

# Authentic reconstruction of the Notre Dame de Paris?

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## 0. Abstract

This paper reviews the decision to rebuild the Notre Dame de Paris to its last known visual state by, firstly, gaining knowledge in the general definition and the importance of heritage and secondly, obtaining insides in the notion and complexities of authenticity. In addition this paper reviews the reconstruction process of the Frauenkirche in Dresden, Germany. Heritage propagates our history and cultural identity and must therefore be viewed critically to prevent deceit. One way to examine the sincerity of heritage can be done by basing it on authenticity. Yet, the latter is a subjective concept and no universal criteria can be formulated, since it comes down the perception of people. Due to this effect, post-war reconstruction in historical style is likely to be seen as authentic because it responds to a collective desire of the people, although it can be seen as deceitful in regard to the historical continuum of the reconstructed object. Examples of reconstructed heritage around Europe show that due to the strong relation between heritage and cultural identity, socio-political factors underlie inevitably the way we deal with heritage, whether it is to enhance, cultivate or destroy cultural identity. The Frauenkirche demonstrated how authenticity is obtained in reconstruction to the original style by applying the Anastylosis principles. However, it also illustrated the complexities of the debate prior to the reconstruction, since multiple symbolisms were assigned to the church and how finally, one of these was neglected when rebuilding this emblematic drawing. Thanks to this framework, it is possible to conclude that reconstructing the Notre Dame to its last known visual state is not likely to be seen as authentic when it deliberately results in creating replicas without an obvious notion of the destruction that the fire caused. The most critical aspect in authentic reconstruction of the Notre Dame is to let the principles of reconstruction meet the people's desire assuming that heritage owns its status by being meaningful to people. Therefore, these meanings and symbolism that people assign to the Notre Dame need to be identified before being translated in design principles.

Keywords: Notre Dame, Frauenkirche, Heritage, Authenticity, Reconstruction, Authentic reconstruction, People-centred reconstruction

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## 1. Introduction

Since April 2019, when a fire caused severe damage to the Notre Dame church in Paris, numerous discussions, concerning the rebuilding of the monumental church, started and are still rather actual. Living in Paris at that very moment, I experienced the big impact that the destruction of the Notre Dame had on the French people. The whole country witnessed – on television or first hand – the destruction that the fire caused. Globally speaking, people that witnessed the fire, are most likely to remember the flames coming out of the roof and the moment the spire collapsed. I remember the videos of people singing and praying on the other side of the river Seine with a burning Notre Dame in the background. It touched me to see how this event brought up so many emotions collectively. People were literally grieving about the loss of their monument; see figure 1. Since then, I am interested to find out what it is that makes historical monuments so valuable to people.



Figure 1. Parisians grieve after the fire of Notre Dame. Retrieved from <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/notre-dame-cathedral-fire-parisians-grieve-pay-their-respects-landmark-n994896>

The emotional impact of the event continued throughout debates that followed on how to rebuild the church. Directly after the fire, President Emmanuel Macron initiated an international competition to rebuild the roof and spire that had been destroyed completely; see figure 2. He argued: “A contemporary architectural gesture could make Notre-Dame even more beautiful”<sup>1</sup>. However, the National Heritage and Architecture Commission approved recommendations by architects that Notre-Dame be restored to its prior state.<sup>2</sup> In addition, a poll among the Parisians concluded that 55% of respondents favoured the original



Figure 2. State of the Notre Dame before (left) and after (right) the fire. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-47945465>

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<sup>1</sup> Sarah Cascone, “France Will Rebuild Notre Dame’s Spire as It Was, Scrapping Plans to Top the Fire-Ravaged Cathedral With a Contemporary Design,” *artnet News*, July 13, 2020. Available at: <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/notre-dame-spire-reconstruction-1894147>.

<sup>2</sup> Aurelien Breeden, “Macron Drops Idea of a Modern Spire for Notre-Dame,” *The New York Times* (The New York Times, July 9, 2020). Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/09/world/europe/Notre-Dame-spire-Macron.html>.

design.<sup>3</sup> In response, the French Senate passed a bill requiring that the reconstruction be faithful to its “last known visual state”.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore it seems like a final decision has been made and the debate has come to a some kind of resolution. I wonder whether the people in charge of this decision architects, historians and politicians looked careful enough at the complexity of the process of reconstruction of the Notre Dame. In particular, did they determine what their decision would mean to the people; the destruction brought up so many emotions, the rebuild might do the same.

In response to the bill passed by the French senate concerning the rebuild of the Notre Dame, this paper aims to review this decision by proposing the most suitable/desirable way of reconstructing the Notre Dame by focusing in particular on the sentiment of the people. In order to do this, it is important to get an understanding of the following:

1. The Notre Dame is part of a UNESCO world cultural heritage site so it is valuable to investigate the general definition of heritage, its meaning and its importance to people. Because why should we actually be bothered by an old building?
2. The possible rebuilding according to its “last known visual state”, raises the question whether this means the same as “original state”. Additionally, what does originality mean when something is rebuild in a completely different era and the context has changed? It is important to obtain some understanding about what is perceived as correct, false or authentic when intervening in a piece of heritage. Who decides whether heritage is authentic and on what is this decision based?
3. The destruction of the Notre Dame caused heavy emotions to the people since the building means a lot for the French culture and identity. This intensifies the debate about reconstruction and probably influences it as well. The rebuilding process can be just as symbolic as the destruction.<sup>5</sup> What social and political factors influence the symbolism of destructed and reconstructed heritage?
4. In addition, it is useful to get an understanding of how a public debate concerning the rebuild of an emblematic building takes place. Therefore, a case study will be reviewed to gain more insides about the application of the earlier discussed theories to a real example. In this case, the Frauenkirche in Dresden, Germany will be evaluated. Its rebuilding process is remarkable because it was performed according to the Anastylosis principles which illustrate important speculations about the notion of authenticity. Also, it was rebuild decades later than it was destructed during the Second World War, due to a broad collective discussion regarding the meaning of the church. What where the motives to rebuild this church? And how did these motives change between the time of destruction and reconstruction? How was dealt with authenticity? And what lessons can be learned from this example?

This paper gives information and draws conclusions through a literature study on the definition and meaning of heritage and authenticity. Subsequently, this paper defines the problems and solutions that occur in similar processes of destruction and rebuilding in order to contribute to the rebuilding

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<sup>3</sup> Sangeeta Singh-Kurtz, “The Notre-Dame Redesign Debate Is Over-and It Will Look Exactly the Same,” *Architectural Digest* (,July 15, 2020). Available at: <https://www.architecturaldigest.com/story/notre-dame-redesign-debate-is-over>.

<sup>4</sup> Sarah Cascone, “France Will Rebuild Notre Dame's Spire as It Was, Scrapping Plans to Top the Fire-Ravaged Cathedral With a Contemporary Design,” *artnet News*, July 13, 2020, Available at: <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/notre-dame-spire-reconstruction-1894147>.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Bevan, *The Destruction of Memory: Architecture at War* (London, UK: Reaktion Books, 2016), 229.

process of the Notre Dame, with a particular focus on meaning and values that are granted to heritage by the people.

In chapter 2: *Heritage, authenticity & socio-political factors* the general definition of heritage is set out, together with its importance and concern to accuracy in propagating a message. In addition, the functioning of the perception of authenticity is discussed and the socio-political motives that influence the way people regard heritage and authenticity.

In chapter 3: *A case study: the Frauenkirche, Dresden* the debate around the rebuilding process of the Frauenkirche is described. This chapter defines the desires and considerations of the people in relation to a building of great importance to national identity and culture.

In chapter 4: *An advise for the Notre Dame* all acquired knowledge in the above mentioned chapters are applied on the debate around the rebuilding of the Notre Dame with due regard to the socio-political context.

At last, a conclusion, discussion and bibliography are added.

## 2. Heritage, authenticity & socio-political factors

### 2.1 Introduction

What is heritage and why is it meaningful to humankind? And for what reason is it to protect heritage? How do we value our heritage? It is important to answer these questions since buildings were not only there to serve a function, but when they got older, became an interesting object in peoples search to discover history in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Buildings were until then left to decay, but since then people started to preserve them.<sup>6</sup> Nowadays, heritage can sometimes be questioned and even be contested, as we have witnessed during the recent protests of the Black Lives Matter-Movement. Statues were torn down and many other things like street names were questioned. We question our way of representing our history. Heritage cannot only be traced back to architecture but it can be found everywhere, representing our history through several instruments like street names, statues and more. What part of history has the right to be shown and what should not be there? And what factors influence the meaning of heritage? This chapter, firstly, explains the definition and importance of heritage, secondly, the controversies around the representation of heritage and authenticity, and thirdly, the socio-political aspects that play a part in our dealings with heritage.

### 2.2 Definition of heritage

Possibly, the immediate reference to heritage protection is UNESCO, founded in 1945, as educational, scientific and cultural organization of the United Nations. Its premise was to learn from the “devastation and destruction from the two world wars, to promote understanding between peoples and to secure peace.”<sup>7</sup> According to UNESCO, world heritage is the designation for places on Earth that are of outstanding universal value to humanity and as such, have been inscribed to be protected for future generations to appreciate and enjoy. Therefore the UNESCO World Heritage contributes to “the preservation of remarkable places and promotes cultural exchange, dialogue and peace in a sustainable way”.<sup>8</sup>

The world heritage list of UNESCO contains numerous cases that are not appreciated for its aesthetics, but that are commemorative and connected to wars and slavery. For example, the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, the biggest camp constructed by the Nazis during the Second World War was inscribed on the World-Heritage List as:

*evidence of this inhumane, cruel and methodical effort to deny human dignity to groups considered inferior, leading to their systematic murder. ... The site is a key place of memory for the whole of humankind for the Holocaust, racist policies and barbarism; it is a place of our collective memory of this dark chapter in the history of humanity, of transmission to younger generations and a sign of warning of the many threats and tragic consequences of extreme ideologies and denial of human dignity<sup>9</sup>*

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<sup>6</sup> Tino Mager, *Architecture Reperformed: the Politics of Reconstruction* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2016), 3.

<sup>7</sup> *World Heritage Explained - Animated Short about the UNESCO World Heritage Convention (English)*, UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2019, Available at: <https://whc.unesco.org/pg.cfm?cid=160>.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> UNESCO World Heritage Centre, “Auschwitz Birkenau German Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp (1940-1945),” UNESCO World Heritage Centre, accessed March 4, 2021, Available at: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/31/>.

Heritage contributes to the collective memory and is an important method of representing our history. This does not only include physical sites but also intangible heritage, such as practices, expressions, knowledge and skills. These can also be inscribed on the list of World Heritage, and will therefore be protected by UNESCO.<sup>10</sup>

Our history is reflected in our heritage. Consequently, heritage helps us understand this history, which, for its part, influences our identity and culture. When making choices for the future, remembering the past can be important. The way history is represented through our heritage needs to be viewed critically because if heritage suggests another story of an event and history is understood in a different way, history can repeat itself in an undesirable way or an important meaning can be lost.<sup>11</sup>

### 2.3 The notion of authenticity

We seek for heritage that propagates history in the right way. But a paradox can be found in this search. In case of the Parthenon in Athens for example, attempts (see figure 3) are still in progress to rebuild the monument to its “original glory”<sup>12</sup>, dating from the Greek times after it turned into a ruin because it was used as a gunpowder magazine in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>13</sup> By rebuilding the Parthenon to its first known shape, this piece of heritage fulfils its purpose to propagate the history of the Greek times. But the reconstructed shape will give the impression that it was never in ruins because of its latter function. Why is it that the one representation of history prevails over the other? Is this historic revisionism? Is the Parthenon authentic because it will be in its original shape or will it not be authentic because it hides an aspect of its story? What does authenticity mean when heritage is reconstructed?



Figure 3. The restoration of the Parthenon. Retrieved from <https://www.greece-is.com/healing-parthenon-inside-mammoth-restoration-project/>

John Bold, Peter Larkham and Robert Pickard (2018) state that reconstructing in historicist style may be read as “an attempt to stop the ineluctable processes of time and decay.”<sup>14</sup> It can therefore be seen as an act which intentionally causes a false perception of time.

John Darlington mentions many examples of reconstructed heritage, which he defines as fake heritage. This concept of fakery is based on deceit and states that all reconstructed heritage is meant to conceal or hide the truth, but there are differences in what degree they are doing so.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> UNESCO World Heritage Centre, “Intangible Heritage - Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ),” UNESCO World Heritage Centre, accessed March 4, 2021, Available at: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/faq/40>.

<sup>11</sup> John Darlington, *Fake Heritage Why We Rebuild Monuments* (New Haven, East Sussex: Yale University Press, 2020), 10-11.

<sup>12</sup> Tino Mager, *Architecture Reperformed: the Politics of Reconstruction* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2016), 3.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> John Bold, Peter J. Larkham, and Robert D. Pickard, *Authentic Reconstruction: Authenticity, Architecture and the Built Heritage* (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2018), 15.

<sup>15</sup> John Darlington, *Fake Heritage Why We Rebuild Monuments* (New Haven, East Sussex: Yale University Press, 2020), 196.

Thus, deceit is unavoidable in reconstruction of heritage but we can consider whether heritage intentionally intensifies this. A possible way to let heritage stay authentic is to not intervene and let it decay. From the moment of intervention, we can ask ourselves whether the piece of heritage is meant to deceive or falsifies the notion of the historic continuum.

However, “in the event of deliberate destruction of emblematic buildings or historic quarters by humans in order to dominate or terrorize, for example in case of wars, it is the population itself that causes a dramatic and destructive intervention in the historic continuum”.<sup>16</sup> In that case, heritage does not even get the chance to decay. The natural response is to rebuild the historic architecture which happened in, for example, German and Polish cities after the Second World War. City centres were reconstructed in an accurate way to make a statement of national identity and resilience. The purpose of the reconstruction was to recreate a familiar place which would revive the historical character of the city, despite the fact that modern materials were used and construction took place in a different era.<sup>17</sup> The notion of authenticity is again paradoxical in this case. People tried to turn back the clock in order to respond an undesired intervention, but, thereby, “distorted the notion of time”.<sup>18</sup>

The interpretation of the word authenticity has become “diluted”<sup>19</sup>, since the term is used to advertise experiences and objects. The word can be used to define a difference between original and replacement materials or whether it is assembled in a traditional way. But the word is also vested in feelings and values that we assign to objects or experiences.<sup>20</sup> This concept of value complicates the issue. Authenticity depends on people’s perceptions, which always differ. Therefore, authenticity is not absolute.<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, it is not possible to label things as authentic or inauthentic in a universal context within fixed criteria. Authenticity must be evaluated in a local cultural context.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, when values change, our perception on authenticity could change as well.

#### 2.4 Social & political factors

Since heritage is so important to our history and identity, political and social aspects are always underlined in our way we treat heritage.<sup>23</sup> It is important to triangulate which motives play a role in intervening in our heritage, whenever this involves maintenance, decay, deliberate destruction, renovation or reconstruction. What are the political and social factors that define these decisions?

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<sup>16</sup> John Bold, Peter J. Larkham, and Robert D. Pickard, *Authentic Reconstruction: Authenticity, Architecture and the Built Heritage* (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2018), 15.

<sup>17</sup> John Darlington, *Fake Heritage Why We Rebuild Monuments* (New Haven, East Sussex: Yale University Press, 2020), 196-197.

<sup>18</sup> John Bold, Peter J. Larkham, and Robert D. Pickard, *Authentic Reconstruction: Authenticity, Architecture and the Built Heritage* (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2018), 16.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 3.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 4.

<sup>21</sup> John Darlington, *Fake Heritage Why We Rebuild Monuments* (New Haven, East Sussex: Yale University Press, 2020), 200-201.

<sup>22</sup> John Bold, Peter J. Larkham, and Robert D. Pickard, *Authentic Reconstruction: Authenticity, Architecture and the Built Heritage* (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2018), 5

<sup>23</sup> Amra Hadžimuhamedović. *Participative reconstruction as a healing process in Bosnia*. (Unpublished manuscript, 2018, available at:

[https://www.academia.edu/40157061/Participative\\_reconstruction\\_as\\_a\\_healing\\_process\\_in\\_Bosnia](https://www.academia.edu/40157061/Participative_reconstruction_as_a_healing_process_in_Bosnia)), 1.



During the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia, for example, the war that ensued in Bosnia and Herzegovina led to deliberate destruction in order to harm another's identity and social values that cultural heritages represented.<sup>24</sup> After the war, important pieces of heritage, like bridges and buildings were reconstructed almost from scratch because in many cases there were just ruins left. The purpose of rehabilitation of cultural heritage was to mitigate the horrors of the war.<sup>25</sup> The commission that was in charge of the reconstruction of cultural heritage in Bosnia, stated that cultural heritage sites should be reconstructed as its last known shape before the war. In doing so, discussions about to whom the heritage sites belonged were avoided.<sup>26</sup> In this way, the commission abstained from the debate on what heritage in general should propagate or who is in charge of it; they just responded to the public desire of reviving their monuments as they were before the war. Creating the illusion that heritage never suffered from destruction, whereas in reality it did, can be seen as historic revisionism. However, this does not imply that the reconstruction of the Bosnian heritage is not authentic. "The reconstruction of buildings, have responded to a people-centred approach to post-war restoration. Rituals, traditions, associations and, above all, new narrative attributes that testify to both the destruction and the reconstruction, have been key in considering the reconstructed buildings not merely as replicas but as authentic monuments."<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the commission highlighted that heritage loses its potential when there is no public support.<sup>28</sup> In conclusion, during reconstruction, the only way heritage gains its authenticity, is by responding to the public's desire.

However, the first response after the war might be to forget the horrors of the war, whereas later on, it would be of value to remember the things that happened, also in the interest of peace.<sup>29</sup> But this acute desire, derived in a certain era and context, is irrevocably a snapshot in relation to the permanency of a reconstructed heritage site. When constructing and reconstructing, desires in doing so are captured in something static and determined as a building. There is a constant tension between remembering and forgetting. Accordingly, there is a danger in continual honour of memories of suffering and, on the contrary, forced forgetting of horrors and the prevention of a possible repetition of history.<sup>30</sup> What weights more heavily? The solution lies somewhere in the middle. One should not manipulate both emotions as history through heritage.<sup>31</sup>

In the above mentioned Bosnians post-war examples of authentic reconstruction to its last known pre-war state, the reconstruction was a well-formulated response to deliberate destruction. To an attempt to harm national identity and culture, the response was to bring back the familiar heritage that propagates that national identity and culture. Like this, authenticity is achieved. But in case of a fire, decay or other non-deliberate causes of destruction, what will be the motive that allows reconstruction in historic style to be authentic? If there is no intention for destruction, what should be the intention of reconstruction? The main principle is, assuming that heritage does not exist without public support, people's desires need to be met in order to let the reconstructed site of heritage gain its authenticity, no matter what the shape of the reconstructed part might be.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 4.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 7.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 7.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 5-6.

<sup>29</sup> Robert Bevan, *The Destruction of Memory: Architecture at War* (London, UK: Reaktion Books, 2016), 229.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 229-230.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 258.

An example of how reconstruction in historic style led to contested authenticity is Barcelona's Gothic Quarter which was not conserved since the medieval times, as one would be led to believe by its name. Instead, it was heavily revised and rebuilt in gothic style between the 1920s and 50s.<sup>32</sup> The aim was to renew the city and to build "a new modern, monumental and symbolic universe for it".<sup>33</sup> Nowadays, many people believe that this quarter originates from medieval times, whereas this is not true and those people are misled in their notion of history.<sup>34</sup> It is partly due to its monumental character that Barcelona is attracting much tourism which became an instrument through which the city creates "the imaginary and symbolism of the city and heritage sites as well as the illusion of their authenticity"<sup>35</sup>. Tourists are seeking more and more for authenticity but paradoxically, there is an increase of performed experiences of authenticity, which are in fact not authentic since they are only organized for the sake of tourism.<sup>36</sup> The latter example shows how the creation of a monumental environment supports a false perception of authenticity which is even more increased by tourists that seek for authenticity but fall for everything but something authentic.

## 2.5 Conclusion

People only started preserving their heritage from the 19<sup>th</sup> century on. Heritage represents our history through commemorative sites, historical monuments and intangible heritage. History influences people's identity and culture. In addition, an understanding of the past arguably prevents both its repetition and the loss of important lessons from history. Since the representation of heritage has implications, it is important that it shall always be viewed critically.

Authenticity is directly related to the perception of people; perception is not an absolute concept, and therefore authenticity is neither. Therefore it is very hard to formulate universal criteria that describe something as authentic. It should always be evaluated in a local cultural context. Reconstruction or restoration in order to maintain the original state of a building creates a paradox in the notion of authenticity. On the one hand, authenticity is met by conserving the original state. On the other hand, reconstruction and restoration in historic style can lead to a false perception of the historic continuum and authenticity can be contested. However, intentional destruction also causes a destructive intervention in the historic continuum. In order to restore this, buildings are reconstructed in historical style to its last known state which is in fact viewed as authentic. So authentic reconstruction of destroyed heritage is, in the end, paradoxical. However, it is possible to evaluate heritage on the level it deceits regarding history. Therefore it is important to always argue what is propagated in heritage and what is not.

As discussed in the examples of post-war reconstruction in Bosnia and Herzegovina, reconstructed heritage sites own their authenticity by responding to a public's desire, although it can also be seen as historic revisionism. Reconstruction to the last known pre-war state, thus reconstruction in historic style, recreates a familiar environment which works healing. However, there will always be a field of tension between the concepts of forgetting and commemoration of the traumatic events of the war. Heritage should meet the emotions of the people and the responsibility to show the events that happened throughout history. The same counts for heritage that got destroyed non-

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<sup>32</sup> Tino Mager and Josep-Maria Garcia-Fuentes, "Barcelona's Gothic Quarter: Architecture, Ideology and Politics," in *Architecture Reperformed: the Politics of Reconstruction* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2016), pp. 35-54. 35.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 36.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 35-36.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. 50.

<sup>36</sup> Ning Wang, "Rethinking Authenticity," in *Annals of Tourism Research*, ed. Sara Dolnicar and Scott McCabe, 2nd ed., vol. 26 (Elsevier Science Pergamon, 1999), pp. 349-370. 353.

deliberately. Heritage can only exist by the presence of public support, so during reconstruction, the desire of the people should be met. Reconstruction to the last known state or in historic style in cases of non-deliberate destruction is less eligible to gain authenticity since it does not respond to a conscious act of destruction.

Barcelona's Gothic Quarter is an example of how reconstruction in historic style leads to an inauthentic and deceitful site of heritage. However, this site promotes the symbolism and illusion of authenticity through the medium of tourism. Tourists seek for authenticity, but paradoxically there is an increase of performances of authenticity. The previous intention to establish a monumental environment results nowadays in a false perception of authenticity which is even worsened by tourism.

Due to the strong relation between heritage and cultural identity, socio-political factors underlie inevitably the way we deal with heritage, whether it is to enhance, cultivate or destroy cultural identity.

### 3. Case Study: Frauenkirche, Dresden

#### 3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter it became clear that both heritage and the notion of authenticity carry many controversies. An unambiguous script on how to deal with authenticity during reconstruction of heritage does not exist. To get a better grip on the complexities discussed in the previous chapter that came together during the reconstruction of an emblematic building, like the Notre Dame, the process of the reconstruction of the Frauenkirche in Dresden (Germany) is reviewed. This is a remarkable example because the church was rebuilt to its original shape but the event of destruction is still noticeable by the appearance of it. Therefore, although it was reconstructed in a historic style, it seems like no historical event is hidden and the church is not meant to deceive. Did people manage to reconstruct the Frauenkirche in an authentic way? Or are there in fact complications regarding the notion of authenticity?

#### 3.2 The destruction & reconstruction of the Frauenkirche

The Frauenkirche, a church that originated from 1743 and replaced the old Romanesque church, was bombed during a large-scaled firebombing on Dresden on February 13<sup>th</sup> 1945 by the allied forces.<sup>37</sup> Together with the historic city centre of Dresden, the Frauenkirche was changed into a ruin, as can be seen in figure 5.<sup>38</sup>

When the reconstruction of the city of Dresden began, important monument like the State Theatre, Academy of Fine Arts and the Town Hall were reconstructed immediately. Accordingly, plans were made to reconstruct the Frauenkirche. After all, the drawings of the original construction were conceived. But funding of the state and Church was not provided, which made it impossible to rebuild the Frauenkirche.<sup>39</sup> Instead, efforts were made to preserve stones and protect the site from being used for other purposes, in order to provide the possibility of rebuilding in the future. The preservation of stones was important to allow reconstruction according to the Anastylis principles.<sup>40</sup> This is a Greek term which



Figure 4. The Frauenkirche in 2018. Retrieved from: <https://lasd.landtag.sachsen.de/de/aktuelles/pressmitteilungen/Begegnungstreffen-der-ehemaligen-Hoheneckerinnen-in-Dresden.cshtml>



Figure 5: The Frauenkirche and city centre of Dresden after the Second World War. Retrieved from: <https://www.archdaily.com/628618/what-is-behind-europes-grandiose-rebuilding/554c7464e58ece423b00029e-what-is-behind-europes-grandiose-rebuilding-image>

<sup>37</sup> Martin Gegner, Bart Ziino, and Tony Joel, "Reconstruction over Ruins: Rebuilding Dresden's Frauenkirche," in *The Heritage of War* (Abingdon, Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2012), pp. 197-218. 199.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 198.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 203.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

prescribes that “the original materials and architectural elements should be used in the most faithful way possible, often reassembling its fallen or scattered fragments. Prerequisites include the survival of sufficient elements of the original to create a credible restoration and an understanding of the original form through documentation, paintings or the detective work of archaeology. Any new elements necessary for structural reasons, such as a missing drum in an otherwise reconstructible column, must be evident as modern interventions, rather than historically accurate facsimiles.”<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, the Frauenkirche stayed a ruin, which was neither reconstructed, nor demolished but only neglected. The Frauenkirche was nothing more than a part of a remaining tower.<sup>42</sup>

Moreover, it was hard for the people of Dresden to relate themselves to the ruins of the Frauenkirche. Dresden was bombed by the English and American allied forces. It was not the Nazi regime that was responsible for the massive destruction, but commemorating raid as a harmful act, would be a charge against the people that liberated the people from fascism.<sup>43</sup> As soon as most of the remains of the destroyed city were cleared away, the ruins of the Frauenkirche stood out and became a site of memory, promoting the bombing and consequently, warning for everything that happened during the war and fascism.<sup>44</sup> See figure 6. Already more than fifteen years after the war was finished, the Dresden's cultural heritage conservationists stated that in both cases, rebuilding or not, the monumental value of the site would undermine the value of the church. When rebuilding, the anti-war symbolism would be nullified and if not, the monumental value of the pre-war church would be lost. This issue became a “heritage impasse”<sup>45</sup>.



Figure 6. The Frauenkirche during the an annual commemoration of the destruction of Dresden in the 1960's. Retrieved from <https://www.dw.com/en/the-history-of-dresdens-frauenkirche/a-37525301>

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<sup>41</sup> John Darlington, *Fake Heritage Why We Rebuild Monuments* (New Haven, East Sussex: Yale University Press, 2020), 206.

<sup>42</sup> Martin Gegner, Bart Ziino, and Tony Joel, “Reconstruction over Ruins: Rebuilding Dresden's Frauenkirche,” in *The Heritage of War* (Abingdon, Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2012), pp. 197-218. 202.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 204.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

During the Second International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments in 1964, the Venice Charter was formulated, advocating the Anastylis Principles and pleading for distinguishing restored objects and rebuilt replicas, in war-ravaged Europe. But the charter provided no solution for the Frauenkirche, since both the anti-war symbolism of the ruin and the value of the pre-war monument fitted within this definition of authentic. The Charter defines heritage by meaning and significance which are two concepts open for everyone's interpretation. It is the public debate at the end which will define the collective values of the two above-mentioned concepts.<sup>46</sup>

By the 1980s the shape of the ruins was significantly worsened and the site became dangerous. An intervention was necessary. Once the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, citizen's initiative was founded to promote the rebuilding the Frauenkirche, which drew a lot of attention. Financial support came from several sources.<sup>47</sup> The people behind the initiative managed well to advertise the potential of rebuilding the church by saying that it would be a "Christian Centre of World Peace in the new Europe"<sup>48</sup> and assuring that that the memory of the role of Dresden during the war would not be forgotten.<sup>49</sup> These statements were met with more positivism now that Germany was reunited, than before in sceptic East-Germany. Also, they stated that an authentic reconstruction would be possible because old materials were well preserved and therefore the church could be rebuild according to the Anastylis principles.<sup>50</sup>

In Berlin, the destroyed Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche was conceived in its ruinous state and a contemporary addition was build right next to it; shown in figure 7. In this example the site stayed a monument which explicitly showed the destructive effects of war. But in the case of the Frauenkirche, the desire to reconstruct the glorious shape of the church was stronger.<sup>51</sup>

And so they did. The church was rebuild according to the drawings and with partly old materials and, clearly distinguished, new materials. The Frauenkirche would no longer be a ruin which represented anti-war symbolism. Authenticity was achieved as much as possible but still, the reconstruction knows several controversies. During the reconstruction digital building techniques were used which were obviously not available in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>52</sup> In addition, fully according to the Anastylis principles, there are clear divisions between the old materials and the newly added materials since the old stones that have been preserved, changed colour due to natural patination and



Figure 7. Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche in Berlin. Retrieved from [akg-images.com/CS.aspx?VP3=SearchResult&ITEMID=2\\_UMEBMJFJNHL&LANGSWI=1&LANG=French](http://akg-images.com/CS.aspx?VP3=SearchResult&ITEMID=2_UMEBMJFJNHL&LANGSWI=1&LANG=French)

<sup>46</sup> Martin Gegner, Bart Ziino, and Tony Joel, "Reconstruction over Ruins: Rebuilding Dresden's Frauenkirche," in *The Heritage of War* (Abingdon, Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2012), pp. 197-218. 204-206.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 208.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 211.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 213.

contrast with the new added original white colour. The previous ruinous state of the church is therefore still noticeable; see figure 8. But it would be fair to admit that the new stones will eventually also become the same colour, with the result of negating the Anastylis principles.<sup>53</sup>

### 3.3 Conclusion

The example of the Frauenkirche demonstrates the way the people assign value and meaning to a site, no matter what the state, shape or form that might be. Also it is very significant that this meaning changes over time and is directly linked to events that happened throughout history. Furthermore, the case study demonstrates that people give different meaning to something at the same time. It is strongly linked to the interpretation of an individual or group.

The reconstruction of the Frauenkirche met the Anastylis principles and therefore tried to respond to authenticity issues as much as possible. Today, it is still very noticeable that the church was destroyed. In that sense, the piece of monument is not intending to deceive or hide a certain part of history. However, by reconstructing the church, the anti-war symbolism was neglected. It is certain that the church does not represent a warning of what a devastating effect war can have on a city. During the reconstruction people did not manage to combine the two symbolisms.



*Figure 8.* The north side and largest remaining original structure (dark stones) of the Frauenkirche. Retrieved from <https://remotangles.com/2013/07/11/dresden-and-the-frauenkirche/>

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 214.

## 4. An advice for the Notre Dame

### 4.1 Introduction

After the attempt to get an understanding of the complexities behind heritage and authenticity, this chapter will aim to apply this knowledge to the context of the reconstruction process of the Notre Dame. Due to the intricacies of the earlier discussed concepts, an unambiguous proposal on the perfect way to reconstruct the Notre Dame will be hard to formulate. This chapter will in fact try to raise awareness for the complexities of the debate in order to contribute to a best possible way of reconstructing the Notre Dame.

### 4.2 Heritage status of Notre Dame

The Notre Dame is located in the very city centre of Paris on Île de la Cité which is part of the “the banks of the river Seine”<sup>54</sup>, that contains a large area of Paris and is listed as UNESCO World Heritage. “The ensemble, regarded as a geographical and historical entity, forms an exceptional and unique example of urban riverside architecture, where the different layers of the history of Paris, the capital city of one of the first great nation states of Europe, are harmoniously superposed.”<sup>55</sup> Due to the great perspective from the surrounding bridges and quays, the evolution of Paris and its history can be well observed. The Notre Dame is a remarkable medieval masterpiece within this heritage site.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, it is one of the oldest churches of France dating from the 12<sup>th</sup> century. It holds many architectural interventions from later on, including the most well-known, *flèche*, by Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc<sup>57</sup> originating from 19<sup>th</sup> century. The church holds many sculptural qualities and is therefore, for great importance for the art history sector. In addition, it is one of the most emblematic monuments to French history, thanks to the remarkable events that the site provided, such as the marriage of Henri IV in 1572, the celebration of the liberation of Paris after the Second World War or masses held by former President Charles de Gaulle.<sup>58</sup> The Notre Dame is deeply intertwined with the French culture and historic events, which is effectively the reason to preserve the great monument.

The fire on April 20<sup>th</sup> 2019 destroyed both the complete roof construction and the *flèche*. The towers and facades survived. The reconstruction would thus only concern a new roof and possible spire. To rebuild the Notre Dame to its last known state can be seen as historical revisionism because it deliberately decides not to show the event of the fire. In addition, since the roof and the spire are completely destroyed, reconstruction would involve the recreation of the historical artefacts and architectural elements. If the replicas will deliberately not show that these are not original in order to meet the last known visual state, the reconstruction can be seen as deceitful.

However, if there is a desire to restore the things that got lost in the fire, what would be an authentic way to rebuild the Notre Dame?

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<sup>54</sup>UNESCO World Heritage Centre, “Paris, Banks of the Seine,” Paris, Banks of the Seine, accessed March 25, 2021, Available at: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/600/>.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Eugène Viollet-le-Duc (1814-1879) was a French architect that did several restoration projects of monuments throughout France, including the Notre Dame. His interventions are sometimes seen as controversial because he did not rebuild the monuments to their original shape but mostly added elements that follow from his own interpretation of the medieval times. Accordingly, he added the spire to the Notre Dame in gothic style.

<sup>58</sup> Ministère de la Culture, “Le Monument,” Notre Dame de Paris, accessed March 25, 2021, <https://notre-dame-de-paris.culture.gouv.fr/fr/monument>.



### 4.3 Authenticity of reconstruction

In the previous chapters some examples of post-war reconstruction in Bosnia and Herzegovina were discussed in which rapid loss of heritage caused a collective desire to turn back the clock. Reconstruction to its last known state took place and in this light, it was outlined how this was in fact authentic. A destructive intervention in the historical continuum of a building, with the aim to harm the cultural identity that this building propagated, allowed reconstruction in historical style – resulting in a replica of the original – to be authentic. In case of the Notre Dame, the fire was an accident and not a deliberate act of destruction. But can the fire still be labelled as a disturbing intervention in its historical continuum which would allow reconstruction to its last known state to be authentic? Or should the fire be seen as a part of the historical continuum and reconstruction to its last known state should be seen as historical revisionism? Anyway, as discussed the Notre Dame is deeply intertwined within the French history and culture. It is therefore understandable that the French consider the loss of their great monument as a loss of their identity and people seek for recovery of this identity by wishing the church to be restored to its last known state. The way to obtain authenticity when in reconstruction to its last known state lies somewhere between preventing historical revisionism and meeting people's desire in reviving those things that have been lost.

In Dresden they did so by being transparent about every element that was not the original when reconstructing the Frauenkirche to its original shape, according to the Anastylis principles. This approach can also be applied when reconstructing the Notre Dame, in order to gain more authenticity. It will not result in an exact reconstruction of its last known visual state since somehow a visual distinction has to be made in comparison to the original elements. So that would be a concession which would nonetheless allow the Notre Dame to be reconstructed to its original shape. The question remains whether this is enough to meet the expectations of reviving the glorious appearance from before the fire, since it is in the end the people themselves that have their own subjective perception of authenticity and assign meaning and value.

Likewise, the examples of post-war reconstruction in Bosnia and Herzegovina demonstrated how a people-centred approach allowed reconstructed heritage to be authentic, since heritage can only exist in the presence of people's support. Assuming that people do not want the Notre Dame to be less authentic after reconstruction, it is important to let the reconstruction respond to the desire of the people. The Frauenkirche became a monument in a ruinous state, carrying an anti-war symbolism. The symbolism of a monumental building can change when the shape or state does. Likewise, the symbolism of the Notre Dame has possibly changed after the fire and will change again depending on which sort of reconstruction it will undergo. In short, in order to gain authenticity, reconstruction needs to respond to people's desire. As the case study of the Frauenkirche showed, there might be several desires based on several symbolisms that the church held as anti-war monument and historic 17<sup>th</sup> century monument. In order to allow the reconstruction of the Notre Dame respond to people's desire, these desires need to be identified first.

A poll was held among the Parisians in which people voted for either a contemporary gesture as reconstruction or a reconstruction to its last known visual state. 55% voted for the latter. Apart from the fact that this is not a very convincing majority, this poll presumptuously suggests two possible ways of reconstruction by instead asking the people which symbolisms they assign to the Notre Dame, which subsequently a possible way of reconstruction can respond to. In addition, the poll was held only among Parisians whereas the monument has universal value and more people assign value and meaning to the Notre Dame.

What possible symbolisms would there be to identify? The Frauenkirche became a monument where its own destruction was commemorated. Accordingly, the site of the Notre Dame can also adapt the symbolism of commemorating everything that got lost during the fire. This is an alternative response to the emotions of the losses incurred than reviving those losses and reconstruct a replica of the roof and spire. Barcelona's Gothic Quarter illustrated how the symbolism and illusion of authenticity was created through the medium of tourism and how tourists are seeking for an authentic experience but easily fall for organised fake authentic experiences. The Notre Dame is visited by 14 million people every year<sup>59</sup> and is therefore indisputably a tourist attraction. It is important to be aware of the symbolism that the Notre Dame propagates being a tourist attraction and to make sure this symbolism does not affect the authenticity of the monument.

Another less obvious symbolism assigned to the Notre Dame is the one of the yellow vest protesters. Within hours after the fire already hundreds millions of euros were donated by billionaires to restore the church whereas the yellow vests protested for months against social and fiscal injustice.<sup>60</sup> The protesters feel like social injustice is secondary to the reconstruction of the Notre Dame. Consequently, for the protesters, the reconstruction of the Notre Dame now carries the symbolism of the French government "favouring the rich"<sup>61</sup>.

As discussed before, the Notre Dame represents a number of important historical events and therefore the church symbolises the French cultural identity. The French people believe that "the state should offer more cultural protection"<sup>62</sup> and there is a long-known "desire to maintain a culture of universal radiance and concomitant fear of cultural domination"<sup>63</sup>. In addition, the French react to the increasing globalization with nostalgia for a disappearing way of life.<sup>64</sup> As discussed in chapter 2, post-war reconstruction in historic style held the symbolism of showing resilience and enhancing identity, when the latter has been under threat. Would the French also seek for a confirmation of their identity in the Notre Dame and therefore prefer reconstruction in historic style, to the shape which causes a sense of familiarity? And would therefore, a contemporary new gesture for the Notre Dame creates a sense as a harmful act for the French cultural identity? Did the international design contest with foreign proposals for the reconstruction went down the wrong way?

Accordingly, everyone will have its own or collective symbolism assigned to the Notre Dame, which is effectively the main quality of heritage. The above examples merely illustrated either obvious or extreme ways of symbolisms assigned to the Notre Dame. The Frauenkirche demonstrated how it is not always possible to combine multiple symbolisms during reconstruction but in order to preserve the monumental value of the Notre dame, the principles of reconstruction should meet as much symbolisms as possible so it can represent the values and desires of as many people as possible. Only in that case, it will stay a monument of outstanding universal value.

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<sup>59</sup> Eric Topona, "La Valeur Historique Et Émotionnelle De Notre-Dame De Paris," DW.COM, April 16, 2019, <https://www.dw.com/fr/la-valeur-historique-et-%C3%A9motionnelle-de-notre-dame-de-paris/a-48360170>.

<sup>60</sup> Samuel Petrequin, "Donations for Notre Dame Anger Yellow Vest Protestors," PBS (Public Broadcasting Service, April 19, 2019), Available at: <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/donations-for-notre-dame-anger-yellow-vest-protestors>.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Sophie Meunier, "Globalization and French Cultural Identity," in *French Politics, Culture and Society*, ed. Phillip Gordon, 1st ed., vol. 19 (New York, USA: Institute of French Studies, 2001), pp. 23-41. 23.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. 24.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. 37.

#### 4.5 Conclusion

This chapter tried to contribute to the awareness of all the complexities concerning the notion of authenticity in the debate around rebuilding the Notre Dame.

The Notre Dame is listed as UNESCO World Heritage being part of The Banks of the River Seine. The church dates from the 12<sup>th</sup> century and holds both many sculptural qualities and unique architectural elements. Due to many important historical events that took place in or around the heritage site, the Notre Dame is deeply intertwined with the French cultural identity. The fire destroyed the roof construction and the 19<sup>th</sup> century spire. Reconstruction to its last known state can be seen as historical revisionism when the event of destruction is delicately not shown.

Nonetheless, reconstruction to its last known visual state can be seen as authentic when the fire is perceived as destructive intervention in the historical continuum of the building which results in a collective desire to turn back the clock. However, this mostly happens in post-war reconstruction after a deliberate act of destruction. The challenge to obtain authenticity when reconstruction to its last known state, lies between preventing historical revisionism and meeting the people's desire to revive the things that have gone lost. This challenge can be approached by applying the Anastylis principles as happened in case of the Frauenkirche.

Apart from the possible future shape of the Notre Dame, for authentic reconstruction it is crucial to strive for public support, given the fact heritage loses its value in the absence of this. Therefore it is important to have the desires of the people identified. Different groups of people possibly have different symbolisms assigned to a monument at the same time, which do not always go together in the reconstruction process as the Frauenkirche demonstrated. For the reconstruction of the Notre Dame is it important, for the sake of authenticity, to identify these symbolisms before responding to this and translating it into reconstruction principles. A poll among Parisians in which they choose for two different forms of reconstruction is not sufficient for identifying symbolisms and meeting the desires of the people. Also, Parisians are not the only people that assign symbolisms to the church, given the universal value of it.

This chapter tries to portray some extreme or less obvious symbolisms are assigned to the Notre Dame in order to contribute to the awareness of the extent people are relating meaning to heritage. For example, with 14 million visitors per year, the Notre Dame is indisputably a tourist attraction. Tourist tend to seek for authenticity but in the end, damage this. Also, Yellow Vest protesters interpreted the reconstruction of the Notre Dame as favouring the rich. The protesters relate to the church in their fight against social and fiscal injustice. Furthermore, the French people fear the loss of their cultural identity and react with nostalgia to globalization. What did the foreign proposals to the international design contest of the reconstruction of their great monument mean to them? When an identity is under pressure, people tend to desire reconstruction to a form which causes a sense of familiarity. Symbolisms need to be identified in order to provide the possibility for people to assign their values to the Notre Dame in order for the church to maintain its authenticity after the reconstruction.

## 5. Conclusion

In April 2019, a fire heavily damaged the Notre Dame which causes many emotions to people in the whole world and particularly in France. It became apparent from which great value the Notre Dame is. President Emanuel Macron called for an international design contest to make the Notre Dame even more beautiful but this was met with criticism and the French parliament passed a law which prescribed the reconstruction to be faithful to its last known visual state. To reflect on this decision, this paper contributes to the debate on what way of reconstruction is the most desirable. Therefore the paper gives information about the definition of heritage, the notion of authenticity and a case study of a reconstruction process of an emblematic building.

The appreciation of historic buildings started in the 19<sup>th</sup> century which led to preserving heritage. Heritage represents our history through commemorative sites, historical monuments and intangible heritage and effectively influences our identity and culture. Therefore heritage must always be viewed critically. To review the sincerity of heritage, we examine on authenticity. However authenticity is not an absolute concept since it comes down to people's perception. Formulation of universal criteria is therefore problematic but it is the people themselves who subjectively experience heritage as authentic or not. Post-war reconstruction of emblematic buildings or city-centers mostly results in a collective desire of reconstruction heritage to its last known pre-war state. Although technically this can be seen as historical revisionism, in the discussed examples in Bosnia and Herzegovina the reconstructed sites gained authenticity before it responding to a people-centered desire for the sense of familiarity and representation of identity after the latter being under threat during the war; keeping in mind that it is in the end, the people that decides what their heritage means to them. However, there are also examples of deceitful – and therefore unauthentic – pieces of heritage like the Gothic Quarter of Barcelona that was not built in the medieval times (but in the 20<sup>th</sup> century) but happens to promote the illusion of authenticity through the medium of tourism, since a lot of people believe it in fact was constructed in the medieval times. Due to the strong relation between heritage and cultural identity, socio-political factors underlie inevitably the way we deal with heritage, whether it is to enhance, cultivate or destroy cultural identity.

The rebuilding process of the Frauenkirche in Dresden, Germany demonstrated how the meaning of a heritage site goes beyond its aesthetics since the church became a new symbolism in ruinous state. The debate over the reconstruction led to a heritage impasse because the monument held two symbolisms, as both a historic glorious monument and an anti-war monument and they could not bring it together in one reconstruction proposal. The original form of the Frauenkirche was reconstructed and therefore neglected the anti-war symbolisms. The reconstruction met the criteria of authenticity by applying the Anastylis principles which resulted in a clearly noticeable difference between the original elements and the new added elements. However, controversies can be found in the fact that the new added stones will eventually become the same color as the original ones and newer digital building methods were applied in the reconstruction were (during the original building process) people did not have access to.

Concerning the outcome to reconstruct the Notre Dame to its last known visual state, the gained knowledge now allows us to examine the appropriateness of this decision. The fire destroyed the roof construction and the spire and the reconstruction would therefore involve only these parts. If reconstruction to its last known visual state would result in creating replicas of the lost elements without making it obviously noticeable that it does not concern the original, this can be seen as historical revisionism and a deceitful reconstruction. Reconstruction by creating replicas can be considered as authentic when it responds to a strong collective desire of reviving the things that have gone lost. Also reconstruction can obtain more authenticity by applying the applying the

Anastylosis principles as happened in case of the Frauenkirche. Apart from the possible future shape of the Notre Dame, for the sake of authenticity, the pursuit should be to formulate a response to the people's desires, given the fact that authenticity is gained through the perception of people. These desires possibly involve multiple symbolism as The Frauenkirche demonstrated. Symbolisms must be identified in order to formulate principles for an authentic reconstruction. Symbolisms exist in many, possible forms, assigned by various groups of people or individuals. This paper introduces several examples of extreme or less obvious symbolisms that are assigned to the Notre Dame in order to illustrate to what extent people associate to the Notre Dame. However, the paper does not make statements on how to identify the symbolisms, but only prescribes to strive for this identification for the sake of an authentic reconstruction of the Notre Dame.

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