Emptiness and Authenticity at Bamiyan

James Janowski

"The Buddha was here to contemplate or to be contemplated?"

—Peter Levi (Margottini 2014, p. 41)

Abstract In 2001, the Taliban desecrated Bamiyan's Buddhas, colossal 1500-year-old sculptures that had long been the centerpiece of Afghanistan's cultural heritage, leaving behind hollow niches and staggering voids. Reflecting on some terms used to discuss heritage objects, I note that meaning and value seem invariably to be conflated. Using Bamiyan as my example, I argue this is a mistake, for meaning and value, coalescing in an *achievement* like the Buddhas, come apart in cases of massive desecration, or *despoliation*. Seeking to comprehend the nature of deliberately induced emptiness, I urge that while meaning has remained intact and, oddly, even perhaps increased in the willfully produced vacuity at Bamiyan, value, rightly understood, has been utterly extinguished, and is altogether absent. I then discuss what should happen at Bamiyan. I argue for reconstituting the Buddhas, and show that doing so would contribute to ends with both intrinsic and extrinsic merit. After deflecting two objections, I defend anastylosis and register skepticism about reconstruction founded in digital technologies. I suggest that integral restoration alone stands to issue in resurgent value and *re-achieved achievement*. In closing, I note that my thinking generalizes and has real import in an age scarred by the desecration of iconic heritage.

Keywords Meaning · Value · Authenticity · Conservation · Restoration · Reconstruction · Digital · UNESCO · Outstanding Universal Value

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1   Introduction[1]

Spectacularly situated in the Hindu Kush, way up in the mountain highlands in what is now Afghanistan, Bamiyan was a bustling religious and commercial center, and a mixing pot of a place where cosmopolitan influences and a confluence of ideas came to be modeled in two colossal sculptures of the Buddha. A blend of Indian, Hellenistic, Roman, and Sasanian art inspiring awe for 1500 years, the sculptures stood serenely in their niches and calmly oversaw the amazing history that transpired in the Bamiyan Valley. Once resplendent—at their unveiling they wore dazzling, brightly-colored outfits and were richly adorned in jewels—earthquakes, freeze-thaw cycles, and the simple, quiet ravages of time had taken a toll. Still, the Buddhas were for all that survivors—right up until their desecration by the Taliban in March 2001, when an intensive two week barrage, undertaken with artillery shells and dynamite, reduced tall and proud sculptures to rubble.

While the core of its physicality is gone, Bamiyan nonetheless remains part of the world's art historical heritage. Indeed, ironically, it seems more attention has been paid to the sculptures and the site post-desecration: The Buddhas' prominence and fame, arguably even their significance and import, has perhaps *increased* since the Taliban's deed. And thus the deliberate targeting—the immediate spark for which was the West's loud and public insistence on the sculptures' "world heritage" value at an unfortunate geo-political flash point—paved the way for a "reinvention" of Bamiyan.[2]

My aim is twofold. First, to understand the result of this reinvention—hollow niches and a staggering void. Using the Buddhas as my example, I seek to comprehend the being of massively desecrated artifacts; the status of iconic objects and sites that suffer wholesale destruction; and the nature of both despoliation and the emptiness it leaves behind. Second, I seek to make a case for what should happen at Bamiyan—and, in doing so, start to both clarify and refine central concepts in heritage conservation theory and begin to develop some thoughts (my focus is Bamiyan but my thinking generalizes) that pertain to what, sadly, seems increasingly frequent: The willful destruction of iconic material culture.

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[1] The first two parts of this essay are modified versions of the first two sections in Janowski 2020. While the essays have very different aims, these two sections are essential to both.

[2] In 1999, the Taliban said it regarded the statues with "serious respect." It went on: "The Taliban government states that Bamiyan shall not be destroyed but protected." (Falser 2011, p. 159) By February 2001, arguably in response to yet further deepened Western sanctions, they did an about-face. I discuss this in Janowski 2015.

2 Bamiyan *Then*, Bamiyan *Now*: Understanding Meaning and Value

I begin by exploring two terms we commonly use to talk about artworks and cultural heritage—'*meaning*' and '*value*'. These ideas seem innocuous and uncontroversial. We deploy them casually and unconsciously, much like we breathe clean and unsullied air unwittingly, without taking notice of what is happening. In discussions about heritage 'meaning' and 'value' seem invariably to be conjoined and any possible distinction between them is unthinkingly elided. In fact we seem to *conflate* these ideas, simply assuming they do the same conceptual work. Thus we naturally say "X has meaning and value," collapsing the concepts as if they were identical. In contrast, "X is meaningful but value-less" or "X has value but no meaning," is *not* something we are disposed to say; both phrases ring decidedly odd. So it is as if 'meaning' and 'value' were one word—'*meaningvalue*'—with no conceptual space between its blended conjuncts.[3] My view is that this unreflective conflation, this running together and blurring of two into one, is a mistake, as careful thinking about Bamiyan will show.

While I cannot fully unpack this here, I believe that Bamiyan's Buddhas—this is true of select, especially powerful and iconic artworks and pieces of cultural heritage (I intend these terms and 'heritage objects' interchangeably)—were an *achievement*. Think Michelangelo's *Pietà*. Think Eifel Tower. Think Pyramids. Think Palmyra Arch or Aleppo's Grand Mosque. Or consider the subject of this volume, Bamiyan's Buddhas. These sculptures—the younger one, at 55 m, was taller than the Statue of Liberty and the largest standing Buddha in the world—were a remarkable feat. Estimates are that it took many decades to transform sheer cliff faces into towering icons. The sculptures testified to the wandering, peripatetic transmission of Buddhism from place to place along the Silk Roads. They were grand and they were awe-inspiring. Witness this observation from Yakut al Hamawi, author of a "geographical dictionary" based on ten years of travel, early in the thirteenth century, throughout the Middle East and Afghanistan: "...two huge idols cut into the rock and reaching from the bottom to the top of the mountain. One is called the red idol and the other one the white idol. You cannot find anything comparable to these two statues in the whole world." (Petzet 2009a, pp. 237–38) Thus the Buddhas were physical exemplars of important ideas and historical-cultural movements as well as tangible markers of creativity, design, intentionality, purposefulness. They manifest ingenuity, craft, effort, will. Indeed, whatever else is true, the Buddhas plainly answered to all these criteria.[4] Put simply, the Buddhas' creators labored long and mightily—evidencing this, the innermost of three layers of clay covering the hand-hewn sculptures' substrate has revealed 1500-year-old fingermarks—and brought something powerful and worthy into the world. The sculptures were *repositories of value* and *sources of meaning*, and thus were in my sense an *achievement*.[5]

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[3] It gets worse. It's really '*meaningvaluesignificanceimportmeritworth*'.

[4] Something like these criteria underlie UNESCO's "Outstanding Universal Value" (OUV). See *OG* 2016, II.D. My analysis, as we'll see, well captures the "universal" in OUV.

[5] As the italics suggest, I intend 'achievement' as a technical term. I believe that the terminological and theoretical innovations I advance in the essay are crucially important. In my view, this sort of

Enter March 2001. Caught up in ideological conflict, the Buddhas fell victim to political-cum-military struggle and competing worldviews. Two weeks of painstaking "effort" reduced them to rubble. That said, in desecrating the sculptures the Taliban did not obliterate meaning. In fact as I noted earlier and have argued elsewhere (Janowski 2015), Bamiyan might well garner more attention and, oddly, be more meaning-filled now than it was pre-desecration. Of course this is not the place to sift through the multiple meanings at play in the remains. Here it suffices to say that the site has both remnants of its "old" meanings—these are jumbled, obscure, "illegible"—and doubtless a host of new ones too. Indeed, surely there will be other—novel and perhaps distinctive—ways of interpreting the fragmentation and emptiness. But whatever these are they are swallowed up and overpowered by a colossal new meaning which—*KABOOM*!—strikes us *immediately*, and *loudly and clearly*. Apprised of what occurred in 2001, we are confused, shaken, knocked off-kilter. We try but fail to comprehend the desecration. Reason cannot get its arms around the result, and indeed Bamiyan now prompts—think Edmund Burke—the experience of the sublime.[6] We are left dumbstruck and thunderstruck, astonished and numbed, groping for understanding that will not, because it cannot, be forthcoming.

And there is, I think, an explanation for this: In desecrating the Buddhas, the Taliban spoiled—*de*spoiled—an achievement. *Despoliation*? Examine the word. *Deliberate* spoiling. Despoliation, I submit, is the deliberate targeting and spoiling of value; despoliation takes aim at "good" and, alas, vanquishes the same.[7] Thus the Taliban did something seriously untoward, even horrific. The Taliban sundered the former coalescence of meaning and value, breaking the link and partnership between them. It deliberately spoiled Bamiyan, thereby *extinguishing* value. This is metaphysically misbegotten. It is metaphysically inverted. Indeed, the *willful erasure of value*—think "the sublime"—is incomprehensible, and existentially befuddling. The deliberate violation of value is weighty, making us languid, droopy, disconsolate.[8] Despoliation is cognitively toxic and cannot be understood rationally.

Thus it turns out that in order to understand Bamiyan *now* we need also to understand Bamiyan *then*. Thinking about Bamiyan *then* shows that meaning and value are typically and rightly conjoined, and that all is well. Bamiyan *then* was an achievement, meaning-filled and value-laden. Thinking about Bamiyan *now* shows how meaning and value can atypically and wrongly come apart. Bamiyan *now* is meaning-filled and value-less. Indeed, March 2001 saw the deliberate scuttling of a "long and happy marriage." It saw the despoliation of value and the generation of axiological emptiness.[9]

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creative thinking and invention is essential if we are to make progress in heritage conservation theory and, indeed, heritage conservation practice.

[6] This idea stretches across the millennia from Longinus to Lyotard and includes thinkers as disparate as Burke, Kant, and Jameson. Burke's classic discussion (1990) captures my intent.

[7] 'Despoliation' too is a technical term.

[8] See Janowski 2015, where I discuss the "axiological gravity" that despoliation prompts.

[9] Of course value, in my sense, might obtain elsewhere in the Bamiyan Valley. I focus on the hollowness in the niches.

My strategy in this essay—consciously decoupling and carefully parsing words that have merged—is, I believe, theoretically innovative and therefore doubtless theoretically controversial. Space is limited here, and I both discuss these ideas more fully (even discuss the idea that Bamiyan is characterized by what I call "anti-value") and deepen the analysis in a related essay.[10] For now, however, I take this—the idea that meaning and value can be separated and that in extreme circumstances value can be *obliterated*—as established and turn to discuss what ought to happen at Bamiyan and why.

3 Re-achieving Achievement at Bamiyan

A cluster of terms form the vocabulary through which we traditionally work to understand material culture. Heritage theorists share a common currency: They trade in the language of value, meaning, significance, authenticity, originality, integrity, etc. While I am convinced that the definitions of and linkage between these terms—and, indeed, the linkage between them and my *achievement* and *despoliation*—need careful study, it seems clear (common sense suggests this and I stipulate it here) that despoliation, destroying achievement and value, severely compromises, maybe destroys, authenticity. Bamiyan is now characterized by radical fragmentation, disorder, and emptiness. Bearing little relation to their former selves—mournful stumps and sheltered stones are far removed from once-towering icons—Bamiyan's Buddhas have been rendered *in*authentic and the site is not (another term requiring clarification!) "genuine." By contrast, it seems undeniably true that all was well, more or less, in February 2001. Most would suggest that, pre-despoliation, value and authenticity were intact, or at least largely so, even though the sculptures were not "whole and entire," and even though integrity, understood as a matter of matter, had been compromised. Indeed, some would affirm that the loss of physical substance had *contributed to* authenticity. (Authenticity—here in a nutshell, I believe, is the difference between it and originality—is an historically-informed property which accrues or accretes. And, depending on the artifact, this gradual gain can be a function of material displacement. Oddly, perhaps somewhat paradoxically, this gain is sometimes a function of loss. My thinking here is related to Alois Reigl's "age value"—the dilapidation of a monument which, he urges, has deep affective resonance. By 2001, plainly, age value had mostly replaced Reigl's "historical value"—captured, cognitively, in the pristine original—at Bamiyan).[11] The question, then, is whether, post-despoliation, value and authenticity

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[10] See Janowski 2020, where I say more about both the nature of value and its antonym, anti-value.

[11] See Reigl 1982. Reigl's thinking is suggestive, but in my view he has the ontology wrongly flipped and he mistakenly bows to a certain kind of relativism or historicism. Reigl's "value" is my "meaning," and my account of the metaphysics and epistemology of heritage objects does much more than his to explain the import of conservation, restoration, and preservation. More about this momentarily.

can be recreated or reestablished.[12] Can the site once again harbor "real" value and, as it were, authentic authenticity?

Obviously this is a very difficult—why else has it gone unanswered for nearly 20 years?—but hugely important question. What happens at Bamiyan stands to affect many people, from many different groups and disparate constituencies, and indeed future generations of the same. If it occurs, reinvention needs to be carried out with the utmost care careful thought can muster. Any intervention must seek to balance a plethora of considerations and speak to the interests of stakeholders from the past, present, and future. This is a tall order. And the idea that I myself, here, can possibly address, much less sort through, all the relevant issues—in effect uttering the last word about value and authenticity at Bamiyan—is fanciful and quixotic. That said, I do aim to contribute to the discussion—having some influence, however small, on any decision regarding intervention at the site would be gratifying—and so now enter and try to make sense of the rubble pile.

I begin my case for Bamiyan's future by amplifying my thoughts from Section 2. It is in the nature of things, happily, that human beings *strive*—this is what we *do* in creating artworks and cultural heritage—and that, in the product of their strivings, which I have dubbed *achievements*, value (which, once created, is constant, unchanging, and universal) and meaning (even if this is, as it will be over time, shifting, contested, and disputed) coalesce.[13] Thus human behavior naturally catalyzes a sort of "magical" material harmonic convergence. Achievements—understood, again, as the product of creativity, intention, purpose, and determination, as well as

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[12] For now, I use "recreate," "reestablish," "reclaim," or "reconstitute" as placeholders that are agnostic as between restoration and reconstruction. The all-important difference between the latter two terms will be my concern later.

[13] Obviously I am using 'value' in an unconventional manner. In my view, the value in an achievement, once the latter is completed or realized, *obtains*. It *is*. The value is *there* and, barring cataclysm, it continues to exist—it *remains there*—irrespective of its appreciation or "attribution." Rightly understood, value—its being—is not a function of perceivers' awareness, perception, beliefs, or "value commitments." It—the value per se—is ontologically prior to the meanings we assign it. In short, value is metaphysical; meaning is epistemological. This gestures toward my difference with Reigl—and near as I can tell all others who discuss these issues. Thus, e.g., UNESCO's *OG* 2016, echoing Reigl, alludes to the "attribution" of value in II.E, 79, 81. My account, grounding value in the artifact rather than the historically-conditioned perception of the same, does more to illustrate the nature of heritage objects than does Reigl's—and, seemingly, the *OG*.

While I discuss this in Janowski 2020 and aim to explain it yet more fully elsewhere, here I simply note that my account, in its unconventionality, fills a gap in our thinking and in the cultural heritage literature. In an interesting paper on the history of the concept of OUV, Christina Cameron suggests that "While the Committee seeks greater clarity and guidance—almost a set of rules—for determining which properties have OUV, such clarity will likely remain elusive. This discussion will probably continue for the foreseeable future because determination of OUV is not a robotic black-and-white exercise but is rather a judgment made at a specific time by individuals of diverse cultural backgrounds." (Cameron 2009, p. 135) I submit that my thinking about value, capturing both its constancy and universality, might be a helpful step toward the clarity and guidance the WHC seeks. Indeed, in the best case my account and analysis, which invites us to think hard but not robotically, might be the beginning of a way out of the impasse.

both repositories of value and sources of meaning—are gifts, across time, from our forebearers, and through us, to future generations. They are symbols. They are material markers of ideas. They are tangible means of communicating history. Forging a connection to the past and those who made and protected it, achievements are rich sources of identity for human beings and their communities. Indeed, iconic pieces of material culture are integral to meaning in the lives of individuals and societies. They are things we find marvelous, things that have us in thrall, and things that inspire pride. Understood rightly—neutrally, and irrespective of our own particular commitments, ideals, self-understandings, and "values"—they facilitate our recognition of others, prompting respect for them and their efforts, whether as creators or stewards.[14] Given their import, one might even urge human beings have a *right* to their iconic achievements.[15] And thus the loss of such an artifact and its attendant value is a profound loss—metaphysically, epistemologically, and morally. It erases history, ravages the present, and compromises the future.

All this, then, is prima facie justification for recreating desecrated icons. Indeed, it seems the proper response to despoliation, where feasible, is the reconstitution of these achievements. We are strongly and natively inclined, even existentially compelled, to respond to a Taliban-esque violation by reintroducing the products of our strivings. Witness Warsaw's historic center, Dresden's Frauenkirche, or Mostar's Old Bridge. There is plainly a human nature-based desire to stare down a willful violation with redoubled effort and focused commitment to reclaim value, meaning, and identity. And thus in general we honor our predecessors' laboring and accomplishments (and fulfill a backward-, sideward-, and forward-looking fiduciary duty)

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[14] This explains the value in, say, the Pyramids. They will mean different things across time, and just *what* they mean will depend on attitudes, tastes, and the sort of human understandings that are shifting and notoriously fickle. Whatever we think about the slavery involved in their creation— imagine there was world-wide unanimity, down to a person, about its moral horror—we ought to preserve the Pyramids because they house value, value which antedates our beliefs and meaning-imputation about ("the value of"?) the same. Again, the being of the value is prior to the being of the meaning. (Michael Petzet perhaps hints at my account in describing the interior of a famous French cathedral: "And to this day the *genius loci* of such a monument speaks to everyone, not only to the believer, but even to the tourist who, during his 'pilgrimage' as visitor, feels the breath of history and the spirit of craftsmen and artists who created this work." Petzet 2009b, p. 67)

Thus, understanding achievements rightly has us *acknowledging* others even if we are unsympathetic with what motivated their striving and enabled the creation of their achievements. Understood as they should be, achievements impose a kind of (potentially begrudging) liberal cosmopolitan respect. Think Bamiyan itself. For 1500 years Muslims (mostly) honored the Buddhas. Presumably they did not "admire," "fancy," or "agree with" Buddhism (they were *Muslim* after all!); but they plainly respected the sculptures and, implicitly or by extension, those who built and protected them. (Admiration and respect are subtly different.) I suspect this explains the about-face described in Note 2. Both sides agreed there was *value* in the niches; what they contested was the *meaning(s)* (the "value") of this value. Tragically, this contestation led to despoliation.

[15] 'Right' is philosophically vexed. For now I simply note this: Some heritage theorists and charters have urged, plausibly, that violating an icon violates a right.

by seeking to undo damage, overcome loss, and promote healing and recovery by answering to this powerful need to reestablish lost achievements.[16]

And why should it be any different with the Buddhas? Assuming recreation is possible, why not pursue it vigorously?[17] Indeed, the preconditions are in place. Significant original material remains. Innumerable people have displayed remarkable dedication, working incredibly hard at considerable risk, to ready the site for intervention. And doubtless because it recognizes the potential value in and possible meaning-making capacity of renewed niches, the Afghan government has formally requested a reclamation project. Further, and finally, many governments and international institutions are supportive. With all this in mind, I believe a strong case can be made for reconstituting the Buddhas. Such an undertaking would promote a multitude of worthy purposes, contributing to ends with both intrinsic and extrinsic merit.[18] Moreover, reclaiming Bamiyan would replace a lugubrious presence with material evidence of our indomitability and resilience. Recreation serves our better angels and is testament to the human spirit. Should we be vanquished? Capitulate? Settle? *Or should we aspire*?

There are, of course, objections to consider. I will discuss two. First, one might argue that this herculean effort is unmotivated, even inappropriate, because the Taliban's "modification" of Bamiyan—recall Mikhail Bakunin's "the urge to destroy is a creative urge"—has generated a new iconic artifact. One could even urge that the empty niches constitute a new artwork-cum-heritage object and thus there would be loss in the loss of the loss if the sculptures are resurrected. (See Janowski 2015.) Perhaps a comment by Andrea Bruno can be so understood. Bruno says: "The void is the true sculpture. It stands disembodied witness to the will, thoughts and spiritual tensions of men long gone. The immanent presence of the niche, even without its sculpture, represents a victory for the monument and a defeat for those who tried to obliterate its memory with dynamite." (Cocks 2012)

Simply put, I disagree. I find this position glib and facile. It is misguided to think the Taliban's act creative (as Bakunin might) and call this a "victory for the monument" (as Bruno did). The act annihilated value; the remains, spread over two continents, are a material cacophony; the site is forlorn, hollowed-out. As is, Bamiyan is not an achievement in my sense; as is, the site (contra Bakunin) does not manifest the relevant creativity and purposefulness; as is, it prompts more melancholy than awe. Thus I believe Bruno's comment is wrongheaded and the idea that the niches

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[16]There will be mitigating circumstances and no immediate link between "violation" and (rightful) "recreation." Argument is necessary to establish this link, and deciding whether this is possible and appropriate in any particular case will require nuanced judgment. We must always guard against Disneylandification, and do due diligence to facilitate "authentic experience." While John Ruskin might be scandalized, a "hands-off the heritage" policy is simplistic. Ruskin famously said: "Restoration is a lie." But if Ruskin had somehow envisioned—or, worse, witnessed—the recent resurgence of iconoclasm he would have seen that *despoliation* is the (real) lie, and far more tragic than restoration.

[17]Empirical issues—economic, political, technical, etc.—are not my expertise. I will suppose all these have been decided in the affirmative. Happily, the evidence seems positive.

[18]I discuss these in all my publications on Bamiyan. See especially Janowski 2011a, b.

somehow remain an artwork is altogether wanting. (Afghanistan's reclamation request suggests that it agrees. Currently, Bamiyan is an "anti-heritage" object.)[19]

A second objection goes in the other direction, urging that (implicitly acknowledging my point regarding the present absence of value?) Bamiyan is a lost cause. The objector says: Face facts. Recreation is unwarranted because the damage is done and recovery is impossible. One might even urge that attempting to reclaim the niches will do *additional* damage by compromising any residual authenticity or integrity at the site. (Like physicians, we are enjoined first and foremost to do no harm; thus we should refrain from heroic efforts that are empty, even deleterious.)

I begin my response by seconding the damage assessment. I agree that Bamiyan was colossally defiled and the result, as I have said, is incomprehensible. Thus one might indeed be tempted to conclude all is lost and, perhaps in keeping with the spirit of Buddhism, say "let the Buddhas go." But this would be hasty. Experience shows—again, think Warsaw, Dresden, Mostar—that value can be recharged and resolve can work miracles. And, at Bamiyan, the raw materials for a miracle are in place, waiting on a go-ahead. Stabilization efforts are halting further loss; puzzle pieces, partially analyzed and sorted, await re-integration. Moreover, crucially, the will to resurrect obtains—in spades. Many, from constituencies inside and outside Afghanistan, are intent on reclaiming the sculpture(s). And when we carefully consider the quasi-compulsion to respond affirmatively to the destruction of value, I think we should err on the side of those who actually suffered the existential violation. All of us have been harmed; the Buddhas, being an achievement, were indeed *the world's* heritage. But Afghans generally and Bamiyaners in particular warrant special consideration. These people—"locals"—seek fervently to recover from the loss that despoliation generated. Their needs deserve to be met. For them, for those who regularly confront the emptiness, recreation is a kind of reparation—and their interests should count more in the decision-making calculus than a purported loss of authenticity to future generations.[20] Indeed, in this case a "principled" (obdurate?)

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[19] Exactly what Bruno intends is debatable. But truth and authenticity, as in "the void is the true sculpture," are sometimes treated as synonymous. Bruno evidently believes the monument is somehow still there—still authentic?—and he's plainly against intervention. I am not persuaded that the monument has emerged victorious. Nor am I persuaded that there is sufficient material left to manifest "the will, thoughts and spiritual tensions of men long gone." Contra Bruno, it seems to me that the Buddhas' *bodies* are necessary to manifest these things. As-is the niches evidence and forcefully portray *the Taliban's* will.

Cornelius Holtorf's work is relevant here. In a session of "The Future of the Bamiyan Buddha Statues: Technical Considerations & Potential Effects on Authenticity and Outstanding Universal Value," a three day meeting in Tokyo in late September 2017—and indeed in both one-on-one conversation and an email exchange (9/30/17) during that same time span—Holtorf suggested, provocatively, that it might be appropriate to think of the Taliban as stakeholders as Afghanistan struggles to make a decision about the emptied-out niches. While my own thinking is somewhat at odds with Holtorf's, and while we might come to different conclusions about the future of Bamiyan, his work in heritage theory is very interesting and deeply suggestive. See e.g. Holtorf 2015 and Holtorf 2006.

[20] One could also ask: How much "say" should present-day Buddhists have regarding what happens at Bamiyan? This is a good question. But note that "locals"—Islamic people—had effectively

commitment to a Venice Charter-style understanding of authenticity—a singular focus on original material and correlative concern to forestall "historical deception"—is myopic. It misses (or underemphasizes) the fact that (currently-existing) people matter. It misses the fact that, since authenticity accretes, recreated sculptures, even if harboring non-original material, will eventually be understood as genuine. (Curiously, it *also* misses the fact that the sculptures standing in 2001 had been restored previously. Thus foot-dragging on "purist" grounds has been without rationale. The Buddhas had had non-original material for a time but were nonetheless not "inauthentic." See, e.g., Margottini 2014, pp. 181–185.) In sum, then, recreation might violate a reading of authenticity focusing narrowly on material integrity; but in my view we should intervene on the basis of a reading which also recognizes the import of human rights, community-building, etc.[21]

These objections and responses only scratch the surface of an extremely challenging dilemma. Thinking about Bamiyan prompts hard questions and more objections could be raised. Space constraints, however, have me bracketing difficult issues and racing toward a baldly stated conclusion: Bamiyan should reclaim its niche(s).[22] Value is, well, important; it *matters*; and remaking it does too. Indeed, making things whole—things that had harbored value in themselves and things that meant things to people—and thereby making people and their communities whole, is a natural, and metaphysically and morally worthy, response to unfathomable violation. The "making whole" in recreation honors the past, recharges the present, and inspires hope for the future. Thus I believe that we—where 'we' has a wide referent—should, the sooner the better, embrace a reclamation project at (and for) Bamiyan.

That said (here is a caveat), I also believe that the rightfulness of intervention trades on the *type* of reclamation project—reconstruction or restoration—undertaken.[23] Thus imagine "new Buddhas" are reconstructed using the most sophisticated digital technologies available. Imagine Buddhas finely designed and exactingly implemented; picture them taken back to their condition at some (arbitrarily chosen?) previous Time-T1; picture them conjured up in a computer and then extruded from a printer. These artifacts surely would be a remarkable achievement. But just as surely they would not be the *sort of* achievement I have discussed. A pixel is not a trowel; digital cameras are not chisels; keyboards and software

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"adopted" the sculptures. Muslims had been largely gracious caretakers of the Buddhas for a millennium. Thus I believe their interests should be weighted more heavily than the interests of those who, citing the tenets of their religion, say "let the Buddhas go." (Adoptive, not biological, parents deserve the credit for stewardship. Birthing a child is different from caring for one.)

[21] See Janowski 2011b for a discussion of the various goods promoted by the reintegration of Dresden's Frauenkirche.

[22] Here, for now, I am non-committal as between reclaiming one or two niches. But note that if the *aim* of conservation is "perpetuation of maximal meanings into the future," (Janowski 2013, pp. 68–69) we should perhaps intervene in one niche and leave the other empty.

[23] I shift now to highlight the all-important (if also not hard-and-fast) distinction between these two terms.

applications are not scaffolding; and 3-D printers are not human hands. Digitally generated "sculptures" would lack the crucial material-historical link to their creators. Physical reconstruction based primarily on contemporary technologies will not reanimate what innumerable human beings labored for decades to accomplish. Buddhas birthed in a computer would not recreate a heritage object in my metaphysically and morally powerful sense. (Non-physical reconstruction—lasers? holograms?—also fails. Indeed, in ignoring the materiality [and related material processes] essential to authenticity, non-physical reconstruction *magnifies* the inauthenticity, highlighting the absence of value and attendant loss. Since original material is available it should be used.)[24]

To bolster this point let's return to those fingermarks in the clay. *Reflect. Think. Picture them*. (See photo on next page.) Fossilized fingermarks are tangible relics of human will; they are historical traces of purposeful effort; they materially represent the striving toward a bona fide achievement.[25] I do not see how physical reconstruction based fundamentally on pixels and DPI, even if the result perfectly mimics some prior state—imagine "Bamiyan Buddhas" rolling out of a printer; dial up any old (your favorite!) particular version, whether from 2001 or (why not?) out-of-the-box new; make (why not?) multiple copies (maybe at 100-year time-slices?) and put them in museums the world over[26]—would capture the fingermarks' significance and result in an achievement in my sense. (3-D printed "sculptures" are in principle *ahistorical*; they neither involve nor honor *toil*; and the *process* whereby something comes to be matters. All the worse, again, for non-physical reconstruction.)[27] By

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[24] Perhaps I am either hopelessly unimaginative or historically blinkered. Perhaps one day we will no longer (be able to?) distinguish between physical and non-physical. Perhaps these worlds will merge (as perhaps they are doing, incrementally and imperceptibly, now). But unless and until this reconceived ontology becomes deep second nature and a concern for "the physical" becomes merely quaint, I feel compelled to defend an "old-fashioned" view.

See Zalewski 2016 for a sense of some of the issues. The article depicts Adam Lowe's digital fabrication work. Although Lowe asks the right questions, I am not convinced he gives the right answers. (I am similarly dubious about Michael Wreen's conclusions in a more purely philosophical treatment of these issues. See Wreen 1985.) While I certainly have not thought these thoughts all the way through—I fully acknowledge that I am not an expert on these burgeoning technologies—recalcitrant intuitions mean something, and they should be heeded.

[25] Ironically, on-site post-desecration reclamation work uncovered these fingermarks. See Petzet 2009a, p. 139.

[26] This scrambles the ontology of the Bamiyan Buddhas in a way that "simple restoration" does not.

[27] Both strategies, I believe, issue in "imposters" and employing either would be worse than leaving the niches empty. And my point applies generally—not just to Bamiyan, but to *any* desecrated site so reconstructed. Indeed, even if digital modelling satisfies, even marvelously satisfies, the "no conjecture" stricture in *OG* II.E, 86—does it?—the *means by which* an icon is reclaimed is crucial. Sagoff 1978 and Wreen 1985 raise these issues. So also does Zalewski 2016.

One might urge that digitally reconstructed (or even non-physical) "sculptures" would serve purposes *other than* authenticity. While we might imagine circumstances and considerations that could perhaps *override* considerations of authenticity—I take it that this, or something like it, is Erich Matthes's position; see, e.g., Matthes 2017—in my view these would have to be hugely and powerfully compelling in order to justify this overriding and the complete reimagining and wholesale reinvention of Bamiyan that would result.

contrast, integral restoration or anastylosis—which in this case has human beings adding freshly-made finger*prints* to their 1500-year-old counterpart finger*marks*—*does* stand to reconstitute an achievement.[28] (Dresden's Frauenkirche and Mostar's Old Bridge are models—hand-produced *physical* models—of largely successful restoration projects.) Anastylosis won't be problem-free (using solely original material would be preferable) but in my view it (and only it) promises to rightfully recreate Bamiyan's Buddhas. Restored sculptures will differ from those standing tall and proud in 2001, but they are the most appropriate response under the circumstances. And so if and when conservators do re-integrate the Buddhas—something that will require creativity, ingenuity, exertion, drive, grit and indeed all the other laudable mental states and character traits that issued in the sculptures originally—they will be shaking hands and merging wills across the millennia with their long gone but worthy and esteemed predecessors. Restored Buddhas will be a powerful achievement—maybe the *re-achievement* of a formerly powerful achievement?—and achieving them will be a powerfully fitting response, metaphysically and morally, to the horror in despoliation.

Close-up of Fingermarks, Original Clay Body, Eastern Buddha.
(© Bert Praxenthaler, 2008)

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[28] Carolyn Korsmeyer's work smartly foregrounds the import and significance of touch. See, e.g., Korsmeyer 2019. (See also a number of essays that led up to this book.) I am altogether sympathetic to Korsmeyer's suggestive thinking. I believe, as I think Korsmeyer does too, that fingers leave a special signature that is absent, necessarily, in the products of digital fabrication.

4   Postscript

I noted earlier that the meaning of and links between heritage conservation theory's traditional terms—and between them and my *achievement* and *despoliation*—need exacting analysis.[29] This careful conceptual work is crucial—both to foster understanding of Bamiyan's present and future, as I have tried to do here, and because, lamentably, it turns out that the March 2001 event was "the first large scale live-act of performative iconoclasm ... in the age of the internet." (Falser 2011, p. 157) Sadly, increasingly, iconic heritage, caught in the cross-fire, is deliberately and publically targeted. Sadly, increasingly, Bamiyan-style emptiness reverberates—and echoes. Sadly, increasingly, lessons learned in thinking carefully about the Buddhas have place in other places.

Iconoclasm despoils. Despoliation extinguishes value, leaving a void and inauthenticity in its wake. We can, I believe, be certain that Bamiyan now is *in*authentic without knowing exactly how, over time, we would come to receive and understand a re-achieved Bamiyan. And while the link between *re-achieved achievements* and authenticity too requires more investigation, an idea—even I daresay a "truth"?—implicit in much recent heritage conservation theory might usefully be made explicit here: Authenticity, being "poly-aspectual" and multi-perspectival, is not all-or-nothing; authenticity is not a toggle switch concept and hence not "on-off" like a light bulb. Instead, authenticity—like, say, "bald" or "warm"—is inherently vague and ineliminably a matter of degree. And consistent with the (fuzzy) logic of the concept, the world heritage community has rightly converged on the position—think Nara Document and many recent Charters—that authenticity is about much more than an artifact's material being (even if, as I have argued, it is also partly about that). Thus where authenticity is understood expansively, as it should be, restoration work, if thoughtfully pursued, will issue in results that are authentic, or certainly incomparably more authentic, than the inauthentic emptiness presently afflicting the despoiled site. A reclaimed Bamiyan will be well understood as a *re-achieved achievement*, and re-achieved achievements, rightly and proudly exemplifying reclaimed and resurgent value, are authentic achievements.

In 2002 Peter Levi, reflecting on his travels through Afghanistan and indeed to the Hindu Kush and the village of Bamiyan 33 years earlier, asked a suggestive question: "The Buddha was here to contemplate or to be contemplated?" (Margottini 2014, p. 41) Neither can happen now; both could happen again. May it be so.

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[29] The issues and questions in this essay run deep and I have not exhausted them. I intend to make further progress in this arena and I welcome thoughtful interlocutors.

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