conservation and protection of Syria's past" (qtd. in Shea). Later that same year, the Parisian exhibition *Eternal Sites: From Bamiyan to Palmyra* showed displays of Palmyra that were created as part of a larger digital preservation project. Drones took over 40,000 images of several sites throughout war-stricken Syria to create detailed computer models for future restoration and reconstruction. François Hollande, President of France, called the exhibition "an act of resistance" against terror and "the best answer to the Islamist propaganda of hate, destruction and death" (qtd. in Simons).[1]

Both projects use digital technologies during the ongoing war in Syria to 'save' global heritage under threat of war and damage. In this essay I argue that such efforts can replicate the colonial structures that have long been part of archaeology and heritage practices (De Cesari; Meskell; Munawar, *Cultural Heritage in Conflict*). Digital innovations are often hailed as solutions but only strengthen the unequal distribution of technological infrastructures, knowledge and power (Rico, "Technologies and Alternative Heritage Values"; Stobiecka; Keightley). To de-naturalize narratives of technological progress I approach digital technologies as dependent on and entangled with non-digital techniques. I do so by comparing the replica of *Palmyra's Arch of Triumph* with two older cases of postwar reconstruction: *Warsaw's city center* and *the Hollandsche Schouwburg*, a Holocaust heritage site in Amsterdam.

First, I discuss the colonial roots of 'world heritage' that enables the saviorism underlying the digital replica of the arch. The appropriation of the Arch of Triumph as a global site in need of international protection sidelines local stakeholders and their perspectives on heritage. I then proceed to argue that the possibilities of destruction and reconstruction that fuel Western saviorism are not external to, but essentially part of Western understandings of heritage. Seeing heritage as a continuous process of destruction and reconstruction allows us to move beyond saviorism's unequal distribution of power. In the final sections I examine the cases of Warsaw and Amsterdam to consider how human-induced destruction and natural decay cannot be categorically separated and are deployed to both erase and articulate marginalized memories.

World Heritage as Appropriative Practice

The value attributed to heritage is not inherent to material objects, but rather the outcome of competing political, economic, societal and cultural stakes (Graham et al. 32). The question is therefore not why certain sites are valuable, but rather why they are considered to be valuable. The very possibility of loss is fundamental to Western understandings of heritage and can be traced back to the romantic roots of heritage preservation as a response to the Industrial Revolution in the United Kingdom (Lowenthal, chap.3). The idea of heritage under threat leads to a logic of protective measures that rely on technological interventions to preserve and restore objects and buildings. Heritage scholar Laurajane Smith argues that what she calls the "authorized heritage discourse" privileges material artefacts, technology and expert knowledge over local stakeholders and an active public that uses heritage to "understand and engage with the present" (Smith 44).

Expert knowledge and technological innovations go hand in hand and their unequal distribution leads to a barrier between those in charge of heritage protection and the people who live with that heritage. This raises questions of ownership, appropriation, and the political uses of heritage. In the three cases central to this essay, the attribution of value is tied up with different and overlapping understandings of heritage and memory: that of world heritage in the case of Palmyra, national redemption in the case of Warsaw, and the early formation of Holocaust memory in the case of Amsterdam. Destruction figures in different ways: the Arch of Triumph and the city of Warsaw were both destroyed as part of an armed conflict in an effort to eradicate and replace a culture; the Hollandsche Schouwburg, a theater used for the registration and deportation of at least 46,000 Jews and currently a Holocaust memorial museum, was not significantly damaged until after World War II as there was no consensus how to deal with this painful heritage.

The Arch of Roman emperor Septimius Severus in Palmyra was built in the 3rd century A.D. as "an imperial marker of Roman domination" and can be read as a "sign of colonial dominance and imperial power that resonated throughout the history of architecture" (Stobiecka 115). Since 1980 the site of Palmyra, which encompasses much more than only this arch, is recognized as world heritage by UNESCO with the following description: "the art and architecture of Palmyra, standing at the crossroads of several civilizations, married Graeco-Roman techniques with local traditions and Persian influences" (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "Site of Palmyra"). The site was considered to be at grave risk since the outbreak of the war in Syria in 2011. In 2015, ISIS occupied Palmyra and destroyed pre-monotheistic buildings such as the Temple of Baalshamin and the Arch of Triumph.

"By reducing Palmyra to a crossroad of humanity and highlighting a Roman site while ignoring other, non-Western, heritages, the layered history of this city is denied and framed solely in Western terms."

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Soon, calls were made in Western media to start the reconstruction of 'our' heritage and archaeologists and other experts from France, Russia, Poland, Switzerland and other countries rushed to set up initiatives (Elcheikh 118). The Institute for Digital Archaeology (IDA), a collaboration between British universities and Dubai's Museum of the Future, was the first to present a replica at two-thirds scale within a year's time. The IDA used dozens of photographs to compile a 3-D computer model. Robots in Italy used this model to carve out the replica using Egyptian marble. After its unveiling, the replica traveled to other cities such as New York, Washington, Dubai, and Geneva.

The swift response by Western experts for immediate action fits the politics that underlies UNESCO's world heritage: protecting sites that are valuable to humanity in a universal, but ultimately Eurocentric, discourse of one-worldism, as archeologist Lynn Meskell phrases it (Meskell, chap.1). She demonstrates how within UNESCO, archaeology, traditionally a discipline of digging and providing context, was replaced almost entirely after the 1960s and turned into "the handmaiden of heritage" with a focus on monumentality, preservation and recovery, prioritizing technical assistance over field research (Meskell 4). The targeted destruction of the arch was already prefigured in its inscription on the list of world heritage, and so was the idea of its reconstruction.

The arch is considered global heritage because of the colonial conception of Palmyra as a crossroad between West and East (Elcheikh). IDA director Roger Michel compares Palmyra to London, the metropole he describes as "the crossroad of humanity, and that was what Palmyra was" (qtd. in Murphy). This explains his choice for Trafalgar Square for the public unveiling of the replica. By reducing Palmyra to a crossroad of humanity and highlighting a Roman site while ignoring other, non-Western, heritages, the layered history of this city is denied and framed solely in Western terms (Kalaycioglu). Anthropologist Chiara de Cesari demonstrates how the notion of the Middle East as the cradle of civilization is a legacy of European archeologists such as the British Gertrude Bell. She not only excavated sites but was heavily involved in drawing the borders of what later came to be the nation-state of Iraq. "In the colonial period, archaeologists and Orientalist scholars were hard to distinguish from the military and colonial administration" (De Cesari 25). Boris Johnson's statements about the future of Syria based on a replica of a Roman Arch while standing at Trafalgar Square are illustrative of the underlying colonial mindset. He frames the act of 'saving' heritage from the barbaric destruction by ISIS as an act of solidarity with the Syrian people while the arch is appropriated and relocated to what once was the center of the British empire (see figure 1).
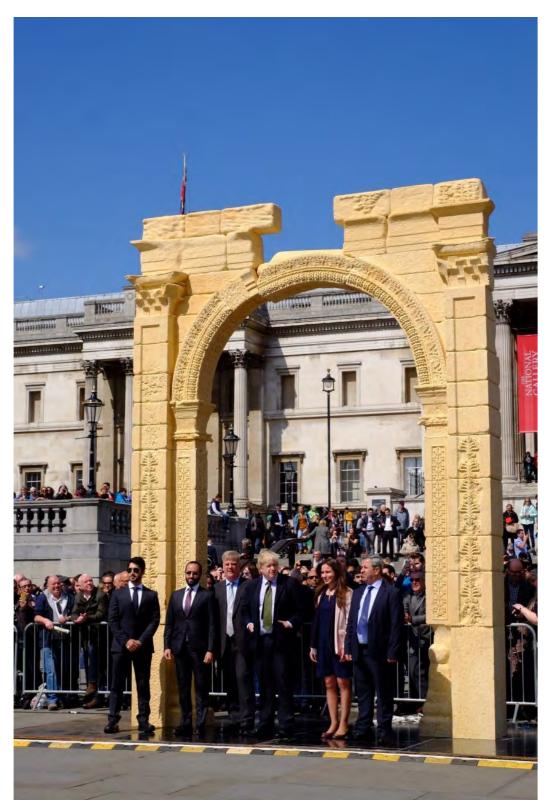
Figure 1: *Boris Johnson unveils replica of Palmyra's Arch of Triumph at Trafalgar Square.* London, UK, 19 April 2016 (photograph by Rachel Megawhat).

The Entanglement of Heritage, Destruction, and Reconstruction
Geographer Elly Harrowell argues in her discussion of the arch's replica that "[r]econstruction naturally follows on the heels of destruction – in many respects they are two sides of the same coin – and it seems unthinkable that a site as valuable as Palmyra (both in terms of heritage and potential future tourist revenue) will not be rehabilitated in some way once the fighting finally ends" (Harrowell 82). Her metaphors conjure up two different models to think about reconstruction: the first is one of an unexamined causality, where reconstruction naturally *follows* destruction simply because there are economic, and perhaps political, stakes involved. The second model, that of two sides of the same coin, argues that destruction and reconstruction exist simultaneously. This implies that the very possibility of reconstruction might invite destruction. Archaeologist Bill Finlayson critiques IDA's replica for this very reason: "[t]he dangerous precedent suggests that if you destroy something, you can rebuild it and it has the same authenticity as the original" (qtd. in Hopkins).

I challenge a rigidly schematic and teleologically structured causality of first construction, second destruction, and third reconstruction. This step-by-step formula makes it hard to see how these three steps are interconnected. Instead, the very possibility of destruction *and* reconstruction are always already part of the conception of heritage. Destruction and reconstruction are not external threats to supposedly stable heritage sites, but instead enable their very being. This explains the value attributed to an inauthentic replica despite the importance of authenticity in Western conceptions of heritage.

Like heritage, dominant understandings of memory are embedded in discourses of loss and subsequent retrieval. Memory scholar Ann Rigney critiques this model of "memory as something that is fully formed in the past (it was once "all there" in the plenitude of experience, as it were) and as something that is subsequently a matter of preserving and keeping alive" (Rigney 12). Such a model invites a saviorism in the form of unearthing and appropriating marginalized memories on behalf of others, while at the same time longing for a past that is forever lost, which defines those others as fundamentally different. Her alternative implies a perspectival shift towards a "social-constructivist model that takes as its starting point the idea that memories of a shared past are collectively constructed and reconstructed in the present rather than resurrected from the past" (Rigney 14). Using this model, we can likewise understand heritage as a continuous process of destruction and reconstruction.

When we return to the Arch of Triumph, it is telling how blind we are to the destruction of the 'original' building from the 3rd century A.D.. As any ruin, the arch as we know it is only a fragment of what it once was. It is therefore tempting to separate human-induced and willful destruction from natural, material decay. Geographer Caitlin DeSilvey takes up a materialist approach and argues to see decay "not (only) as erasure but as a process that can be generative of a different kind of knowledge" (DeSilvey 28). She claims that objects "generate meaning not just in their preservation and persistence but also in their destruction and disposal" and argues that the things we consider heritage have social, biological and chemical lives as well (DeSilvey 29–30). Though it is essential to take the material vulnerability of heritage seriously, I fear that a strict separation of manufactured destruction and natural decay is unproductive. Do not all forms of preservation act against natural decay? And can we really consider the material decay of a site that is not 'properly' taken care of, for instance because of an ongoing war, as purely natural? Moreover, this might lead to a romanticized understanding of decay as a natural process that we should embrace, juxtaposing it to its 'unnatural' counterpart of human-induced destruction that can forgotten. Such an erasure leads to a sanitized reconstruction of the past.

In the next sections I examine the cases of the city center of Warsaw and the Hollandsche Schouwburg in Amsterdam. We will see how the categories of natural decay and human-induced destruction are mixed up and ultimately indistinguishable. In the former, a preconceived 18th century Warsaw was reconstructed, erasing both the Nazi destruction and the Jewish presence in the city. In the latter, the postwar 'natural decay' of the old theater was made to stand in for the Nazi persecution of the Jews.

Redemption and Erasure: Rebuilding a City Without Jews

Warsaw was the most damaged European city after World War II. The Nazis had a plan to destroy the city and rebuilt it as a provincial town inhabited by ethnic Germans and enslaved Poles. They first targeted Jewish properties as part of the Nazi genocide of the Jews. Before the war, about 370,000 Jews lived in Warsaw, many of them in the city district Muranów. In 1943, the Nazis torched this district street by street in response to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. A year later, in 1944, the Polish resistance attempted to liberate the city awaiting the arrival of the Soviet army. After this failed attempt, the Nazis tasked special forces to systematically burn down the city. Most of the historic old town was destroyed with an emphasis on cultural heritage such as libraries and historical landmarks. In the whole of Poland, the Nazis

killed between five and six million Poles, about three million of them Jews. After the war, the reconstruction of Warsaw's old town continued until the 1960s using archival documents and paintings to recreate the city's late 18th-century appearance, excluding the Jewish district Muranów (Meng). It was a prestige project that the postwar communist government took as an opportunity to rebuild the nation in line with their understanding of the history of Poland and was the first reconstructed city inscribed as world heritage in 1980 (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "Historic Centre of Warsaw").

Soon after the war, Poland's provisional communist government used the narrative of Warsaw as a martyr city whose reconstruction would function as a symbol against the Nazi destruction. The agency that oversaw this reconstruction began with organizing an exhibition called *Warsaw Accuses* that included photographs of the destruction and first reconstruction efforts. Soon after its opening in Poland it traveled to the United States, comparable to the arch's replica tour through Western countries. Historian Michael Meng demonstrates how the reconstruction of Warsaw was a struggle between urban modernism and historic reconstruction. The Polish authorities rebuilt hundreds of buildings based on photographs and drawings that the resistance movement had already started collecting during the Warsaw Uprising. The resulting reconstructed old town was

> *"[a] space of spectacle and consumption, a space to experience, photograph, and witness national renewal. The restorative nostalgia denied the irreversibility of time by claiming that Warsaw's past had never been lost. … Warsaw's sacred ruins had to be restored because no less than Poland's survival appeared at stake. Warsaw suffered a violent, unnatural catastrophe. The ravages of time did not slowly decay its old town, but rather human violence did. This untimely death seemed … full of redemptive promise: the city's precious ruins could be brought back to life and with them the Polish nation"* (Meng 74).

Meng's vocabulary resonates with the arch replica and separates natural decay from unnatural human destruction: where 'natural' decay can remain visible, Nazi destruction should be erased to fight the Nazi genocidal agenda.

The reconstruction of the old town takes the late 18th century as its reference point, with 1830 as a breaking point, erasing other historical periods. When I visited the city in 2017, I stood in front of one of the

Figure 2: *The Church of the Holy Cross*. Warsaw, Poland, 19 May
2017 (photograph by the author).

reconstructed churches and saw a display holding a copy of a painting by
Bernardo Bellotto (see figure 2). The display held little information oth-
er than the painter's name, date of birth and death, and presumably the
painting's title in Polish and English: 'The Church of the Holy Cross, 1778'.
That title refers both to the painting and the church and merges the two.
The year of the painting, 1778, is a convenient way to reduce and erase part
of the complex building history that includes several demolished chapels
and churches from the 15th and 16th century that stood at this ground,
the main building from the late 17th century with additions from the 18th
century, and its destruction in World War II. The display's location in front
of the church suggests that the authorities used the painting for the recon-
struction of the church. I was looking at a copy of the painting that served
as an original source for reconstruction. This reversal of copy and original
reflects the entanglement of destruction and reconstruction in heritage
sites. The painting enabled reconstruction and by displaying this in front
of this church is made to function as a promise into the future in defiance
of any possible destruction. The redemptive promise that was part of the
reconstruction effort as described by Meng is essential to its status as re-
constructed heritage that embodies both real (past) and possible (future)
destruction and reconstruction.

The most painful erasure in the reconstruction of Warsaw can be found in the Jewish district Muranów. City planners did not consider this quarter to be of historic significance and took its destruction as an opportunity to get rid of poor housing conditions. In the late 1940s, the architect Bohdan Lachert proposed to build new housing blocks with façades using red bricks from the debris to reference the destruction of Warsaw's Jews. This would have placed the memory of Jewish suffering alongside Warsaw's martyrdom. The plan was soon abandoned for a more cheerful design and "a colorful place for the working class" (Meng 81). The former Jewish district came to symbolize the communist rebirth adjacent to the old town's sanitized reconstruction of Polish identity. Builders used the debris of the ghetto for the reconstruction of the city and any trace of Jewish heritage was lost in the process.

The replica of the Arch of Triumph was also a political act to counter the destruction of ISIS and erases several important elements in its process. The IDA selected only one single architectural motif out of a large ensemble and changed their plan several times, including the materials used and the scale of the replica. Comparing the replica to photographs of the original demonstrates the removal of many decorative details and two arches directly attached to it (Burch 67). Furthermore, the project did not involve local stakeholders but instead relied on photographs and was carried out from a distance. Heritage scholar Nour Munawar argues that the replica removes all traces of the current war and that a reconstruction that does not include the lifecycle of heritage can lead to political amnesia, which "has the potential to prolong conflict on a social level, as the reconstruction can be as destructive as the destruction itself" (Munawar, "Competing Heritage" 153). Furthermore, the enormous amount of attention for this replica in the name of saving world heritage denies the importance of other sites and erasing them from view. "Western cultural elites have spent more time lamenting damage to a single site, the Classical ruins of Palmyra, than the destruction inflicted on hundreds of Islamic mosques and shrines across Iraq and Syria combined" (Meskell 183). Though different from Warsaw, both cases render marginalized heritages invisible in relation to dominant political narratives. In the case of Warsaw, the Jewish community was murdered by the Nazis and their heritage was not inscribed into the reconstruction of this capital. In the case of the replica of the Arch, notions of 'humanity' and 'civilization' exclude non-Western heritage. What once was an immobile site was now transformed into an mobile replica, presented in London which is a "key conduit for looted artefact" (Burch 71). The ensuing 'grand tour' of the replica in mostly Western cities was not a demonstration of solidarity with

the Syrian people: "Created and owned by Western agendas, it recalls the long-standing Western ambitions of possessing heritage" (Stobiecka 120).

Postwar Decay as Wartime Destruction:
The Hollandsche Schouwburg as Painful Heritage
The destruction of the Hollandsche Schouwburg is different from the other cases as it was not a direct effect of World War II but resulted from the inability of the postwar community in the Netherlands to deal with painful heritage. Built in 1892, the Hollandsche Schouwburg ('Dutch Theater') stood in a district known for its theaters and mixed population of Jews and non-Jews. During the Nazi occupation, Jews were forced out of orchestras and theater groups as part of anti-Jewish measure and the theater became the Joodsche Schouwburg ('Jewish Theater'), a cultural center for performing and visual arts for Jews, in the spring of 1941. Following this period, the Nazis used the building from 1942 to 1943 for the registration and deportation of nearly 50,000 Jews on their way to extermination camps (Vree et al., chaps. 3 and 4). The building was sold in 1944 by a company that forcibly liquidated Jewish businesses, and the new owners wanted to resume its operations after the liberation.

Amsterdam was not as damaged as Warsaw; the Nazis saw the Dutch as a German race that had to be incorporated rather than destroyed. Most urban destruction was due to early fights, allied bombing, and the looting of houses of Jews who were deported or in hiding. In this postwar period of national reconstruction, there was little attention for and acknowledgment of painful heritage, just as there was no attention for the suffering of the Jews. The Nazi occupying forces, with the help of thousands of collaborators and Dutch agencies gradually isolated and deported Dutch Jews, leading to the killing of more than 100,000 Jews in the Nazi extermination camps. Less than a quarter of all Dutch Jews survived the war, which was considerably lower than in any other Western European country (Griffioen and Zeller). Despite this, the persecution of the Jews was initially incorporated in a national frame: the Dutch had suffered as one people and the national government did not want to commemorate Jewish suffering separately. It is remarkable that in this period, a group of concerned citizens protested the opening of the Hollandsche Schouwburg under the new name Piccadilly, a reference to the entertainment district in London. An action committee, consisting of Jewish, Catholic and Protestant members, argued that the reopening was shameful and successfully collected money for this national debt of honor. It acquired the theater and, after a long legal battle, donated it to the city of Amsterdam in 1950. The city council

was unable to find a broad consensus about what to do with the building, which was unsurprising given the memory culture of the 1950s that made the articulation of Jewish suffering subordinate to the national narrative of collective suffering, and a heritage discourse that did not attribute any value to painful World War II heritage.[2] As a result, the building stood empty and dilapidated.

In 1962, the Hollandsche Schouwburg was finally opened as one of Europe's first Holocaust memorials with a national significance. Architect Jan Leupen made use of the bad state of the building and used its demolition to stand in for the destruction of the Jews (see figure 3). The red brick walls of the former stage evoke the image of ruin and loss. The (unplanned) erosion of the top of these walls, including the plants that have grown in its cracks, only reinforces this sentiment (see figure 4). When I did research on this site in the early 2010s for my dissertation project, nearly all visitors I talked to were sure that this theater had been destroyed during the war. The postwar decay of the theater was thus not erased by a historical reconstruction but instead used to stand in for the destruction of Dutch Jewry (Duindam, chap.4). This is not an incorrect interpretation that confuses postwar decay with wartime destruction. This case demonstrates that the separation between human destruction and natural decay does not hold up: the postwar decay of the building was the indirect effect of the Nazi destruction. The fact that the theater was not properly maintained by the city of Amsterdam was a sign of a nationwide inability to cope with the memory of the destruction of Dutch Jewry, which the historian Isaac Lipschits has called the "kleine sjoa" (the small Shoah) after World War II (Lipschits). Highlighting the continuation of destruction in other forms, rather than deferring this destruction entirely to the past, complicates common understandings of trauma as event-based and belonging to the past and sensitizes us to the fact that in many cases, historical trauma and suffering continues into the present (Craps, chap.2; Saloul).

Conclusion

In this essay I compared the reconstruction of the Arch of Triumph without highlighting the digital nature of its production. As argued by most scholars who published about this case, IDA's project is deeply engrained in Western heritage practices and agendas and has little to do with the heritage or interests of Syrian people, which resonates with the colonial structures that underlie the very notion of world heritage. UNESCO aims to protect endangered sites that are valuable for humanity as a whole and prioritizes technocratic solutions. The resulting use of new technologies is

Figure 3: *Courtyard of the Hollandsche Schouwburg.* Amsterdam, the Netherlands, 11 September 2012 (photograph by the author).

an extension of that very same imperial move that appropriates heritage sites through Western technologies for Western consumers.

The exhibition in Paris, under UNESCO's patronage, suggested that the data gathered could be used for future rebuilding. The IDA replica worked under the same techno-optimism which was shared by Western media that did not fully apprehend the technology, but hailed it nevertheless (Stobiecka 116). Technological advancements in the fields of archaeology and heritage management have in general been welcomed by policy makers and academics alike and have not been met with enough critical reflection (Rico "Technologies and Alternative Heritage Values" 218; Stobiecka 114). In the case of the replica, archaeologist Trinidad Rico argues that the replica is about "technological fetishism" and leads to a "cultural imperialism" that figured Western companies as "fighting back" ISIS (Rico, "The Second Coming of Palmyra" 120–21). Framing the replica as a technological wonder that stands for the future of heritage reconstruction erases its non-digital nature.

As archaeologist Monika Stobiecka points out, "the effect of that intense digital work is material – a tangible, touchable, solid, 11-ton weighted copy of an arch" (Stobiecka 117). This resonates with the call by media scholar Emily Keightley that media memory studies are too invested in Eurocentric narratives and understandings of technology. This has "centralized the

Figure 4: *Detail of courtyard of the Hollandsche Schouwburg*. Amsterdam,
the Netherlands, 11 September 2012 (photograph by the author).

role of media technologies, and digital communication in particular, as a key, of not the key, structuring feature in contemporary experiences and practices of remembering" (Keightley 2). According to Keightley, we need to refrain from universal claims about media ecologies and acknowledge the unequal distribution and usage of new technologies. One effect of this focus on new technology is that the digital is made invisible as an eco-system that simply works in the background, and the non-digital is seen as content that needs to be translated to the digital realm. This very aptly describes both the exhibition and replica projects. One solution Keightley suggests is to understand nondigital media as memory technologies in their own right. This is precisely what we have seen in the cases of Warsaw and Amsterdam: the painting by Bellotto and the courtyard of the Hollandsche Schouwburg are memory technologies that do not stand at the beginning or the end of a potential digitalization process, but instead act as both copy and original, enabling not a traveling from nondigital to digital, but a continuous and co-creative process that encapsulated the redemptive power of reconstruction in the former, and the continuation of trauma in the latter. If we look again at the replica of the arch, we do not see radical innovation, but rather a conservative gesture that should not stand model for the future of heritage preservation and memory production.

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Endnotes

[1]   This paper was first conceived as a keynote lecture
    for the CODART TWINTIG conference in Warsaw
    on 21 to 23 May 2017. I would like to express my
    gratitude to Gerdien Verschoor and Friso Lammertse
    for their feedback.

[2]   When the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs
    Joseph Luns was asked to intervene in the planned
    destruction of the Anne Frank House in 1954, he
    answered the building was of no historic or artistic
    relevance (Lans and Vuijsje 66). In the years before
    the Covid-19 pandemic the Anne Frank House had
    more than one million annual visitors.