Introduction

What role does destruction play in the continued existence of a historical monument? Is destruction an inevitable part of its identity? Huyssen in his 2003 book, *Present Pasts*, suggests that, “…the only monument that counts, is the one already imagined as ruin.” (Huyssen 2003, 38) On the other hand, the creation of the monumental itself is led by a quest for immortality, by the human need for a legacy, and is thus, expected to outlast its creators. Ironically, such acknowledgement of the perishable nature of life, included within the very process of a creation, also lends a certainty to future destruction of the monument. Otero-Pailos, in his 2004 *Future Anterior* editorial titled ‘The contemporary stamp of incompleteness’ says, “Unlike the compulsion to build, the impulse to preserve cannot be justified in terms of pure necessity.” (Otero-Pailos 2004, iii) But the final part of the trinity of creation, preservation and destruction, goes beyond an impulse or a necessity, to almost being a realization of inevitability.

This destruction takes place with cyclical manifestation of states of rejuvenation, and depends on many factors: physical, political, sociological, aesthetical, economical; some strategic, others inadvertent. As a mechanism for the interpretation of a monument, a palimpsest of historical interventions presents a temporally layered biography, be it through physical alterations - additions, subtractions and adaptations or through changing narratives enveloping its identity.
Destruction by intent

Motivations
A discussion about the innate human impulse to destroy is beyond the scope of this paper but let us reflect a little on the destruction of historic monuments as a result of the human need for proclaiming power. From time immemorial, sacking of vanquished cities has been a common narrative in stories of war. Be it the destruction of Troy following the Trojan War or the demolition of the city of Hampi, the capital of the once mighty Vijayanagara Empire by the victorious Deccan Sultanates, destruction of conquered property asserts victory like no other proclamation from any palace rampart could. There is a resonant permanence of defeat surrounding the ruins of once majestic cities, a constant reminder of the ferocity of the attack and subsequent loss, rendering such destruction a very effective tool of war as well as a warning against any imminent uprisings. But it is also true that the symbolism associated with an outsider destroying the visual, physical representations of a civilization, their manifested pride, transforms just another war story into an epic - to be recounted long after the event, used as a tool by those needing a rhetorical device for their present agendas. This was seen in the 9/11 attacks in New York, with the images of the fallen Twin Towers acting, now, as a constant reminder of the violence that shocked not just a civilization, but the entire world. That, that war has morphed into other forms, with different actors, is not easily acknowledged by those still reeling under the effects of the event, especially with the persistence of modern recording media. The motivation behind the attacks, if it was to sow seeds of hatred between certain groups of humans, succeeded. The fact that the tally of human lives lost in the retaliatory war, far surpassed the number of deceased in the first attack, lends support to the
thesis that destructions of symbols of a civilization, its kings or then its monuments, elicit a more visceral response than the actual human loss.

**Destruction by neglect**

Destruction by intentional neglect is a passive-aggressive way of demolition. Again, as in the case of deliberate destruction, the reasons spring from the humans connected to the monument, sometimes economic, sometimes social, or political. The result, though, is the same with once glorious monuments crumbling into rubble now, as is the case with a large portion of the palace of Shah Jahan at Burhanpur in India. He was a 16th century Mughal king who lived in this palace with his beloved wife Mumtaz Mahal, for whom he built a grand marble Mausoleum after her death, called the Taj Mahal. Burhanpur is about a 1000kms away from Agra where the Taj Mahal is located. There are many possible reasons for the present dilapidated state of the palace. After the death of Mumtaz, Shah Jahan moved back to the North thus effectively abandoning the place, the current local politics in Burhanpur is dominated by the majority Hindus coupled with a general apathy in preservation of historic monuments, least of all one belonging to a Muslim king. In urban regions, the prices of real estate are another reason for land and building owners to destroy by neglect. Although it seems almost an insipid way of destruction, an in-depth analysis of this phenomenon would be needed for a comprehensive understanding of the issue.
Distortion of narratives, Collective amnesia and Persistence of memories

New narratives destroy civilizational memories, some deliberately, others organically.

Apart from the physical state, a monument also exists in the phenomenological world, dependent upon the perceptions of people. Its identity is formed by the narratives enveloping the built structure, through its history that connects with the intentionality behind its existence and through the present that anchors it in current times. The narratives describe the reason why this particular building should be deemed important in the present moment. As Halbwachs has said in his seminal work, On Collective Memory, “It is in society that people normally acquire memory. It is also in society that they recall, recognize and localize their memories.” (Halbwachs 1992, 38) He further says about memories that, “...even at the moment of reproducing the past, our imagination remains under the influence of the present social milieu.” (Halbwachs 1992, 49) This can be a powerful tool, used by those with particular agendas, to distort strategically, the narratives surrounding a monument. At other times, the change happens quite unintentionally and organically. Let us look at two examples.

Intentional

The importance of the narrative attached to a monument might seem like a bit of extraneous information but there are times when this can even endanger the very existence of a monument, as was the case with the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya, in India. The Babri Masjid was built by the Mughal emperor Babur in the 16th century CE. Four centuries later, in 1949, an idol of a Hindu God – the mythological king Rama, was placed inside the mosque by a devotee, and
a year later, the local religious leader claimed the space as the birthplace of Lord Rama (Shah 2017). Over the next many decades, the mantle of this fictional fight was taken up by various right-wing Hinduist groups, until, on December 6th 1992, Babri Masjid was destroyed by hordes of fanatic believers, incited by, amongst others, the very political party that is in power in India at the moment, the BJP. The trail of the instigators and proponents of this act leads right from that very first person placing the idol inside a mosque, to the new chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, Yogi Adityanath, who recently justified the removal of Taj Mahal from an official list of monuments saying, “...the Taj Mahal does not reflect Indian culture.” (Indian Express 2017)

And thus the cycle continues... Changed narratives, given time, can most definitely pull down a built structure. But in this era of ‘fake news’, what about entire civilizations - are they in danger too now?

**Organic**

Sometimes the change in narratives is quite unintentional, a mere device to overcome collective amnesia of a society. Public memory is notoriously short, but before the revolutions of the printing press and then of the internet, it is possible that loss of knowledge might have been a commonplace event. Although important vessels of historical knowledge, oral traditions can also be those rolling stones that gather an enormous amount of folkloric moss over the passage of time and distance, turning historical facts into myths and in turn, embedding myths with possible historical origins.

The colossal Bamiyan Buddhas blown up by dynamite by the Taliban in March 2001 had just such a narrative attached to them. They had been carved out of a mountainside in the Hindukush ranges in Afghanistan between the 6th and 7th centuries CE. (Morgan 2012, 4) Over
time, Buddhism all but disappeared from the region, leaving behind two gigantic figures dominating the landscape in perpetuity. The future inhabitants, mostly Shia Muslims, created a legend of their very own to explain these omnipresent idols. The taller statue was to be Salsal, a prince of Bamiyan and Shamana, the shorter one, a princess from another kingdom. Their love story was mired with political complications and so rather than live apart, they chose to turn into stone and spend rest of the eternity next to each other. (Bobin 2015) The Bamiyan Buddhas stayed safe under this cloak of amnesia until the Taliban understood the impact their destruction would have on the world community and on their own status as a power to be reckoned with. Whether this destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas was a litmus test, or worse still - an inspiration for the next big event on the other side of the globe a trifle six months later, we will probably never know.

Another example, although nestled amidst less polemic surroundings is the use of a moniker for many a rock-cut caves in India. Many Buddhist caves in the Sahyadri mountains came to be known as Pandava caves. Again, by this time, Buddhism had vanished in those parts of India, and Pauranic Hindu religion was prevalent, so successive generations had forgotten the stories carved on the walls of these Buddhist caves. On the other hand, the oral tradition of transmitting the epic story of Mahabharata with the Pandava princes as the main protagonists persisted, as it had over millennia. As the story went, these princes had to go into exile for more than decade and thus would have travelled all over the country. This gave rise to myths about these caves being carved by them when in exile and the figures, actually of Buddha and associated characters came to be identified as those of the Pandava princes. Thus, so many of these thousands of Buddhist caves dotting hillsides all over India got new identities connected
to the contemporary Hindu religion and mythology, better suited to serve their new ‘patrons’.

Thankfully, over time, scholars debunked these fabrications as the Brahmi script was deciphered and the inscriptions at these caves revealed a wealth of information.

**What does destruction destroy?**

Narratives can be important for the identity of a historic structure and can help keep its spirit alive even after complete annihilation, as can be seen in this next case.

**Burning of Shaniwarwada in Pune**

In 1828, a decade after the British defeated the last great Indian empire, the Maratha Empire, the bastion of the Marathas, their fortress in the city of Pune called the Shaniwarwada, was up in flames. An unexplained fire raged for seven days, turning to ashes the reportedly seven storied wooden palace from the top of which, on a good day, one could apparently see the temple spires of Alandi, some 17 kms away. Only the massive stone fortification walls and the stone plinths of the palace remained. It was no surprise that the British did nothing to rebuild that last remaining vestige of the Marathas, a symbol of their former glory. The destruction of this icon, though, did not much quell the spirits of the local populace and Pune became one of the strongholds of the Indian freedom struggle in the next century. Shod of all its former glory, the iconic status of the fortress, nonetheless persisted in the ‘collective memory’ (Halbwachs 1992) and to this day, during political and mass movements, be it farmers or workers or any other group, the call that goes out remains, *Chalo Shaniwarwada!*, translated as ‘March to the Shaniwarwada!. The vast empty space in front of the main entrance door acts as the rallying
place for these agitators. At other times it is used as a picnic spot by the masses, occasionally moonlighting as an open air performance space.

**Destruction and museums**

Museums are considered the interfaces between expert knowledge and the public consumption of culture. They are the media through which we learn of our past in a curated manner, with scientific facts laid out in an audience-friendly manner. It is an undeniable fact that museums preserve our heritage for future generations.

Nonetheless, social anthropologist and academic Shiv Visvanathan has an interesting point to make about the inherently destructive nature of museums. In his words, ‘they present artifacts from essentially dead cultures’ (Vishvanathan 2017). In his 1997 book A Carnival for Science: Essays on Science, Technology and Development, he explains, “The museum [thus] becomes an index of the map of the world, a taxonomy identifying cultures in time. One is forced to confront the violence encoded in this innocent bit of anthropology.” (Visvanathan 1997, 21)

He further states,

“It is this museumization of life forms that is ingrained in Science, where the Other as nature or as culture is presented as disembodied and abstracted from context. The museum is the recognition of the Other but always through the smell of formaldehyde.”

(Visvanathan 1997, 57)
Context and identity

If we agree, even partially or just philosophically, with Prof. Vishvanathan’s argument, then would that make curators the ambassadors, representing their museums and justifying the ‘violent’ acts of their collectors to the true owners of that heritage, the common public?

Furthermore, concerning objects in museums, one of the biggest criticisms is the removal of the context. From a Chinese house transplanted at the Peabody-Essex Museum to the ‘Berlin’ Pergamon marbles on ‘loan’ at a travelling exhibition in New York, to the permanent display of an entire Egyptian temple in a glass-lined atrium at the Metropolitan Museum, the loss of context affects the authentic interpretation of an object. One can say, a bit poetically even, that it is the very spirit of the object that might seem missing.

But a loss of context is not always dependent on displacement of the object. Historic Delhi could quite easily be called a Delhi of fences now, with so many monuments incarcerated behind ‘protective’ bars, to keep out the public from dusk to dawn, when the gates at some end of the vast grounds are opened for ticketed visitors. A few years ago, the expansive 200-acre Mehrauli Archeological Park housing over 100 historical significant monuments added iron fences around some of them. (Verma 2015)¹ Stripped of their contexts and ‘othered’ by controlled confinement, an echo almost of the Foucauldian argument, the monuments bear witness to this destruction of their very places in the annals of history. The cultural landscape enveloping these sentinels of a past ethos of Delhi finds no place in the changing heritage sensibilities of the country.

¹ Interestingly this phenomenon is reflected in the gated residential communities all over Delhi city, sans the strict timings and tickets of course but complete with barbed wires at times.
Along with tangible heritage, this can also be the case with intangible heritage. In the 1980s, the ‘Festival of India’ consisted of grand spectacles to be taken around the world to showcase the richness and diversity of the Indian culture. (UNESCO, Festival of India in London 1982)

Although quite successful, the fact that some performances took place, at times, in spaces too large for the proximity needed for folk artistry, or without the flexibility needed for the sheer variety of acts, that street foods were not displayed for patrons as they would be in India, possibly diminishing the experience of the vital moments of anticipation before consumption, highlighted some effects of stripping of the context. (Jain 1987)

Museums and cultural festivals are, no doubt, invaluable aspects of cultural mediation but it is also important to acknowledge that without the original context, there is a definite lack of ‘wholeness’ of the artifact or the cultural experience.

**Destruction through use**

Let us look at another aspect of change that can affect the ‘spirit’ or the ‘wholeness’ of an object. Does a use, different than the original intention, destroy the very essence of a monument? In a case presented earlier, the fragrance of the erstwhile power still wafts around Shaniwarwada, attracting those seeking to corral legitimacy for their various causes. Merely coexisting in this space associated with such past glory, while broadcasting their demands, appears to impart a sense of strength and confidence to the groups.

But as a counterpoint, let us take the example of the conversion of many of the palaces in India to hotels or museums. Often due to lack of funds for maintenance, many princely families hand over their properties on long-term leases to hospitality partners like the Taj hotels, who repair
and restore the buildings and then convert them into hospitality spaces with guest bedrooms, lobbies, restaurants, and other spaces needed for a hotel. The rooms originally created for royal grandeur become showpieces for the glamor of past, the lotus ponds in the center of royal gardens, swimming pools for tourists.

What would Plutarch say of this ship of Theseus? Theseus’s Paradox, poses the question of whether Theseus’s ship, which had all its parts replaced over the course of a long voyage, was the same ship at the end of it all. In the hotel conversions, owing to multiple interventions, what percentage of the structure is a palace still and what, merely a hotel? On the other hand, if the structures themselves are now in the best of conditions and profiting from this transaction, to what extent does authenticity matter in this case? Further, we might want to reflect on what exactly was transacted here – neglectful destruction for refurbishment, nostalgic monumentality for practicality, and pride for life?

**Re-creation and destruction**

Increasingly technology is used to reproduce heritage artifacts for a variety of reasons. A reproduction could be used for public exhibition to protect the original from further wear and tear. This was the case with Michael Angelo’s David in Florence. In 1873, the original statue was removed from its open-air location at the Piazza della Signoria and moved indoors, to the Galleria dell’Accademia. (Galleria dell’Accademia Firenze n.d.) A replica was installed in the Piazza a few years later. This switch was done to reduce future damage to the masterpiece.

Apart from natural wear and tear, mass tourism has been stated to be one of the foremost catalysts for deterioration of heritage sites. Access to many world heritage sites, such as Machu
Picchu in Peru, has been restricted to a fixed number of visitors per day to reduce damage (Andean Air Mail & Peruvian Times 2014). According to Adam Lowe of Factum Arte, an entire mockup of the Tomb of Seti I was created near the original to promote “protection of fragile sites” at the tombs in the tourist-popular Valley of the Kings in Egypt. This was done using facsimile technology with reproductions of very high accuracy that helped enhance visitor experience while sparing the originals to some extent. (Factum Arte 2014)

Remarkably, nature and human curiosity seem quite benign dangers to heritage, when compared to the increasingly common attacks from deliberate acts of war and violence. Here, the use of technology for reproduction is probably the only solution for re-experiencing the original. The arch of Palmyra, so dramatically destroyed by ISIL a few years ago, was reproduced by the Institute for Digital Archeology using latest 3D technology and displayed at various locations around the world. The material used was Egyptian marble, the blocks carved by robots using 3D digital models made from combining photographs. The scale, though, was 1/3rd of the original due to limitations of technology as well as the problem of supporting the weight of the stone in a temporary installation, as explained by Roger Michel of the Institute Digital Archeology at a roundtable on Digital Technology for Heritage Preservation. (Columbia University 2016) The question here is how much of the integrity of the original object was diminished with the drastically reduced scale of the reproduction. Michel’s statement that this work was “an important gesture of friendship and solidarity with people in the regions of conflict” might explain the priorities of the project, with an emphasis, less on the exactitude of the replica and more on the essence of what it represented to the people. (Michel n.d.)
To deliberate a little more on this topic of reproduction or imitation, let us go back to Plato’s *Republic.* (Plato 360 BCE) In Book X, Socrates suggests banishing all artists and poets from his ideal city, as according to him their works of art were the furthest removed from truth. He explained his disapproval of the gap between pure truth and the essentially mimetic nature of art with the example of a painting of a bed, which he stated was thrice removed from reality, since the idea, or the essence of a bed was created by God in the mind of the carpenter, who then created the bed, the second removed state from reality, and the painter’s depiction becoming a further, third removed state. By this logic, in a 3D reproduction project, the first digital copy would be twice removed from the original and the 3D printing, in fact, thrice removed. But there is a slight glitch in that logic. The digital copy aims to be a reproduction of the original without the interpretative layer of a human mind and the 3D printing, although limited by the technology, is not necessarily altering the ‘essence’ of that copy. So what does constitute the original essence of an object? Is it the original idea in the minds of the creators? Or the materials and the techniques used? Or the unplanned flaws in objects due to the inconsistencies of human creators? Or the patina it accumulates over time, the chips in the plaster, the peelings on its surface included?

An *artiste brut* in Pune, a cobbler called Kashinath, creates his art using the same strokes he uses daily, to polish shoes. Would a facsimile of his artworks, even with the texture replicated using latest 3D technology, capture the sequential occurrences of each individual stroke, applied in an entranced creative state? Could the smell of the crayon wax or the musty odor of new shoes on the insides of an unraveled shoe box used as canvas, be captured? Can the
quantum of loss during reproduction be calculated as compared to the original - a diminishing return on originality?

**Identity thefts and Collective amnesia**

**Usurpation of space, identities – Is destruction ever justifiable?**

New settlements often mushroom on top of older ones, laying claim to the land of the dead civilizations that once flourished there. Settlers probably choose locations that are advantageous for human subsistence, near water sources if possible and affording a certain safety to its inhabitants. Over time the settlements might go into decline, causing people to migrate to better locations. Gradually, the reasons for the decline of a settlement might fade from the collective memory but the global narratives often tend to trail behind in the form of myths and mythology. Mythological stories of sand dunes rising up in river beds and *disappearing rivers* are found in some ancient Indian texts, stories that correspond with the archaeological evidences found at sites belonging to the great Indus Valley Civilization that faced a drastic decline around 2000 BCE. According to eminent Indian archeologist, Prof. M. K. Dhavalikar, this decline was due to inclement environmental conditions from 2200-2000 BCE (Dhavalikar 2009, 86). Archeologists have uncovered proof of widespread earthquakes in the region that led to rivers changing courses and riverbeds shifting upwards, resulting in unprecedented floods, as observed at Mohenjodaro in Pakistan. Subsequently, a period of unusually cold climate in Europe around 1800 BCE was causing drought conditions in the rest of the Indian subcontinent (Dhavalikar 2009, 88). Such extreme conditions led to mass migrations and total abandonment of these once massive settlements. Over the next 4000 years, environmental conditions improved, and some of these sites saw new settlements, case in
point the village of Rakhigarhi in Rajasthan, India. At present, a village with a population of about 13,000 lies very close to this Indus Valley Civilization city, one of the largest yet discovered, according to archeologist Vasant Shinde at Deccan College (Shinde, et al. 2012). At present, a controversy surrounds this site with the refusal of the villagers to relocate as stipulated in an earlier agreement with the ASI (Archeological Survey of India). Thus, future excavation plans as well as the security of the site and artifacts now depend on the reluctant village’s co-operation. (Siwach 2017) This story of a proposed relocation of a village in the present to uncover a glorious but buried past becomes complex with the juxtaposition of the rights of humans versus the right of the historic site with no easy segue in sight. Does past glory proclaim a decree of ownership that ought to be considered valid by present generations of occupants? What are the rules to assign parameters and weightages for justification of destructive actions in the name of archeological explorations?

A good example to reflect on this dilemma would be the case of the two doors in the tomb of Tutankhamun. As mentioned briefly earlier, recently Factum Arte, a Madrid-based workshop focusing on digital mediation and production of facsimiles in the world of art and heritage, created a high-definition facsimile of the interiors of the tomb of Tutankhamun using latest 3-D scanning and high resolution photography techniques. (Factum Arte 2014) The results from this project led Egyptologist Nick Reeves to discover two previously unknown possible doorways, one of which, he posits, might possibly lead to the tomb of Queen Nefertiti. (Reeves 2015) The openings are now plastered and painted over and so their existence is a well-educated guess in the end, unless one removes the painted plaster and the infill in the doorways, which would then lead to a passageway and the chambers that Reeves speculates lie beyond, creating
further possibilities for exciting discoveries. The question one faces here is, at what point is destruction justified? How does one weigh the importance of the existing paintings and plaster over the possibility of finding a tomb chamber inside? In effect, could a non-destructive test lead to a destructive method, after all?²

Identity thefts

An abandoned settlement might be easier to occupy, but it seems so is usurping the identity of a contemporary monument? In 1995, a new, far-right state government in India changed the name of a monument in its capital city of Bombay. At the same time, it also changed the name of the city from Bombay to Mumbai, as it is known in the local language. The monument is the erstwhile Victoria Terminus, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and a magnificent specimen of “Victorian Gothic Revival architecture, blended with themes deriving from Indian traditional architecture.” (UNESCO n.d.) It was built in 1888, during the reign of Queen Victoria, hence the name. More than a century later, the new political party in power, Shivsena, renamed the station as Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus after a 17th century local king. That he had nothing to do with either trains or Bombay or most definitely with this very railway station, did not matter. This name-changing spree went on for a while, with everything from airports to museums renamed after this king, whose architecture mainly consisted of robust forts on remote hills in the Sahyadri range. So how does this imposed medieval association, with a true example of the grandeur and complexity of architectural expression in the British Empire, affect the identity of Victoria Terminus? Do presumptions of or to a legacy by the original creator have lesser validity

² Recent studies using radar scans conducted by researchers at the Polytechnic University of Turin have contradicted the claims of the hidden tomb location. (Stubley 2018)
than the claims of its new ‘owners’? Are monuments, ultimately, slaves to human caprices or do they have any separate rights of their own?

**Right to Existence**

We left the earlier section with an important question. Do monuments have rights of their own, separate from the whims of the humans claiming dominance over it, at that particular period in time? In Fall 2016, Columbia University Graduate School of Preservation and Planning conducted a very interesting workshop for its Historic Preservation students. The instructor, visiting professor David Gissen, who codirects the MAAD HTX and the Experimental History Project at the California College of Arts, led the students through a weeklong exploration of the rights of a monument. They looked at the following questions,

“(Do) Monuments have the right...to remain in their original location and not be removed, moved, or dismantled ; to exist independent of their current sites or their current composition, and to move, travel exist in multiple locations; to be reproduced in any form by anyone; to be owned, with exclusive rights of the owner to reproduce it; to be free of violence; to be removed by international governing agencies when threatened with violence; to remain intact, unadulterated or disfigured; to be demolished or dismantled when inciting hatred or insulting or impeding the civil rights?” (Gissen 2015)

Article I of the UNESCO (United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization) Constitution describes its Purposes and functions and it begins with pledges “to contribute to peace and security ...amongst nations...for the human rights and fundamental freedoms... for
UNESCO, at present, is one of the foremost organizations in the world working for the protection of heritage and yet the “conservation and protection of the world’s inheritance” (UNESCO, UNESCO Constitution 1945) is mainly done in the service of mankind and their quest for a lasting peace. There is no doubt that UNESCO has carried out important programs such as the World Heritage Centre list and also worked on mitigating danger from natural disasters and illicit trafficking of heritage artifacts, but going back to our original query – do the heritage artifacts and monuments have rights separate from those of humanity? As an international organization, UNESCO has tried to influence individual governments to take better care of their inheritance, by providing information and other support, and incentivizing preservation efforts through programs such as inclusion in the World Heritage Centre list on one hand, and raising red flags when needed through the endangered sites list, on the other. Many other organizations such as WMF, ICOMOS and ICOM follow suit to work in heritage conservation. But one must conclude that for all their efforts, on the hierarchy of rights, monuments find a place on a rung lower than that of humans.

The term ‘hierarchy of rights’ brings to mind a 2001 article by Teraya Koji where he talks about a hierarchy practiced in international human rights and a ‘justified’ derogation of human rights traded for peace and order (Koji 2001, 917-941). He says, “States may derogate from human rights treaties because of their need to recover social order... The scope of justified derogation is therefore strictly confined to the extent of measures necessary to reach this end. This criterion reflects the negative definition of non-derogable rights... the primary focus here is on the right to life of a state not the rights of individuals.” (Koji 2001, 923)
If this is the case with humans, what hope do we have for inanimate heritage objects? But as suggested before in this paper, destruction of heritage objects, laden as they are with the very cultural identity of a people, often elicit more forceful responses than lost human lives.

But one of the perspectives, Koji says, has been to address those issues first, that are readily solvable and then try to tackle the complex ones, a pragmatic stance taken in face of unwieldy world issues. Ultimately the effectiveness of this strategy remains to be seen as it could lead to certain vital issues being ignored indefinitely.

Would the terrorists in Syria have hesitated, even a little, before destroying the Arch of Palmyra if there had been stronger repercussions for the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas? The question is, of course, moot in light of UNESCO’s stated aim in the preamble, “the peace must therefore be founded, if it is not to fail, upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind” (UNESCO, UNESCO Constitution 1945, Preamble), a noble yet inherently aspirational goal when faced with the intractability of these terrorist ideologies. It also does not help that the UNESCO Constitution clearly states further, that the “Organization is prohibited from intervening in matters which are essentially within their [Member States’] domestic jurisdiction.” (UNESCO, UNESCO Constitution 1945, 3)

**Absorption of space, identities**

Apart from destructive events, there are also forms of transformations of heritage that result in regeneration, in re-creation. When cultures intersect over time, the aspects that define their cultural ethos such as language, music, dance and arts, interface and assimilate. A confluence of
architectural influences takes place and languages merge to give birth to new ones, with a graceful temporal fluidity and nary a fanfare.

For instance, the influence of Persian on many modern Indian languages is irrefutable. According to Safavi (2006, ix), Indian languages like Bengali, Punjabi, Marathi, Gujarati, Telugu, and Hindi contain a great number of Persian words and phrases. This was no doubt due to the fact that Persian was the language of culture and education in the early Muslim courts in India and then the sole official language during the Mughal rule (Khansir and Mozafari 2014, 2360). The Persian influence in India was notable, not just with the Muslim rulers starting from the Delhi Sultanate, Bahmani Sultanate in the Deccan and finally the great Mughal dynasty, but it was also seen in the court languages of the Hindu kings. In medieval India, a new language, Urdu, emerged out of the mélange of chiefly Hindustani and Persian, as a result of communication between the new rulers from the West and the local population. In the south-central Deccan region, the court documents of the prime ministers of the Maratha Empire, found in the *Peshwa Daftar* (Archives), used both Islamic and Hindu almanacs. The common court language was *Dakhni Urdu*, a form of Urdu from the Deccan (Kulkarni 1991-92, 505). Just as the official language of the Marathas became replete with Persian and Urdu words, the popular language also borrowed heavily, to the effect that by the mid-16th and early-17th centuries, “the exhibition and use of Persian words, in their day to day life by Hindu elite and intellectuals, became a status symbol.”, and about 80 percent of the vocabulary in the contemporary Marathi correspondence was found to be Persian. (Kulkarni 1991-92, 506) The older Marathi had been transformed, much of its earlier vocabulary having perished in the
name of expedience or fashion, a cycle of destruction and rejuvenation manifest, albeit with a certain refinement of cultural amalgamation.

**Conclusion**

Just as creative energies propel the building of a society, a fascination for the very concept of destruction and the possibilities of its manifestations, also continues to fire people’s imaginations. Recently, artist Nikolas Bentel spoofed Rauschenberg’s 1953 erasure of a drawing by Willem de Kooning by selling ad space on a crowdfunding platform to cover sections of a *Rauschenberg*, as a commentary on the vagaries of the art market and the destructive power of market capitalism in the art world. (Voon 2018) His initial, sensational announcement that he would ‘destroy’ a Robert Rauschenberg (Voon 2018), ultimately led to the creation of a new work, an original Rauschenberg completely covered up with inane advertisements. Bentel used the mechanisms of market capitalism to instigate a process that would ultimately ‘destroy’ a work of art which, in turn, he will auction off and thus re-participate in the unavoidable marketplace. (Bentel n.d.) Bansky’s 2008 ‘Power Washer’ also commented on the differential valuation of artworks and the label of ‘vandalism’. (Duncan 2018)

Destruction comes in many disguises, speaking many different tongues, some deliberately provocative, others facilitating regeneration through reimagination. Monuments and other heritage artifacts bearing the brunt of destructive events, often act as proxy for the motivations and urges of the humans involved, both attackers and victims, lending legitimacy to some arguments and righteous outrage for others. Changing narratives become tools in the hands of creative humans and mold the futures of these monuments, some pushed to the forefront of
modern wars, others relegated to lie neglected in nostalgic ruins, without even a nod of remembrance. Such changing fortunes are inevitable, Heraclitus would agree, since one can’t possibly step into the ‘same’ river twice. The certainty, though, lies in the unavoidable involvement of humans in the process. Some insist on freezing the monuments in their present state, others on reclaiming their past ‘beauty’ by adding layers of makeup, the rest on letting the patina take its course. With not much chance of a consensus there, let us end this thinking exercise with three examples that deal with the ephemerality of creation, of the inevitability of change, and the acceptance of cycles of creation, preservation and destruction.

The Great Mosque at Djenné in Mali, the largest extant mud building in the world, was rebuilt in its present form in 1907. Every year since, it becomes the center of attention at the annual re-claying ceremony, with very active, hands-on involvement of the local population, when everybody from children to elders, and apprentices to experts take part in the ritual of re-plastering the mosque, a frenzied endeavor accompanied by music and celebration. (Marchand 2015)

In Japan, the Shinto shrines of Ise are completely rebuilt every 20 years, a ritual that has been followed over a period of about 1300 years now, since the tradition began in 690 CE. Shinto rituals mark multiple stages of the construction and care is taken to follow the original methods of construction, a quest undermined to some extent by the use of power tools and other modern technologies. Although the workforce consists mainly of skilled craftspeople, two of the over thirty construction rituals also involve hundreds of thousands of unskilled worshippers,
contributing in the transportation of logs from the forest to the work site and the laying of white pebbles on the ground around completed buildings. (Adams 1998, 49-52)

Tibetan Buddhists carry out a ritual called the Kalachakra Mandala during which a painting made of colored sand is created over a period of many days. Motifs from Tibetan iconography and spiritual symbols are laid out painstakingly on a flat surface. Soon after the intricate design is finished to perfection though, the ritual ends with the work of art completely wiped off, ‘to emphasize and highlight the impermanence of all things and the importance of nonattachment.’ (Namgyal Monastery Institute of Buddhist Studies 2018).
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