

FOR THE PRESERVATION OF MARKS OF DISTRESS PELA CONSERVAÇÃO DAS MARCAS DA DOR VITOR GARCIA, ELINE CAIXETA

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Abstract

The current article addresses the topic ‘interventions in architectural heritage damaged by disasters caused by human action’. We have observed, in recent cases, the hegemonic thought towards significant appreciation of these constructions’ aesthetic-material aspects, which resulted in the reconstruction of buildings to a state prior to the incidents they were affected by and enabled removing the marks left by these events. Our aim is to re-address this conservation mode from a counter-hegemonic perspective, i.e., to advocate for an interventional approach capable of preserving these marks. Therefore, the herein adopted methodology focused on investigating two recent cases of intervention in buildings damaged by calamities – namely: the Portuguese Language Museum, in São Paulo City, Southeastern Brazil; and Notre-Dame Cathedral, in Paris, France – and on a systematic and transdisciplinary literature review on the concept of memory. Based on the current study, we have concluded that signs of disasters are marks of distress capable of reviving the memory of distress caused by misfortunes. Without them, we lose the source of remembrance about what happened. Absence of memory results in forgetfulness, which, in its turn, leads to the likelihood of repeating the forgotten fact. Therefore, we see marks embedded in architectural heritage as a way for us not to forget these misfortunes and, consequently, to find the means to prevent them from happening again. Therefore, we advocate that interventions of this nature preserve these marks.

Keywords: Architectural Heritage, Disasters, Intervention, Memory, Forgetfulness

1 Introduction

The current article addresses the topic ‘conservation in architectural heritage’, from the perspective of interventions in architectural structures damaged by disasters caused by human action. Based on the analysis of recurrent recent events, we observed cases driven by the hegemonic thought towards significant appreciation of buildings’ aesthetic-material aspects, to the detriment of other meanings that can be associated with the property itself. This attitude resulted in the reconstruction of buildings to a state prior to the incidents they were affected by and enabled removing the marks left by these events in their material structure. Our aim was to re-address this conservation mode, although from an opposing perspective, by emphasizing how erasing signs of misfortunes can lead to recurrent tragedies. Considering the foregoing, and from a counter-hegemonic perspective, we herein defended an antagonistic interventional approach, i.e., an approach capable of preserving these marks.

To do so, part of the herein adopted methodology focused on investigating two recent cases of intervention in buildings that were severely affected by fire events, namely: *Museu da Língua Portuguesa* [Portuguese Language Museum], in São Paulo City, Southeastern Brazil, which was destroyed on December 21st, 2015; and Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris, France, which was damaged on April 15th, 2019. Based on bibliographical references, as well as on publications in electronic newspapers and journals, we have evidenced how the interventionist proposal resulted in the intentional erasure of signs of the tragedy. Subsequently, we conducted a systematic literature review on the concept of memory. Based on a transdisciplinary approach, we explored theoretical Sociology, Anthropology, Philosophy and History texts to help better understanding how built space and memory (mainly the memory of distress) are associated with each other, as well as understanding the causal relationship between forgetfulness and repetition.

Furthermore, we have identified cases of buildings that were damaged by tragedies, and whose interventionist proposal somehow preserved signs of the experienced disaster. Finally, we have compared the herein collected information to build a theoretical-critical reflection about the effects of erasing the marks of tragedy on memory and about its consequences for architectural heritage conservation. We have organized these considerations in four different sections. The first section correlates the material evidence of tragedies to memory; the second section analyzes how interventions conducted at Portuguese Language Museum and at Notre-Dame Cathedral have suppressed these signs; the third section analyzes likely imbroglios of these obliterations; and the fourth section presents our arguments in defense of the preservation of these marks.

2 Architectural Heritage and Memory (of Distress)

Memory, space and place are concepts recurrently correlated to each other. Halbwachs (1990), for example, advocates that memory only exists if it is developed within a spatial framework. According to the aforementioned author, this association is necessary because our impressions are volatile and do not remain in our mind, whereas space, which is a durable reality, enables us to recover memories from the past, since they reemerge when we turn our attention towards the material environment surrounding us. According to Halbwachs (1990), these reminiscences take place because we are always inserted in a given space, which is transformed in our own way; at the same time, we subject ourselves and adapt to material objects capable of resisting us. Thus, when we establish our marks in space, they evoke our recollections and form a framework where we can locate our memories.

Similar association is observed in the study by Nora (1993, p. 21, our translation), who introduced the term “realms of memory”, which comprises real or imaginary, material or immaterial places loaded with the desire to remember. According to Neves (2007), these places have three different meanings, namely: material places where memory is supported, and can be assimilated, by our senses; functional places that have or acquire the task of supporting memories; and symbolic places where collective memory is expressed and revealed. Based on Pollak (1989, p. 03, our translation), among the places of memory analyzed by Nora, “one obviously finds monuments, [...] the architectural heritage and its style, which follow us throughout our lives”.

We do not aim at approaching critical judgments about the formation of these concepts. We just take the discussion promoted by these authors as a starting point to emphasize that one of the purposes of architectural heritage lies on acting as mnemonic support to mobilize memory values. Santiago Júnior (2015) has highlighted some of the most common values, such as the ones described by Alois Riegl in his *Denkmalkultus*, from 1903, namely: the age value, according to which, the building shows marks of the passage of time; the commemorative value, according to which, the building enables elaborating the sense of continuity with a finalized past; and the historical value, according to which, the building enables constructing the narrative of the past (Riegl, [1903] 1982).

However, we herein address a different memory type that remains poorly addressed in the heritage context, although it has been finding its space of connection to heritage assets. It is the “memory of tragedies”, which is referenced by Candau (2021, p. 151, our translation) as the one associated with suffering, distress and misfortune, which is seen by him as a strong memory that “leaves traces that are shared by those who have suffered, or whose relatives or friends have suffered, for a long period-of-time”, and which we herein refer to as memory of distress.

During a webinar organized by the *Comitê de Patrimônio e Museus da Associação Brasileira de Antropologia* [the Heritage and Museums’ Committee of the Brazilian Association of Anthropology], in 2021, Rubino (2021) reported an emblematic case of such a connection between architectural heritage and memory of distress, namely: the listing of the complex of buildings that had housed the DOI-CODI¹, in São Paulo City. The aforementioned author addressed the lawsuit that led to the guardianship of this property by CONDEPHAAT², in 2014, and she emphasized that these buildings were acknowledged for acting as material support for hard memories of violence, torture and repression, rather than for their plastic-architectural importance. After surviving time and the national re-democratization process, this complex of buildings became a place of remembrance and homage to victims who disappeared during the Brazilian Military Regime, i.e., a place to recollect the memory of distress. Therefore, this example shows how architectural heritage enables evoking a given memory associated with suffering (pain) caused by human violence.

The current article addresses architectural heritage’s ability to revive another essence of distress, i.e., distress of losing symbolic buildings that were destroyed by calamitous events. We herein allude to two cases of buildings that were severely damaged by fire events within a time interval shorter than five years, namely: Portuguese Language Museum and Notre-Dame Cathedral. According to Mendes (2020), these fire events have caused immeasurable material damage. The wooden ceiling of the Portuguese Language Museum collapsed and the building’s second and third floors were completely destroyed. With respect to the Notre-Dame Cathedral, in addition to the suppression of multacentennial elements, such as two thirds of the oak-structure roof and three rosettes from the 12th century, the pinnacle designed by Eugène Viollet-Le-Duc, which was

¹ An intelligence and repression organization, subordinated to the Brazilian Army, which existed during the Brazilian Military Regime.

² São Paulo State Council for the defense of Historical, Archaeological, Artistic and Tourist Heritage.

more than 45-m tall and one of the most symbolic elements of this construction, has collapsed. At the same time, several correlated values deriving from the immateriality behind the meanings attributed to these estates, were weakened and are at risk of being overlooked.

Such damages left their marks embedded in the matter of these buildings, namely: signs of the flames in masonry, charred objects, exposure of constructive substrates and gaps of several types and dimensions. Based on Halbwachs (1990) and Nora (1993), we understand that these marks - herein called marks of distress – will enable us and the next generations to evoke memories of these events, either at individual or community level, and, therefore, to bring back the memory of distress – i.e., to reactivate the memory of tragedies, as well as of sufferings associated with them. We herein refer to the pain of losing our past, affective and symbolic heritages, and objects capable of connecting us as community, as well as to feelings triggered by this pain, such as impotence and resentment towards the neglect of cultural heritage³.

The natural trend of heritage agencies, political authorities and society after these disaster types lies on crying out for interventions in the damaged good. The aim is to “resurrect” the perished object - regardless of the interest type assumingly associated with this claim (cultural, personal, economic, or political, among others). However, based on the two herein reported cases, we can see the trend to adopt the total reconstruction of the damaged good to its state prior to the fire event and, consequently, to erase the marks of distress resulting from the experienced incident, as an intervention measure.

3 Erasing the Marks of Distress

There have been several debates about what to do after an architectural heritage is hit by a major accident. Antagonisms emerge among those who defend the total reconstruction of the good, those who advocate that it should remain at ruined state, and the ones focused on making contemporary insertions in the remaining spaces, for example. We herein analyzed the intervention in the Portuguese Language Museum, which has already finished, and the one in the Notre-Dame Cathedral, which is still in progress. We addressed how - in these two cases - the hegemonic thought towards significant appreciation of these buildings’ aesthetic-material aspects resulted in their reconstruction to the very same state they were at, before the damaging events took place and how this solution erased the marks of distress embedded in these heritages.

The first case – i.e., the Portuguese Language Museum – was installed in the former managerial wing of *Estação da Luz*, a railway station in São Paulo City, which was officially launched in 1901. According to Kühl (2018), these facilities had already been damaged by a fire event in 1946 and the recovery services implemented at that time had considerably changed them. Decades later, Paulo and Pedro Mendes da Rocha, two prominent Brazilian architects, developed the project for the Museum, which opened in 2006. According to Kühl (2018), the project designed by them comprised quite incisive interventions in internal areas of the historical building, such as extensive demolitions in its compartments, changes in its finishing, and reorganization of both horizontal and vertical circulations. On the other hand, the external area of the building received the opposite treatment, which conserved its composition. Regardless of the undeniable aesthetic, functional and museological qualities of this proposal, and from the heritage perspective, the aforementioned author has assimilated this intervention as facadism, i.e., as an intervention that only aims at preserving the external part of the building and that disregards the internal part of it.

Thirty days after the 2015 fire event that destroyed the composition launched in 2006, São Paulo State’s government signed a partnership agreement with Roberto Marinho Foundation to rehabilitate the Museum. The proposal for the space, from that moment on, was already outlined, namely: rebuilding its facilities, based on the architectural design that guided the 2006 intervention, by carrying out the necessary updates (Museu da Língua Portuguesa, 2016). That was exactly the place reopened on July 31st, 2021: a new version of the 2006 project that, this time, was exclusively designed by Pedro Mendes

³ There are differences in the scale of impacts caused by each tragic event. There was global commotion around the fire event that took place at Notre-Dame Cathedral, since it is an icon of Gothic architecture, as well as a French symbol described and mentioned in different books and films. On the other hand, the impact caused by the fire event at the Portuguese Language Museum had local scope; it was likely stronger among São Paulo City dwellers and individuals involved in heritage conservation processes. Thus, both events have caused the same type of distress, although at different intensities and in different audiences.

da Rocha, with specific changes to improve the Museum's deficiencies that had been reported during its ten-year operation (UIA2021RIO, 2021).

The third intervention (2016-2021) was very close to the Italian concept *com'era, dov'era* [how it was, where it was]. According to Lagunes (2011), this expression derives from the reconstruction of the bell tower in Venice (Italy), which collapsed in 1902 and was rebuilt at the same location, with the same formal features it presented before it collapsed. In other words, except for some occasional functional updates, nowadays, the Portuguese Language Museum presents the same physical and material features it had before the 2015 fire event⁴. According to Delaqua (2019), although pieces of wood that survived the disaster were reused, the treatment they were subjected to has eliminated any sign of combustion. This process erased all marks left by the fire - i.e., all marks of distress resulting from the tragedy - and the building looked like it was brand new, as if nothing had happened.

The intervention in progress at Notre-Dame Cathedral heads towards a similar outcome. According to Singh-Kurtz (2020), a few days after the 2019 fire event, former French Prime Minister, Édouard Philippe, has announced that Paris would hold an international competition to define the solution for the destroyed roof. According to him, the French government was looking for a proposal capable of adapting to contemporary techniques and challenges; this concept was taken by President Emmanuel Macron as a contemporary architectural gesture to make Notre-Dame Cathedral "even more beautiful". Several ideas for the place have emerged within a short period-of-time; many of them inserted contemporary elements to the nearly millenary Gothic construction. Voien (2019) has listed some of these ideas, namely: the suggestion by Spanish group "POA Studio" of a translucent glass structure that would recreate, through an ethereal materiality, the volume previously occupied by the pinnacle; as well as the proposal by Swedish team "ULF Mejerjgren Architects" to take advantage of the space that had emerged on the roof of the church to install a public-use swimming pool.

However, according to Singh-Kurtz (2020), around July 2020, Macron has withdrawn his support for a contemporary insertion in the reconstruction process. Given the pressure coming from architects, scholars, and Parisians themselves, the proposal for the Cathedral has changed towards restoring it, as consistently as possible, to its last-known full state. Even the French Senate has passed a bill requiring the faithful reconstruction of Notre-Dame Cathedral to its last visual state before the fire event. Thus, the Christian temple has been rebuilt with the same shapes, materials, and techniques, as it was before the disaster. Soon, these interventions in Notre-Dame Cathedral will lead to the same outcomes observed in the Portuguese Language Museum, namely: the total erasure of signs left by the fire in the Cathedral's material, as well as the absolute elimination of the marks of distress left by that fateful April 15th, 2019, to consolidate, in its place, a "*com'era-dov'era*" church.

In both cases, we can infer that, despite the numerous debates about these heritages' immaterial and transcendent aspects⁵, a hegemonic thought towards significant appreciation of the buildings' aesthetic-material aspects, to the detriment of others, remains. In other words, the desire to restore the stylistic unity of the building was naturalized in the social body, to the detriment of other meanings, such as the memory of distress, which could emanate from these damaged architectural structures. Thus, the following actions were taken based on this prevalent position: cleaning and recomposing surfaces, as well as filling gaps and redoing lost elements, among others; in other words, rebuilding the damaged assets to the identical state prior to their respective fire events.

4 Forgetting the Distress

The present section explores the likely consequences of these positions on architectural heritage conservation. As we previously emphasized, Halbwachs (1990) advocated that marks left in the matter are valuable elements that help us to build our memory. Therefore, if the space no longer shows marks capable of triggering memories, they will be at risk of disappearing. This is what we saw in the intervention proposals focused on both the Museum and the Cathedral. As the

⁴ We inquire about what this intervention aimed at conserving: was it the old railway station in the urban imaginary of São Paulo City's dwellers, through its facade? Was it the contemporary intervention and the Museum's functioning? In other words, what did one try to conserve: the past or contemporaneity?

⁵ For example, the 32nd session of Unesco's General Conference held in Paris, in 2003, where the 'Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Heritage' was envisioned.

signs to be erased are the ones we herein define as the marks of distress, those that would be most likely to enable the framework based on which we could locate the memories of what happened will no longer exist in these buildings. Consequently, the memory of distress may fade away.

Accordingly, when memory fades away, an opposite phenomenon emerges in its place, namely: forgetting. According to Ricœur (2004, pp. 412-413), “forgetting indeed remains the disturbing threat that lurks in the background of the phenomenology of memory”; thus, “memory defines it-self, at least in the first instance, as a struggle against forgetting”. Candau (2021, p. 125, our translation) adds by stating that “failing to satisfy the memory means exposing oneself to the risk of disappearance”, since forgetting, which is the enemy of memory, always imposes itself on recollections. Therefore, based on this reasoning, one of the likely effects of the memory dilution process deriving from the erasure of the herein addressed marks of distress by interventions carried out in both the Museum and the Cathedral would lie on forgetting the distress caused by the aforementioned losses, which resulted from these tragic events.

Consequently, by obliterating these misfortunes, we will also forget how they mirror the fragility of our architectural heritage: it took a few hours to destroy parts of buildings that took years to be built and that remained intact for decades. In addition, we will forget that the causes of these misfortunes are insignificant. According to the report issued by the Forensic Science Institute of São Paulo State’s Police Department the fire at the Portuguese Language Museum was caused by malfunction in a floodlight installed in the building (Tomaz, 2019). Although the definitive cause of the fire at Notre-Dame Cathedral is yet to be clarified, there are also suspicions that electrical failures may have happened in the collapsed pinnacle (Thompson, 2021). In other words, we will forget how something as small as a short circuit can cause such a destruction.

Furthermore, suppressing the memory of the vulnerability these ancient monuments are exposed to, can likely lead to negligence in both the care and maintenance of historic buildings. Based on an anthropomorphic analogy, architecture also becomes senile and requires further preventive examinations to be performed, as days go by, to identify and fix different problems. However, if we forget that insignificant phenomena can lead to such a devastation level, we can also forget about the importance of performing scheduled maintenance services in buildings to fix these failures before tragedy takes place. Scenes of neglect towards our heritage, such as the growing dismantling of public initiatives aimed at protecting these assets, is what we witness the most - at least in our political and social context -, a fact that makes periodic monitoring procedures even more essential for their conservation.

Thus, we herein digress and wonder whether these strongly incisive interventions are not adopted as measure to erase from our memory the human error of not having identified and solved - in due time - the accessible causes of these destructions that have caused so much grievances. Could these interventions be a variant of “commanded forgetting”, which was the term created by Ricœur (2004, p. 452) to feature operations that tend “to erase the psychical or social traces, as if nothing had happened”? In other words, would the return of assets to a state prior to the fire event be a sort of “commanded amnesia” to forget our lapses that have caused these misfortunes?

Moving away from speculative inquiries and returning to the central axis of this argument, we get to the main point of our reflection: forgetting can lead to the emergence of an alarming threat, namely: recurrence. According to Gagnebin (2006, p. 47, our translation), “fighting against forgetting [...] is also fighting against the repetition of horror”. In other words, when we forget the facts, mainly the unfavorable ones, opportunities for them to be repeated emerge. We are not saying that the forgotten fact will happen again as it happened before. We are just pointing out that, as Gagnebin (2006, p. 75, our translation) has put it, although there are no identical repetitions in history, there are “retakes and variations that can be just as cruel as, although different from, the original event”. One of the reasons for the recurrence of painful phenomena, even if in a form different from the original one, lies exactly on forgetting that something similar has already happened. It is so, because, when we forget, we lose the traces that could remind us about our past mistakes and the setbacks deriving from them. When we lack these traces to stop the recurrence of these very same failures, we are prone to repeat them.

Based on the herein presented considerations, the aforementioned forgetting types are worrisome because they represent a threat to architectural heritage conservation, due to the likelihood of having a given tragic event happening again. It is so, because, as we have previously mentioned, repressing the memory of distress sets the stage for its recurrence. Without the mnemonic evidence of these assets’ vulnerability, their periodic monitoring procedure may be neglected. Without the proper care, new faulty floodlights and dubious installations can emerge, among other issues of the same nature that were once the

cause of accidents and could be again the origin of new tragic events. Thus, we understand that, by adopting intervening measures that lead to forgetfulness, we give our consent to expose other architectural heritages to the risk of experiencing losses similar to those experienced by the Portuguese Language Museum and the Notre-Dame Cathedral. We risk seeing the history, actions, values, meanings, feelings, and sense of belonging that connect us as collectivity, crumble once again.

5 For the Preservation of Marks of Distress

We advocate that interventions focused on erasing the marks embedded in the material of a given heritage object after a calamitous event, such as the ones that took place at the Portuguese Language Museum and at the Notre-Dame Cathedral, threaten to deprive our memory of the incidence of these tragedies. Thus, the current article speaks on behalf of the preservation of these marks of distress, as well as triggers a critical reflection to help defining the intervention strategies to be adopted in assets damaged by disastrous events. We understand that preserving these marks of distress perpetuates the memory of these events in the community and acts as mnemonic mechanism to help preventing tragedies like these from happening again, by enabling greater social awareness about the vulnerability of these assets.

We are not proposing anything new. Interventions that have preserved marks of grief are nothing new. The Peace Memorial in Hiroshima (Japan), for example, is the only surviving structure close to the hypocenter of the atomic bomb that exploded on August 6th, 1945. It shows the same material condition it presented right after the explosion; it has only undergone occasional interventions for structural consolidation purposes. The Memorial became a strong and powerful symbol of the tremendous destructive power held by humankind⁶. Another similar case lies on the memorial built at the site of the former World Trade Center, New York (USA), which was destroyed by the terrorist attack held on September 11th, 2001, leaving a gap in the heart of Manhattan. The proposal for the space - which was developed by the Handel Architects group - has maintained this urban gap by setting two water mirrors to outline the location of the fallen towers; these water mirrors act as voids that make the absence of these towers present and visible⁷. In other words, they are there to not let us forget that there used to be two skyscrapers in that exact point that were taken down in a terrorist attack.

Thus, instead of rebuilding these objects back to their identical state prior to the catastrophic events, or of erecting other buildings in their places, these two proposals preserved the void left by them after those tragic events and turned them into memorials of pain. They are categorical solutions, whose use is virtually restricted to monuments, such as Riegl's ([1903] 1982, p. 21) "intentional monuments"; in other words, monuments intentionally created with the purpose of "keeping single human deeds or events alive in the minds of future generations". However, less radical alternatives focused on the partial or specific preservation of these marks enable associating their memorial function with other uses. It was the case of *Igreja Matriz de Nossa Senhora do Rosário* [Mother Church of Our Lady of the Rosary] in Pirenópolis City, central Brazilian plateau region, which was finished in 2006. This Christian temple from the 17th century was hit by a fire event on September 5th, 2002 and had both its roof and its internal part (including all its integrated artistic elements) destroyed by the flames.

Much has been discussed about the solution to be adopted for this monument, which was destroyed by the flames; however, according to Cavalcante (2018, p. 67, our translation), "the decisive spark to restore the monument came from the collective manifestation of Pirenópolis community, which sees the Mother Church as the greatest symbol of its culture". Therefore, the size of the church was restored back to its state before the fire, and it was reinserted in the landscape as local cultural symbol. On the other hand, with respect to the internal part of it, its artistic assets (altars, ceilings, arches) were not redone; it was made the option for using compositions that sometimes revealed the rammed earth substrates of the self-supporting masonry, such as those housing the side altars, and sometimes introduced new contemporary features, such as the new crossing arch. Thus, part of the building was rebuilt *com'era, dov'era*, whereas the other part of it preserved the signs of fire, either by maintaining the gaps or by introducing elements holding a new aesthetic language. Furthermore, although the church resumed its function as religious temple, nowadays, it also plays the role of recalling the dramatic events that took place decades ago, through the marks embedded in its structure.

⁶ For more information: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/775/> (Accessed: 09 May 2022).

⁷ For more information: <https://handelarchitects.com/project/national-september-11-memorial> (Accessed: 09 May 2022).

Another case is that of the National Museum in Rio de Janeiro City, Southeastern Brazil, which was devastated by a fire event on September 02nd, 2018. After the incident, a technical cooperation between Brazilian and international institutions engaged in rebuilding the Museum was established and called *Projeto Museu Nacional Vive* [National Museum Lives Project]. The aforementioned group carried out a tender to define the company in charge of the architectural and restoration project; the consortium formed by H+F Architects and Atelier of Architecture and Urban Design has presented the winning proposal (Museu Nacional Vive, 2021). So far, the available images of the interventional proposal - which is still under development - have indicated that the external elements of the building will be restored back to their state prior to the fire. However, it is possible seeing a mix of approaches to its internal part: some environments will be restored, others will receive contemporary additions, but there are also indications that environments will have the marks left by the disaster in the masonry preserved. Thus, the winning proposal will return the National Museum back to its museological functions and, at the time, it will preserve some of the scars left by the flames on the masonry, by including them in the new formal composition of the building. This strategy will provide the means for us to rescue the memory of distress associated with this tragic event.

At some point, we may be criticized by those who, like Nora (1993), believe that contemporary society shows excessive desire for memory; that everything turned into artifact of reminiscence with an excessive set of institutions to preserve it, but without hierarchy to decide what should, or should not, be remembered. However, this is not our purpose. We do not deny our right and need of forgetting, as defended by Candau (2021, p. 128, our translation), who understands that “this forgetting process can be long-lasting and beneficial in everyday life, except for some incident”.

The U-House experience, in Japan - a residence from the 1970s designed by Japanese architect Toyo Ito for family members who were going through the distress of mourning the loss of a loved one, after a battle with cancer - is an example of this demand for forgetting. According to Cairns and Jacobs (2017), the elaborated proposal reflected this context of sadness and introspection. Years later, in 1997, when the family’s mourning time was over, the house was demolished upon request by the dwellers themselves, who had moved on, whereas the residence maintained its funeral symbolism, which was hard to change. Thus, it was dismantled because its dwellers agreed that it was time to overcome their sadness and the house made this process difficult, since it kept the memory of distress alive.

However, we do not see it as a valid justification to erase the marks of the fire events at the Portuguese Language Museum and at Notre-Dame Cathedral. Despite the distress caused by them, the memory of these events is unlikely to prevent us from moving on with our lives. The grief arising from these events was not caused by an irremediable phenomenon; on the contrary, it could have been easily avoided by performing regular inspections in the electrical installations of these buildings. Thus, we defend the remembrance of these tragedies through the preservation of their marks of distress, based on two different intervention premises. The signs of fire in the internal masonry of the Portuguese Language Museum, for example, could have been kept, occasionally, as long as they were structurally stable, as it was done in the Mother Church of Pirenópolis and at the National Museum of Rio de Janeiro. The contrast between new and deteriorated surfaces in the aforementioned buildings enables seeing an instigating creative exercise of aesthetic-formal composition.

For the Notre-Dame Cathedral, we suggest a different strategy, since the marks of flames did not reach the gables of the building with the same intensity; they mostly affected the external faces of the vaults, which are lesser visible spaces. On the other hand, we could preserve the gaps in the roof, although we believe that this measure is more harmful than beneficial for the conservation of the building. Therefore, we agree with the demand for the reconstruction of the Cathedral’s covering elements, although through a process with the potential to emphasize the consequences of the disaster. Instead of rebuilding the damaged parts based on using the same materials, shapes and construction techniques used before, we would propose an analogical contrast approach for this case. In other words, we would make the option to perform a sensitive re-reading of the lost elements, by reverting them into new shapes, materials and construction techniques, so they could harmoniously interact with the remaining parts and, at the same time, reveal their nuances⁸. This method would be extended to both the vaults and the roofs, as well as to the lost pinnacle, which we would also rebuild due to its categorical symbolism.

⁸ Strategy addressed in debates about conservation held since the 19th century, with the so-called archaeological restoration; later on, it was revisited by Camilo Boito and Gustavo Giovannoni, in the early 1900s, and reinterpreted by Antón Capitel and Ignasi de Solà-Morales, at late 20th century

Thus, the operationalization of visits to the buildings could be maintained in both scenarios, along with the preservation of signs of the disaster. The marks in the Portuguese Language Museum would be internally concentrated, given the effect of the fire on the building's materiality, whereas the manifestations of the fire at Notre-Dame Cathedral would take place externally, based on a new composition that would contrast with the remaining one. These are two, among countless, alternatives to the proposals that have been, or are still in the process to be, applied to these buildings. These proposals could be accepted upon a meticulous and sensitive historical, aesthetic, technical and socio-cultural study, which is not part of the scope of the current article. Nevertheless, from a counter-hegemonic perspective, they are assumptions based on which we can re-examine a given mode of action.

6 Final remarks

The aim of the current article was to readdress the intent of rebuilding heritage buildings damaged by disasters to their identical state prior to these incidents, by erasing the marks of these events. This strategy has proved to be the result from hegemonic thoughts towards greater appreciation of buildings' aesthetic-material aspects in two recent cases. Thus, our intention was to defend an antagonistic interventional approach, i.e., one that preserves these marks. In order to do so, we have analyzed different cases of interventions performed in buildings damaged by disasters and confronted them with concepts such as memory, forgetting and repetition. Based on this analysis, we have concluded that the signs of disasters are marks of distress capable of reviving the memory of distress caused by misfortunes. Without them, we lose the source to remember what happened. Absence of memory leads to forgetting, which, in its turn, raises the threat of having the forgotten fact repeated. Therefore, we see the marks embedded in architectural heritages as a way not to forget these misfortunes and, consequently, to find the means to prevent them from happening again.

Therefore, we herein emphatically advocate for a counter-hegemonic interventionist strategy focused on preserving the marks of distress left by fire events, such as the ones left at the Portuguese Language Museum and at Notre-Dame Cathedral. This preservation should be addressed on a case-by-case basis to enable assessing the limits of what to be preserved and how to preserve it. It is possible adopting an extreme measure focused on maintaining all marks of the tragedy, even if it limits the building to a monumental function, as well as a moderate solution focused on preserving fragments of these marks, which would enable associating the memorial function with other uses. We advocate that tragedies like these imply certain duty of memory "because only the symbolic transmission assumed despite, and due to, unspeakable suffering, only this reflective resumption of the past can help us not to repeat it forever". (Gagnebin, 2006, p. 57, our translation).

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