

Conference Paper

Which Version™? Exploring the digital modelling of architecturally important sites and the implications on the understanding of the historical narrative the model reflects

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Which Version™? Exploring the digital modelling of architecturally important sites and the implications on the understanding of the historical narrative the model reflects.

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Which Version™?

- i. **Historical Perspective: What Version™ remained after World War II**
Will consider the example of destruction and subsequent reconstruction relating to World War II as examples of pre-digital projects reflecting on the core consideration of the paper and the presentation, **Which Version™ are you creating/recreating and for what purpose?**
- ii. **The Digital Opportunities**
Will examine the current digital technologies available to those tasked with restoring what has been destroyed in Palmyra and the implications of these methodologies, particularly where virtual/immersive environments are a possibility.
- iii. **The Historical Narrative**
Will consider the historical narrative impact these technologies could have on the story of Palmyra going forward from the removal of daesh as a governing entity in the region.

Which Version™? An introduction

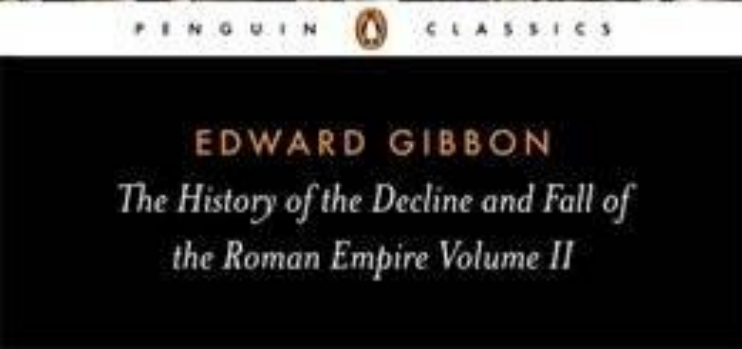
A conversation relating to how will the ancient city reflect recent events? **And why Palmyra?**



Gibbon described Palmyra as:

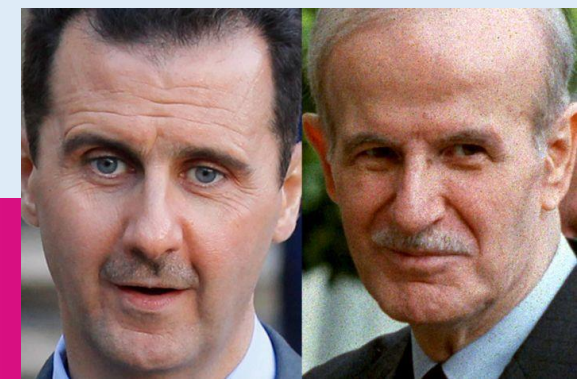
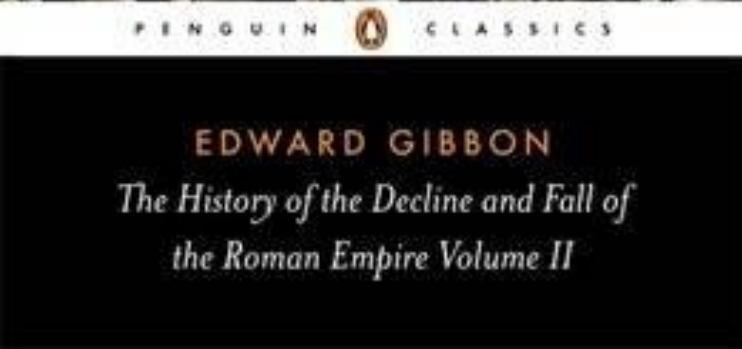
Amid the barren deserts of Arabia, a few cultivated spots rise like islands out of the sandy ocean...situated at a convenient distance between the gulph (sic) of Persia and the Mediterranean, was soon frequented by the caravans which convey to the nations of Europe a considerable part of the rich commodities of India...It was during that peaceful period , if we may judge from a few remaining inscriptions, that the wealthy Palmyrenians constructed those temples, palaces and porticos of Grecian architecture, whose ruins scatter over an extent of several miles, have deserved the curiosity of our travellers.

(Gibbon, 1776, pg.317)



Which Version™? An introduction

Why Palmyra?

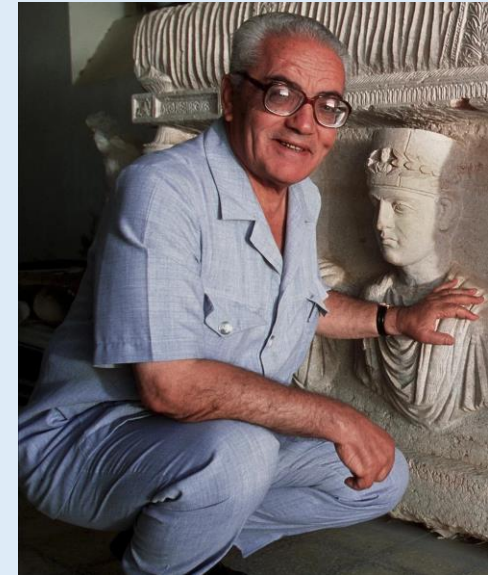


Which Version™? An introduction

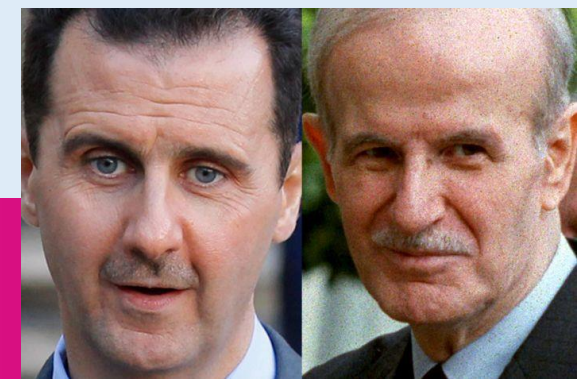
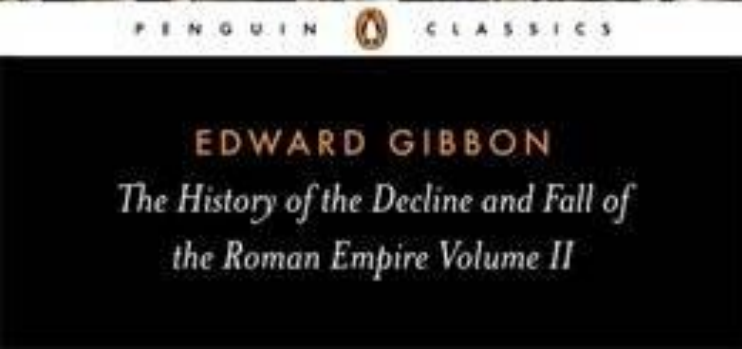
As with Gibbon's eminent patronising comments, context is everything... **Why Palmyra?**



The UNESCO assessment of the current state of Palmyra notes:
The mission asserted the deliberate destructions that were reported by aerial images and propaganda images when the site was inaccessible, namely the destruction of Cella of the Temple of Baal-Shamin, the Cella and surrounding columns of the Temple of Ba'al and the Triumphal Arch...The funerary towers and the temple of Bel could only be seen from a distance, as demining operations were still underway.
(UNESCO, April 2016, pg.3)



Khaled al-Asaad, the 82 year old scholar at Palmyra, after a month of interrogation was beheaded and his body hung from a column on the site in 2015.



Which Version™? Historical Perspective

The why and wherefore of the assignment of cultural, national, even personal importance to a building, a place, and the architecture of both is a topic for another presentation.



Robert Bevan's 2006 [The Destruction of Memory: Architecture at War](#) describes the deliberate destruction by Nazi Germany of the Polish capital Warsaw, from the initial damage caused in its capture in 1939 to the calculated retribution in 1944 for the Warsaw Uprising of the same year:

Of the official pre-war list of 957 historic monuments in Warsaw, 782 were completely demolished and another 141 were partially destroyed. Only 34 survived because the Germans did not have time to set the charges once the Soviet advance resumed. (Bevan, 2006, pg.97).

Cultural Vandalism? Is this a term strong enough for what happened here? Can the bombing of historic Coventry, and Dresden not be included in this mix?

Which Version™? Historical Perspective

Kristallnacht (Night of the Broken Glass) between the 9th and 10th of November 1938



Their destruction arguable acted to wipe these Jewish centres of worship and learning off the German landscape and cityscape in order to produce a version of Germany more akin to the Nazi ideals. When considering What Version™ of Germany they sought, Kristallnacht, like the destruction of Warsaw in the creation of a greater Germany, expressed in the destruction of architecture a future without Jews and without the Slavic races Nazi ideology considered inferior to their Aryan ideal.

As an ideologically driven movement, the Nazi Party, once in power used the deliberate targeting of cultural buildings, as well as associated commercial and residential properties, as a means of both propagating terror and, arguably as attempting to architecturally cleans Germany in a violent prelude to their ethnic cleansing of Europe during the Holocaust.

On the basis that context is everything, the driving force behind these actions can be seen as cultural, ethnic, and ultimately genocidal.

And we can generally agree abhorrent... just as we have to recognise this was neither a Nazi invention, (do we consider Dresden?), nor has it ended with them.

Which Version™? Historical Perspective

Warsaw, Poland, occupied in 1939 and systematically destroyed following the 1944 Warsaw Uprising. **An example of an analogue restoration; to the fullest extent**



**WORLD
MONUMENTS
FUND**

On being asked the question, **Restoration or Commemoration**, John Darlington raised the example of Warsaw.

“...personally I think it’s an extraordinary achievement, but there is a certain sort of antiseptic nature to it that doesn’t actually tell the story of what happened to it.” (BBC Radio 4, June 2017)



The most recent act of destruction perpetrated by daesh has been the 12th century Great Mosque of al-Nuri in Mosul, Iraq, including a famous leaning minaret, on the 22nd of June 2017 ***one very big ‘but’**

Which Version™? Historical Perspective

With regards to Warsaw, Bevan goes on to state, regarding the Neo-Classical Church of St Alexander: “Like so much of the historic city centre, it was rebuilt in close facsimile in the post-war period but it lacks the finesse of the original. The reconstructed city has been described as a ‘Disney operation.’” (Bevan, 2006, pg.182)

Darlington suggested 3 options as alternatives to the Warsaw approach:

- i. Partial restoration from remaining fragments;
- ii. Leaving the ruins to commemorate the events;
- iii. Adapting the ruins into new forms.

And as an example of an analogue restoration?

- Original drawings;
- Photographs;
- Verbal and textual descriptions;
- Paintings, done using a camera obscura (image projected through a small hole... inverted...)??

Warsaw, like many of these projects, was a fascinating one. In particular it was and an opportunity for the Polish architects under Soviet direction, completing the major phase in the mid 1950s (with other works continuing into the 1980s) to test and try out new approaches:

- i. Materials were recycled into other city buildings, including surviving architectural details;
- ii. The examining historic construction methods with a pathology approach to how it went up, and how it came down;
- iii. Understanding the technology utilised in the original building and how it can be replicated in those materials, or with new and emerging technologies;
- iv. A study, certainly in post War Warsaw, of how to undertake major restoration during a period of socio-economic challenge



Assisted by surviving inhabitants of the city, international experts began work on the restoration, with particular attention to the 22 cityscapes painted by Venetian Bernardo Bellotto...

...Bernardo Bellotto died in 1780

Why do this? Why did the Soviet authorities rebuild Warsaw as if World War II had not happened?

Which Version™? Historical Perspective

Nothing in the Old Town stands to commemorate the Nazi invasion or the subsequent destruction in response to the Warsaw Uprising of 1944. Arguably, 'stands' is perhaps the wrong word for it is precisely what does not stand, or partially remains as a ruin which the Old Town does not have.



Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche: Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church, built in the 1890 and damaged by an Allied bombing raid in 1943



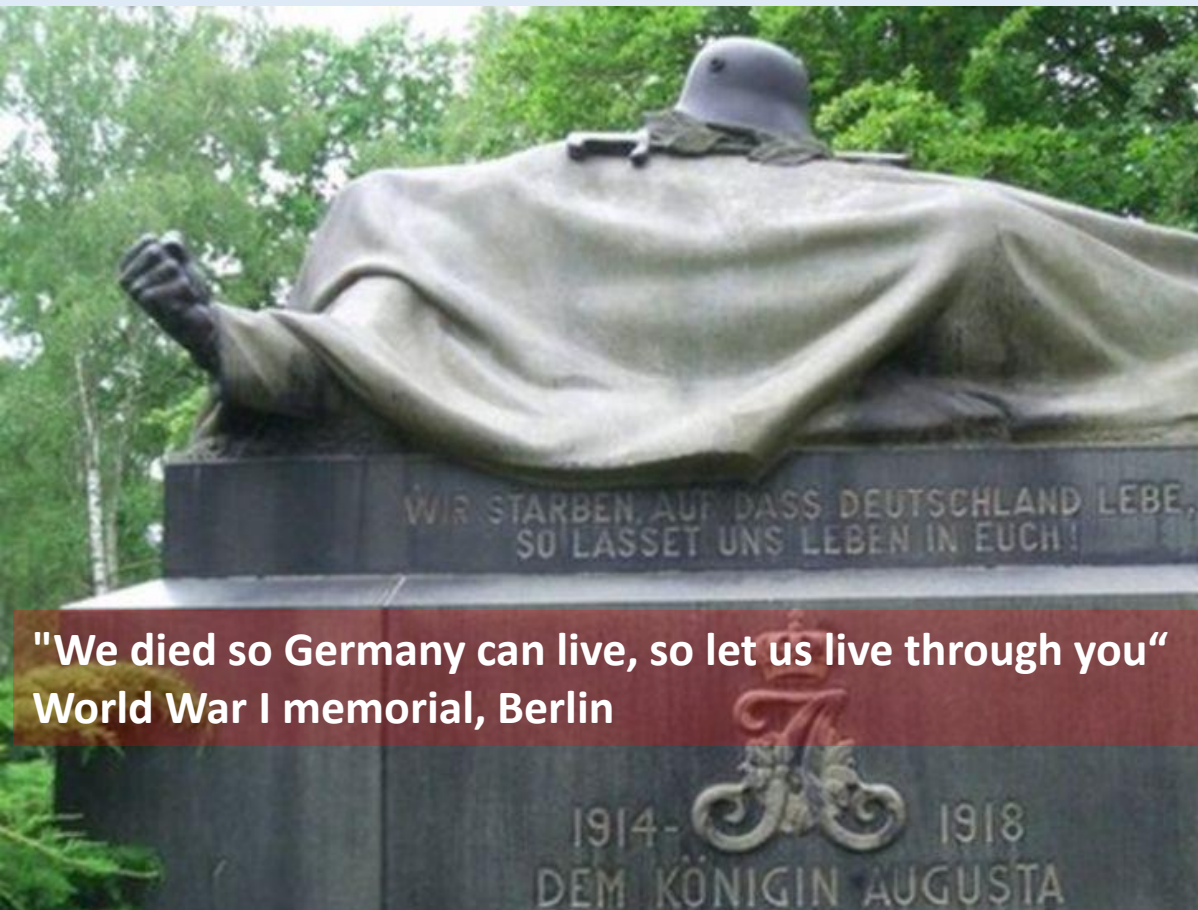
The French village of Oradour-sur-Glane, site of a Nazi Waffen-SS massacre in 1944



St. Michael's Cathedral was destroyed in 1940 with a modern Cathedral being completed in 1962

Which Version™? Historical Perspective

As the grandson of a German who ended up a British prisoner of war I believe commemoration and remembrance is the correct approach. Were I the Grandson or a Pole who fled the destruction of Warsaw in 1944, I might want to see restoration and the eradication of what the Nazis did. Context is everything and represents a considerable challenge to those tasked with a conundrum like Palmyra.



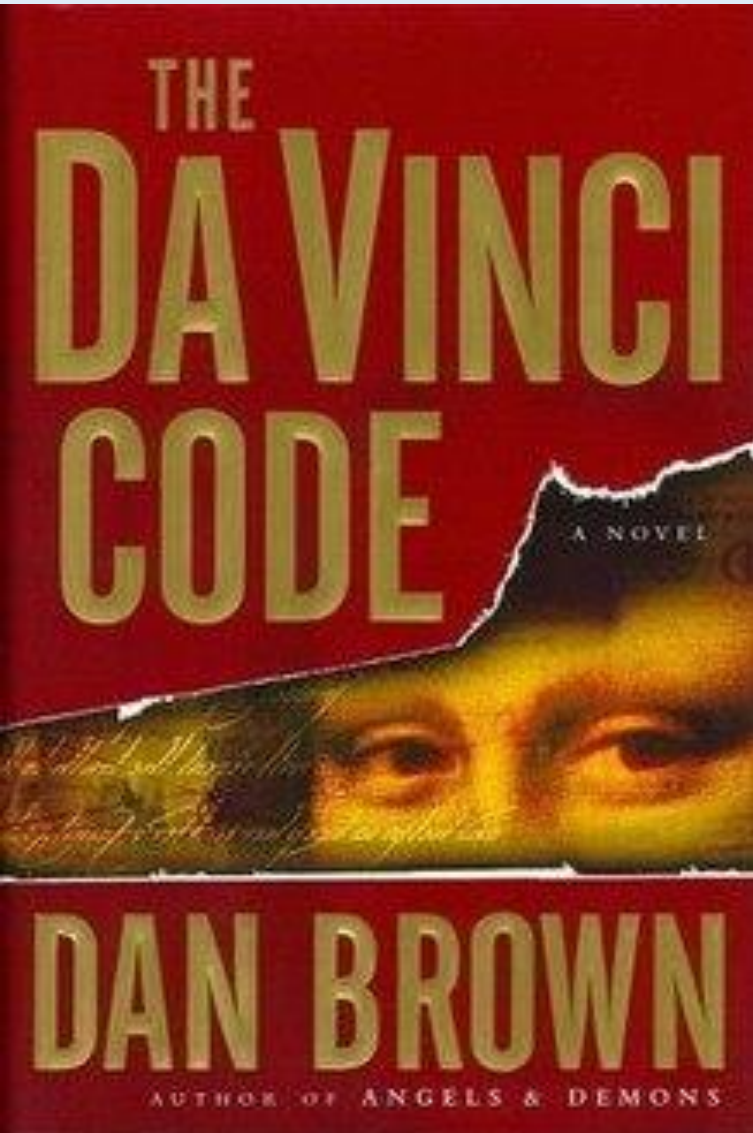
Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, Brandenburg Gate, Berlin

"We died so Germany can live, so let us live through you"
World War I memorial, Berlin

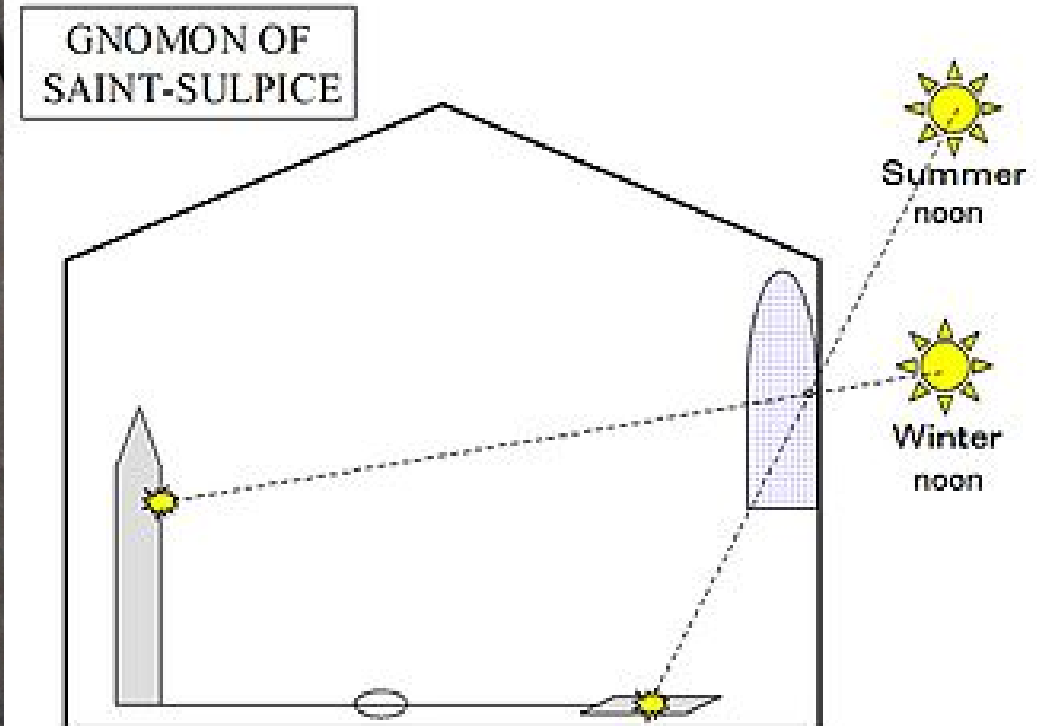
Extension to the Jewish Museum, Berlin

Which Version™? Digital Opportunities

Avoiding the unmarked and un-noted. ...and still a little analogue; bear with me



The Gnomon of Saint-Sulpice is an astronomical measurement device located in the Church of Saint-Sulpice in Paris, France. It is a gnomon, a device designed to cast a shadow on the ground in order to determine the position of the sun in the sky.



Which Version™? Digital Opportunities

A simple modern plaque next to the original reinstates the missing text and offers explanation, restoring the information while maintaining the historical relevance of the events of the Revolution.



This work, consecrated to God, the best and greatest under the royal auspices of Louis XV, benefactor of this Basilica, and by the grace and authority of Lord Jean-Frédéric Phélypeaux, Count of Maurepas, Minister of State, first warden of this church, and Lord Phillibert Orry, Minister of State, Director-General of the King's Buildings, was devised in the name, and with the advice, of the Royal Academy of the Sciences, by Pierre-Charles Le Monnier, associate member of this and the London Academies, from the Autumn Equinox and was completed at the time of the Winter Solstice in the year of Salvation Restored 1743.

** Restitution of text obliterated*

Such physical elements in the architectural record as this are evidence of the power buildings and their decorations have in telling multiple stories of the existence of those structures and the context they survive in.

Which Version™? Digital Opportunities

They speak of Civic Identity, legacy, and the question of their future use and reuse...

...and the permanence transience of that future

Queen Victoria Monument, 1906, C.J. Allen, Derby Square, Liverpool

Who has the power to change these functions?

Queen—Empress Victoria, Cape Town, South Africa, Valletta, Malta: words you'd associate?

Inadvertent focus of amusement for Scousers and visitors for more than a century, a symbol of defiance in war, and a favoured focal point for two very different opinions

Colonial Architecture

Government House, 1855



The Colonial Renaissance original was remodelled by the Japanese during the 1940s



St John's Cathedral, 1849



An austere Neo Gothic Victorian Church



French Mission House, 1842



Neo Classical, remodelled in 1917



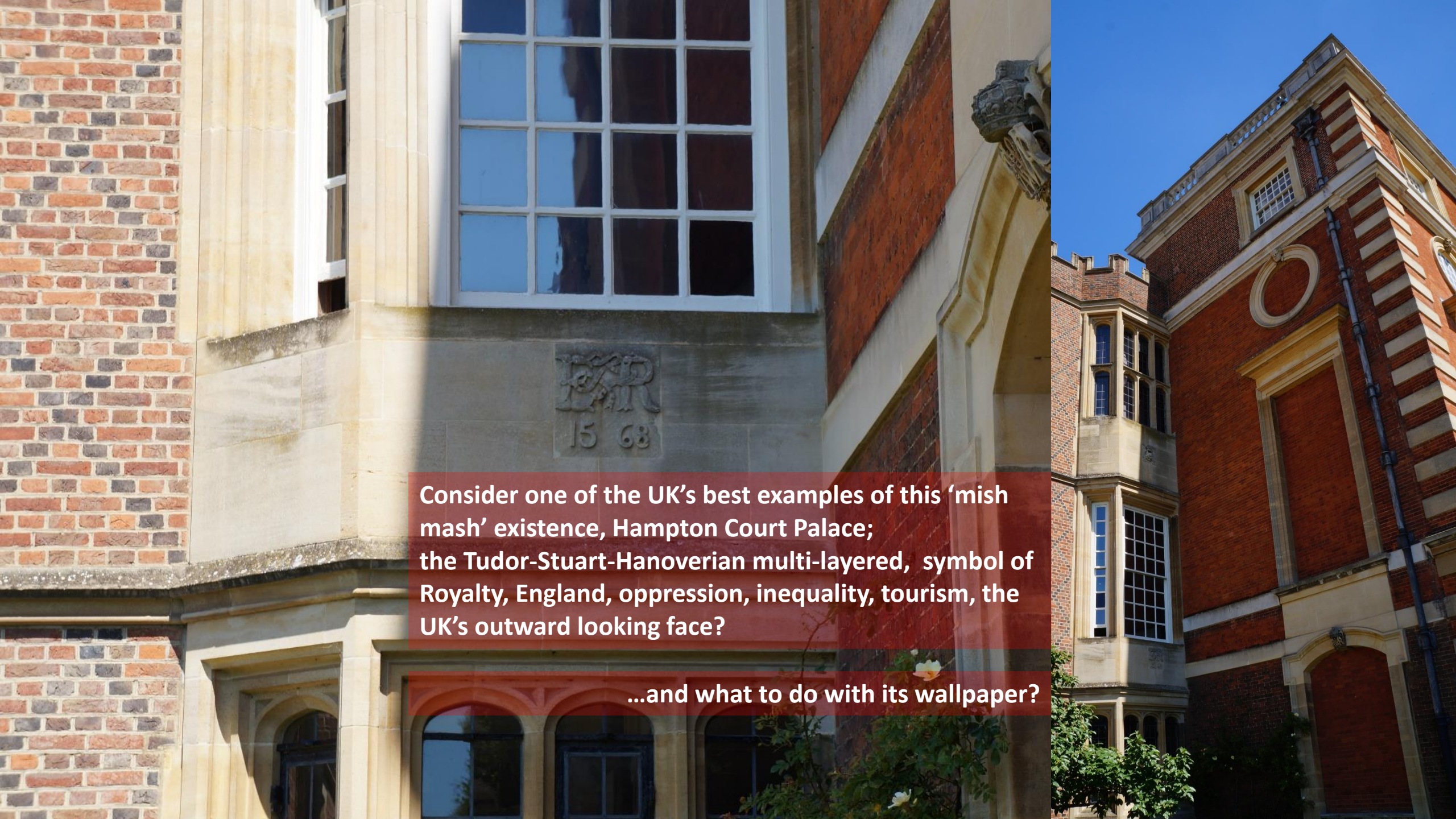
Flagstaff House, 1849



Greek Revival, a form of Neo Classical



Lecture Session 4: Architecture, and the adaptive reuse of buildings in Hong Kong



Consider one of the UK's best examples of this 'mish mash' existence, Hampton Court Palace; the Tudor-Stuart-Hanoverian multi-layered, symbol of Royalty, England, oppression, inequality, tourism, the UK's outward looking face?

...and what to do with its wallpaper?

Which Version™? Digital Opportunities

...evolving digital systems offers a range of possibilities beyond what “analogue” experts had. At Palmyra. UNESCO staff “...undertook a damage assessment of the site and the museum, identified some first-aid measures, documented the damages with aerial photos and 3D scanning, and conducted rapid interventions for the safeguarding of the museums objects.” (UNESCO, April 2016, pg.3).



Aerial photo of the Ba'al Shamin Temple, UNESCO 2016

UNESCO proposed, in the 2016 report considered earlier, a number of short, medium and long term recommendations for damaged sites such as Palmyra. Understandably the short term measures relate to ‘first aid’ based on a systematic documentation of the remaining fabric, particularly relating to those monuments damaged during the occupation through a form or architectural triage. Ominously they also include recognising the need to protect the site from further military activity or infrastructure, assumedly aimed at the Syrian government forces but they are not specific, recognising the ongoing instability of the region.

The example of Warsaw demonstrated what can be achieved from archival information, dating back a few hundred years. UNESCO recognise the importance of the scanning and digital methods available to it in addition to existing information, in this case going back millennia. Aided by:

- Drone footage
- Satellite imagery
- 3D capture
- Computer Aided Design packages

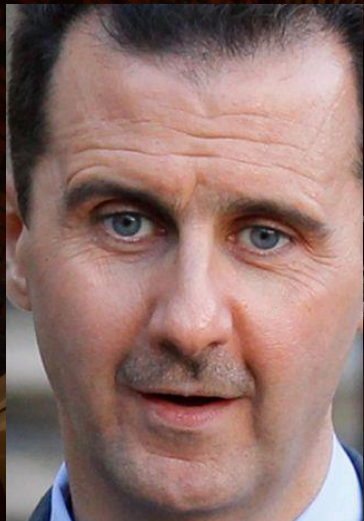
Which Version™? Digital Opportunities

Remote access, immersive environments, augmented realities and opportunities for study...
...none of us will be going to Palmyra anytime soon.

Returning to the Hampton Court wallpaper, pre-digital methods would have left the conservationists with a conundrum. Options may have included leaving examples of all the period paper on the walls, or physically recreating the rooms elsewhere to show the Victorian, Georgian and Stuart layouts while restoring the Tudor apartment. However, the digitisation of elements of this process could see the wallpapers digitally recorded and scanned and recreated virtually, accessible from the Palace or anywhere with an internet link to view it, or the relevant immersive technology to experience them in 3D.

With regards to Which Version™ there is naturally a consideration of control with the creation of digital environments. However, the scope for amendments or the creation of multiple versions of the same space are theoretically infinite in this environment. With regards to historical sites such as Palmyra, it would be possible to not only create the pre-daesh site virtually, but also to use the other information mentioned in the UNESCO recommendation in order to achieve a recreation of Zenobia's Palmyra.

Who then does make the decisions, whose version/version(s) are approved, what tale do they tell? How do you avoid an airbrushing?



Which Version™? Digital Opportunities

“Disnification (sic), it seems to me, is a specifically visual thing...the basic procedure of disnification is to render it stupid by rendering it visual.” (Baker, 2001, pg.174) While architecture is significantly concerned with the visual, it is also vitally important not to forget, in the rush to restore those visuals, the importance of understanding what has been restored and what the reason for that restoration may itself represent



Which Version™? Digital Opportunities

With digitisation comes gamification, the hyperreal, and all the possibilities and problems associated with those terms **Is context of any importance when a multiverse of possibilities exist?**

Do ethics exist? Should ethics be a consideration?



The Albert Dock renovation, 1980s, Liverpool. Damaged during the Blitz. The corner was internal facing and therefore only visible from within the dock complex. It showed the depth of the walls and the vaulted brick ceiling construction and supporting iron work.

...some architecture and monuments relating to Nazi Germany in particular have been deliberately destroyed in order to prevent them becoming sites for veneration by individuals and groups who support the ideology of the Third Reich. These include Nuremberg where mass rallies were held by the Nazi Party, and the demolition can also be seen as a cathartic act on the part of victorious parties to see the destruction of your enemy's works.

A recent example of how digital technology can be used to augment past horrors is the creation of a virtual reality version of the Auschwitz concentration camp to assist in the prosecution of war criminals. To physically recreate the gas chambers of a concentration camp would be distressing and could also inadvertently create those very sites of veneration authorities are still trying to suppress.

Can it be argued, the 2016 destruction of the building in Braunau am Inn where Nazi Leader Adolf Hitler was born, is on the same (but very far down the other side) spectrum as the deliberate destruction of Warsaw?



Who cares about the physicality of the buildings, considerations of how to build them, materiality etc.? They do not exist as concerns of restrictions in these immersive digital realities.

Can the treatment of Palmyra be used to reflect the most recent horrors inflicted on the historical site, the wider region when the likely future custodians of the site is a Syrian regime whose legitimacy we question?

It is no longer necessary to have the Nuremberg of the late 1930s and early 1940s physically present in Germany in order to appreciate, now, the grandiose footage of German filmmaker Leni Reifenstahl's 1935 propaganda film Triumph of the Will. The film used aerial footage of the architecture of the city and Nazi parade ground of Nuremberg to glorify the achievements and power of Hitler and the Nazis. The awesome, awful horror of this and indeed Albert Speer, Hitler's architect's vision of a new Berlin, Welthauptstadt Germania can be seen in full hyper-reality in current TV shows such as The Man in the High Castle.

Which Version™? Conclusion: The Historical Narrative

To the victors go the spoils?

Who controls a recovery is important. Returning to Warsaw, Bevan pushed Jameson's point further: "...there needs to be a 'careful disassociation between the categories of historicity and authenticity.' The deaths of millions of Germans and Poland's own Germanic heritage have been lost in the narrative of Warsaw's celebrated rebuilding.' (Bevan, 2006, pg.182) The visual recreation of Warsaw does not truly reflect the history of the city that existed before 1939 or the one that suffered under the occupation.



Remember my one big 'but'?

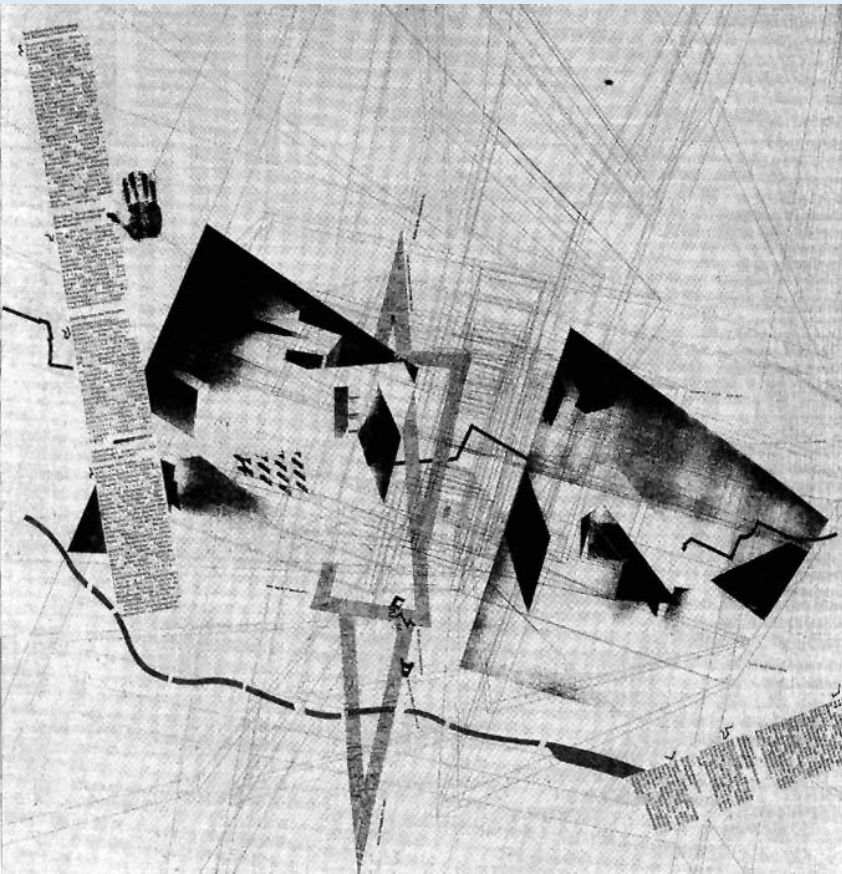
Even considering the recent example of Mosul, daesh have blamed the US air force while the Iraqi Government sees the destruction of the Great Mosque as the last gasp of a defeated force. Both narratives serve the propaganda purposes of each side without **really reflecting reality.**

The era of 'fake news' is just another iteration of the adage, history is written by the victor; just minus a winner.

Which Version™? Conclusion: The Historical Narrative

Gibbon commented on attempts by Rome to rebuild the city “But it is easier to destroy than restore.” (Gibbon, 1776, pg.319) In this modern instant, it is now possible to do more than just restore with the careful, evidence based creation of virtual versions of the site.

These will be invaluable for future education and, should cultural vandals ever damage the site again, useful for restoration.



Palmyra is an example of an architectural palimpsest where layer upon layer of history and civilisation has been built up and can be pulled back to reveal elements of a shared past. The simple reconstruction of a pre-daesh Palmyra misses an opportunity to mark how this site, the repository of so much evidence of different civilisations’ rise and falls should also reflect the **modern failure of our civilisation and the regional powers.**

The rise of daesh, the failure to support the Arab Spring, the use of Syria as a site for global power struggles is a reflection of the failure of our collective civilization, and some mark of that failure should be part of the future of the palimpsest that is Palmyra?

Which Version™? Conclusion: The Historical Narrative

To the victors go the spoils? **While it is clear history is written by the victors, it is also a truism oft repeated, those who ignore or forget history are doomed to repeat the mistakes of the past.**



Should this presentation and paper demonstrates any outcome, regardless of its eventual aesthetic merits, be they charges of Disneyfication or otherwise, they can only be achieved through dialogue which is inclusive of these varied demands. Reflecting again on Palmyra, sitting as it does in the middle of the ongoing Syrian crisis, it is difficult to envisage how this particular, inclusive conversation can start, or how contextual issues can be guaranteed and respected. **As such, a remote, digitised Palmyra may be the only fair place to start.**

UNESCO's second medium term recommendation states: "Elaboration of a comprehensive approach and an overall conservation plan for Palmyra after the end of the conflict, to achieve international standards and high-quality scientific methods, and establish an inclusive and participatory process." (UNESCO, April 2016, pg.3)

Palmyra, like the village of Oradour-sur-Glane, Coventry Cathedral and the Gedächtniskirche should be more than just a reconstructed relic to the past. **It should be a statement in stone and a digital record recognising its past, acknowledging the impact of the present, and acting as both a warning and a hope for the future.**