

Heritage and Tourism

Places, Imageries and the Digital Age

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Amsterdam
University
Press

LHS



Cover illustration: Tourists visit the Begijnhof in Amsterdam, August 2017
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Cover design: Coördesign, Leiden
Typesetting: Crius Group, Hulshout

Amsterdam University Press English-language titles are distributed in the US and Canada by the University of Chicago Press.

ISBN 978 94 6298 535 3
e-ISBN 978 90 4853 644 3 (pdf)
DOI 10.5117/9789462985353
NUR 680 / 740

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Curating “Holoscapes” in Europe’s Age of Crisis

Rob van der Laarse

Egberts, Linde & Alvarez, Maria D. (eds), *Heritage and Tourism: Places, Imageries and the Digital Age*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018

DOI: 10.5117/9789462985353/CH02

Abstract

The notion of a European heritage has become one of the main pillars of the EU’s cultural policy. However, instead of the political wish for a European shared patrimony, Europe faces a highly conflicted past, which has become for many Europeans a contested heritage with strong repercussions for the backward-looking notion of European culture. For, there is no heritage without culture and no culture without conflict. One’s heritage also defines one’s identity, and the willingness of Europeans, and “Western” tourists more in general, to identify with deplorable and painful pasts makes Holocaust heritage tourism into a kind of healing experience. More than being a matter of shared values, the conservation of such painful pasts deals with their present uses. In other words, the meaning of heritage is produced by politics of memory and identity as much as by the performative experience of heritage tourists and other stakeholders with often conflicted interests and competing memories. This has resulted in many parts of Europe (and beyond) in what I would call urban “Holoscapes”, where visitors now walk in the footsteps of victims in a virtually re-enacted site without Jews.

Keywords: conflict, heritage, tourism, Holoscapes, Europe

A curator mouldering the concrete remnants of the ruins of the gas chambers and crematoriums of Auschwitz-Birkenau in his hand to show the material decay of Europe’s most horrible past, is taken as the opening scene

of Oeke Hoogendijk's documentary film *The Holocaust Experience* (2002). A single shot of the dust, blowing away like the ashes of the victims of the Nazi death camp in the past, shows in a nutshell the uselessness of the daily struggle of the Polish State Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau to preserve the most iconic remnants of the Holocaust. "Here everything should stay the same", as one of the masons remarks while restoring the concrete piles of the former German Nazi concentration camp, but we all know that it would not. Yet the same documentary presents another way to keep the memory of the Holocaust alive. For if Auschwitz should be frozen in time as Europe's main crime scene and primary evidence of the Holocaust, at the same time a thousand kilometres away in the Simon Wiesenthal Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, American visitors and school children experience Auschwitz in a *virtual* way. Re-enacting the atrocities of the past by means of reconstructions, this museum wants to let people experience the behaviour of mankind "when *we* arrive at our lowest form". Thus school children receive passport cards with shocking details about the terror and evil experienced by their peers in the past, the "Holocaust children". And, as a guide declares, "because Hitler had no use for *you*, you marched right into the death camps, you were gassed and you were burned up". After that "lesson" their march through the museum ends up in a replica gas chamber (Hoogendijk, 2002).

Passing through the iconic gate of Europe's heart of darkness – and the symbolic crossing of the still-existing mental border of the Iron Curtain – seems to have become a trend among Western-Europe's rich and famous, politicians, and more and more also among younger generations. This could be regarded as a success for Europe's global contribution to the development of Holocaust tourism. For as David Lowenthal observed, while Europeans may criticise the European Union's process of bureaucratic centralisation, "the commodified and touristic past plays a leading role in the continent's unification". And much that Europeans are willing to share is commonly defined as "heritage"; "the sense of an historic past embraced within the present – a past conserved, used, and exhibited on behalf of our collectives selves – is quintessentially European". But "what's most quintessentially European are not traits in which Europeans take *pride*, but rather attributes generally felt *deplorable*, even shameful" (Lowenthal, 2005, p. 34-5). Therefore, in contrast to the American Holocaust experience, the real Auschwitz might for many Europeans even be *too* overwhelming to experience. Rather than being confronted with the horrors of the gas chambers they seem to prefer a touristic sightseeing at the "authentic" place, without too much shocking details. But the difference between visiting an American museum and a European terrorscape goes beyond that.

In addition to such a touristic consumption of Europe's past, I would add that far from being a *shared* patrimony, it is for Europeans basically a *contested* patrimony of a conflicted past that is represented at such sites. For, there is no heritage without culture and no culture without conflict. One's heritage also defines one's identity, and the willingness of Europeans, and "Western" tourists more in general, to identify with deplorable and painful pasts makes Holocaust heritage tourism into a kind of healing experience. The shame that Holocaust tourists felt seems closely related to a fascination with "dark" destinations which even for visitors of the second post-war generation still seem to take some courage to enter (Cf. Lennon & Foley, 2000). More than being a matter of shared values, the conservation of such painful pasts deals with their present uses. In other words, the meaning of heritage is produced by politics of memory and identity as much as by the performative experience of heritage tourists and other stakeholders with often conflicted interests and competing memories. This has resulted in many parts of Europe (and beyond) in what I would call urban "Holoscapes", where visitors now walk in the footsteps of victims.

Re-enacting a land without Jews

A United Europe from the ashes of Auschwitz (Sadée, 2010)? A new 1,000-Euro note, with a generic concentration camp gate framed by barbed wire on the front, or an abstract image of the ruined bridge of Mostar on the back? The idea seems perverse, if not obscene. After all, the dynamic, transnational space of the EU seems solidly rooted in the peaceful attraction of a common market and a cultural idea that proclaims uniquely "European" values of humanism, democracy and citizenship. Yet, the case can be made that the wars and mass terror which characterised much of the twentieth century – described as "Age of Extremes" (Eric Hobsbawm) and "a Century of Camps" (Zygmunt Bauman) – were the defining experiences that encouraged the current European process of integration (Cf. Hobsbawm, 1995; Bauman, 1995; Mazower, 1999; Judt, 2005). If before 1989 the memorialisation of the First and Second World Wars followed national and often nationalist lines (van Vree & van der Laarse, 2005; Mazzucchelli, van der Laarse & Reijnen, 2014), with the destruction of the Iron Curtain, the wars in former Yugoslavia, the expansion and consolidation of the European Union, and what may be called a Holocaust memory boom (Winter, 2006, pp. 286-9; Hoskins & O'Loughlin, 2010, pp. 98-9, 104-19; Lennon & Foley, 2000). Auschwitz and other sites related to the Holocaust or to other aspects

of Nazi terror have become critically important icons of modern European identity.

Thus, in the 1970s the death camp at Auschwitz was still a site of remembrance for Polish communists, dedicated to mass manifestations honouring the antifascist resistance and the victims of Nazism, without specific reference to the *Jewish* victims of Auschwitz II or Auschwitz-Birkenau. In fact Auschwitz I, the *Stammlager*, was until 2000 the only site open to visitors, and its display of hundreds of victim photos shot by Nazi photographers included no Jews, only Poles. Still today, for many Poles the “essential” Auschwitz is not the iconic Jewish death camp Birkenau, visited mainly by foreign tourists and Israeli survivor families, but this “Catholic” martyr site. The iconic Auschwitz victim is not Anne Frank or any other Jewish prisoner or survivor, such as Primo Levi (whose ruined and forgotten hospital barrack from Auschwitz III Monowitz was transformed into a farm shed before it was demolished some years ago (Kearns, 2014)), but the “Catholic martyr” Father Kolbe, for whom candles burn in front of his former prison cell. Opposing the communist “texture” of the site, Father Kolbe was canonised as a saint in 1982 by the Polish Pope John Paul II, whose visit in 1978 to Auschwitz was a direct reaction to the listing of the Auschwitz State Museum as a UNESCO World Heritage site in that same year. If the Pope’s visit supported the Solidarnosc anti-communist liberation movement at that time, it also provoked, years later, a long “battle of the crosses” with the international Jewish community: a memory war over the identity of Auschwitz. Was it a shrine for Jews all over the world or only for Polish Catholics (Dwork & van Pelt, 2002, p. 354-78; Zubrzycki, 2006)?

A compromise was reached that took the form of a spatial separation of the two streams of tourists. “Polish” Auschwitz I and “Jewish” Auschwitz II or Birkenau each has its own guides, supervising board, and gates, but they are often confused by tourists who cannot believe that Jews never entered the former’s iconic gate with the cynical slogan “Arbeit macht frei”. What I hope to make clear is that many of the elements of heritage tourism are, so to speak, put on trial at Europe’s most iconic, and contested, World Heritage site. This should serve as a reminder that, in contrast to what most of us would like to think, (material) authenticity and (heritage) tourism by no means automatically go together. What tourists visit and consume is mostly “staged”, just like our historical parks, medieval castles and monumental city centres.

But the kind of “dark tourism experience” of some of the Auschwitz’s visitors mentioned above, represents only one side of the Holocaust

Figure 2.1 Visitors at Auschwitz II-Birkenau

Photo by Diego Delsa

memory boom, the other side of which may be defined as Jewish roots travel: a touristic homecoming of mostly non-European Jewish visitors to “Jewish heritage sites” in formerly Eastern-European Jewish towns and “ghettos”. For many people, the discovery of their Jewishness by listening to Klezmer music and identifying with Yiddish culture has not only created a dynamic counter-memory to Auschwitz-Birkenau; it can also be regarded as a healing activity compensating for collective feelings of guilt and trauma. Therefore not only Auschwitz-Birkenau and other Nazi-German extermination camps preserved in occupied Poland, but also Jewish heritage sites in Poland have changed remarkably because of appropriations by heritage groups, such as the Canadian Ronald S. Lauder Foundation’s restoration of parts of the old Warsaw ghetto. The Lauder Foundation also initiated the so-called Morasha schools for e-Learning which aim “to create a sense of belonging to Jewish children from each and every town in Poland” and to help them understand “their Jewish heritage and [shape] their Jewish identity (Lauder Foundation, n.d.; Meng, 2011). The same project is also being extended to Germany and the Czech Republic, while Yad Vashem and American Holocaust travel organisations have developed comparable projects to enable younger generations to attach roots in and identity with former Jewish places in Poland where at

Figure 2.2 Tourist facilities in Jewish-Kazimierz



Photo by the author

present only some material traces recall the communities destroyed by the Holocaust.

Yet, though especially in the countryside many Polish people are still prejudiced against Jews and “other” foreigners (as has been shown during the present refugee crisis and the recent elections, in which the nationalists received more than 50% of the vote), in addition to Western tourists one can also witness a remarkable identification with the Jewish past occurring among a younger generation of Poles in cities like Warsaw, Krakow and Lublin. There the historic centres are being transformed into well-preserved historical districts as Soviet sobriety gives ways to trendy gentrification. Consider the case of Krakow, with its impressive, large Renaissance square and the nearby salt mines, both, like Auschwitz, listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Already during the communist era the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee restored the Great Synagogue and the Jewish graveyard, which in the 1990s came to function as the natural location of a fast-growing number of Jewish bookshops, trendy galleries, and restaurants, as well as new heritage sites such as the Galicia Museum and Schindler Museum in the original factory which plays a key role in Steven Spielberg’s

Figure 2.3 A group of tourists posing in front of the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes in the former Jewish Ghetto of Warsaw in 2005



Photo by Tevon Alexander

movie *Schindler's List* and even offers a re-enactment with staged walls and streets of the nearby Podgory ghetto. To be sure, Krakow-Kazimierz is not only a product of the tourist, heritage, and media industries; it is also the result of a long process of restoration which attracted students and artists (soon to become yuppies) to a gentrifying city that has successfully reappeared on the map of European memory as a “city of collective memory” (Boyer, 1996).

Yet, as a result, Poland’s “forgotten” heritage of its erased Jewish past is now marketed as a “Jewish Revival” in the wake of Yael Bartana’s and Slawomir Sierakowski’s hilarious, and critical, Israeli-Polish art project called the “*Jewish Renaissance movement in Poland*”, which at its first JRMiP Conference in Berlin (!) formulated its programme in terms of three key questions:

- 1 How should the EU change in order to welcome the Other?
- 2 How should Poland change within a reimagined EU?
- 3 How should Israel change to become part of the Middle East (JRMiP, n.d.; Cembalest, 2013; Zubrzycki, 2013)?

Thus, historical cities in former Nazi-occupied Poland have become attractive destinations for cultural investors and Jewish “roots tourists”, combining the “hot” message of “Auschwitz – never again!” (as sold by Krakow tour operators) with the “soft” heritage of a revived Polish-Jewish past. Paradoxically, this Jewish revival in Krakow is strongly influenced by its nearness to Auschwitz, which makes it possible for tourists to “consume” the city by framing the past from a Holocaust perspective. Similarly, Lublin is restoring part of its destroyed Jewish ghetto, once situated in the city centre (now a parking place), as a counterpoint to the Majdanek concentration camp just outside the city, which just like Auschwitz is becoming more Polish by a lowering of the stated number of Jewish victims and the exhibition of “Polish” barracks on the site next to the gas chamber (Rezka, 2005; Majdanek, 2007).

Yet the logic involved in combining heritage, tourism, and identity is far from straightforward. Attracting tourists is hard work. The “selling” of hospitality is much easier in some locations than in others, since place-bound factors, such as their cultural biography, cannot be changed haphazardly, and as such need to be carefully linked to the grand narratives of nation-building, European civilisation, or the Holocaust. Thus, in its attempt to compete with Krakow by creating a Jewish-themed tour of its erased Jewish past, Oświęcim (the Polish name of the town of Auschwitz), seems not to be having much success, even though it actually was a Jewish shtetl before the War, most of all because of the “hot” message of the Auschwitz concentration camp. Tourists visiting the site find it difficult to believe that people are actually living in Auschwitz, let alone to book a hotel in a Polish town framed by them (in sharp contrast to its inhabitants) as the iconic Nazi-German extermination camp (compare: Citroen & Starzynska, 2011)!

In fact, while we know a lot about visitor behaviour at heritage sites and in museums, we do not yet know much about why they feel at home in one place and not in another. We do know, as Dean MacCannell remarked, that “tourism is agency” (MacCannell, 2001). It transforms whole land- and cityscapes into heritages- or memoryscapes (Cf. Garden, 2006). And this kind of post-Holocaust memory tourism is not restricted to Poland; such Holoscapes can be found today throughout former Nazi-occupied Europe. Tourists may not only take a Jewish-themed tour in “Jewish Krakow” or “Jewish Warsaw”; they may also experience “Jewish Ghosts” in Western Europe, such as in “Jewish Amsterdam” (Fein, n.d.).

Framing a city without Jews

One should not underestimate the power of a tourist guide or travelogue when it comes to mapping local highlights in an unknown environment where people speak languages incomprehensible to most tourists, like Polish or Dutch. The formula underlying these guides goes back to the seventeenth-century Grand Tour and eighteenth-century interest in picturesque travel, and it assumes tourists will do their own “place-making” by the act of walking. Each walk takes him or her for a half-day trip along a carefully designed route formed by a series of spots or stops like museums, squares, parks, boulevards, some “exotic” Gothic streets, and, of course, a good café. For example, the Anglo-American *Cadogan* Guide offers an Amsterdam experience through “six entertaining easy-to-follow walks”, such as a route through the medieval Dam and Red Light District (“Central Amsterdam”, one along the Canals (“Essential Amsterdam”), and another to the Museum Quarter, Leidseplein, and the “Diamonds” district. In Amsterdam the diamond industry already has a Jewish connotation, at least for the locals, but for us the most relevant itinerary is Walk 3: “Jewish Amsterdam and Jordaan”. By far the longest walk in the *Cadogan* Guide, it starts at Artis, the Zoo, and takes us along the Trade Union Museum in the Henri Polak Lane (named after a famous Jewish socialist leader) to the Noordermarkt. In fact, this route is extremely well conceived, because on it the visitor can take in a very varied cityscape while walking for several kilometres from the Jodenbreestraat, the former main street (Broadway) of the old Jewish quarter in the east end of the old city centre (where one can also visit the seventeenth-century Rembrandt Huis and the Jewish De Pinto House), to the so-called Jordaan quarter at the periphery of the Canal ring.

This excellent choice of a route through “Jewish Amsterdam” is eye-opening even for residents. What is displayed as spatial heritage or Holscape is, after all, a new branding of the past (van der Laarse, 2005), because after the post-war renovation of the city centre, the construction of the metro line and the building of the combined Opera and Town hall building (the so-called Stopera) almost nothing of the old Jewish quarter with its famous Flee market island (Waterloo square) survived, even though the old names still appear in every tourist guide. Although the *Cadogan* Guide correctly notes that the name Jordaan might be derived from the French word *jardin* (garden), one may wonder why this historically non-Jewish area is part of a Jewish-themed tour. Perhaps it is because of the nearness of this area to the Anne Frank House Museum, which is the only Jewish heritage site outside the so-called “Jewish cultural quarter” around the

Figure 2.4 Jodenbreestraat in 2017

Photo by Bert Brouwenstijn

Jewish Historical Museum in the idiom of Amsterdam City Marketing. In any case, walking into the Jordaan after having visited the place where Anne Frank lived in hiding might reinforce the Jewish associations of the earlier sites. For although this seventeenth-century Amsterdam working-class neighbourhood with its small streets, shops, and pubs is considered to be the quintessentially “folkish” part of Amsterdam, the so-called “Mokum” (the Yiddish word for place, in Hebrew “makum”) also bears a much closer resemblance to the stereotypical notion of a historical Jewish quarter than does the windy, modernist Jodenbreestreet.

By using such an ambiguous toponymic symbol as “Jewish quarter”, however, the guide might give tourists the false impression that Amsterdam had a ghetto, whereas in fact the Jewish middle class lived mostly in the modern, southern part of the city, including well-to-do German refugees like the Frank family (Merwedeplein). (The Anne Frank House was not their residence, but rather Otto Frank’s business office). Yet even sceptics must admit that this walk connects most of the Jewish museums, heritage sites, and other traces of the lost Amsterdam Jewish community, from the Hollandsche Schouwburg near the Zoo – during the war the place from which Jews were deported and which since the 1990s has been transformed into a Shoah memorial museum (van Vree, Berg & Duindam, 2013) – to the immense seventeenth-century

Sephardic Portuguese (Esnoga) Synagogue and the neighbouring Ashkenazi (High-German) Synagogue, the latter of which now houses the Jewish Historical Museum (Amsterdam Walking Tour, n.d.; Joods Historisch Museum, n.d.).

Already in the nineteenth century the Scottish Highlands were “branded” by the hijacking of Sir Walter Scott’s romances (Rigney, 2005). In the same way, people like Rodney Bolt, the author of the *Cadagon Guide* (2004), have successfully constructed, decades after the destruction of the Jewish community of Amsterdam, a new touristic “Jewish Amsterdam”. This shows the power of what Ruth Ellen Gruber calls “virtual Jewishness”. Indeed, this phenomenon of the virtual creation of complete Jewish-Yiddish quarters in Europe’s “cities without Jews” is strong enough to revive the lost Jewish identity and appearance of completely transformed cityscapes where the unbroken continuity of Jewish life has been almost non-existent (Gruber, 2002).

Tourism has been described as “the export that doesn’t go anywhere”; for the only product taken home are memories (Prentice, 2001). Yet, if heritage is regarded as “a mode of cultural production”, as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (the New York curator of the Warsaw Jewish museum Polin) has asserted (1998, p. 7), its production could be defined as much more than simply a photo album. Heritage and tourism have fused into a new mode of production in which high culture, or trained knowledge, has given way to the marketing of experiences. In fact, heritage tourism might even claim to be the pioneering sector of the modern “experience economy” as conceptualised by Pine & Gilmore (1999; Metz & Brinkman, 2002). For the dynamic of heritage tourism continuously converts new locations into destinations – spatial sites as well as virtual places like websites – promoting an endless consumption of places (Urry, 2002; Ashworth, 2005). In contrast to traditional notions of sites, which assume that they possess intrinsic historical values, in heritage tourism historical authenticity seems less relevant than staged authenticity. This is the case for several reasons:

- Tourists consume places as a leisure activity;
- They expect to visit the real thing, the original, but for the most part that is not what they get, and;
- Finally, heritage tourists are seeking in the past not a foreign country, but their own identity.

Far from being passive consumers, heritage tourists are thus active appropriators by performing the role of visitors searching for clues, stories, and traces to give meaning to a past that is framed, mapped, and visited as “heritage”. In other words, this activity is not really about the past as history,

but about a past that can be visited: a “memorial space to be experienced by walking”. We consume their history by “reading time in space” (Cf. Schlögel, 2003) with the help of markers, that is to say, of signs like images or names referring to cultural heroes or past events, known from history books, novels, and movies. Yet, as Gregory Ashworth observed, heritage managers often forget that there is a fundamental difference in place consumption between local residents and national and foreign tourists, and that “you can never sell your heritage to visitors, only their heritage back to them in your locality” (Ashworth, 1998, p. 282). For this commodified past is brand-new instead of age-old, and “othered” only to become mastered and domesticated by visitors as their own. This “tourist-resident dialectic” affects also the many other battles about contested pasts we discussed before. For what tourists like to visit in “Europe of the cities” is not the heritage of residents, but Classicist, Golden Age, or Fin-de-Siècle highlights, or, in contrast, the Holocaust or postcolonial markers generally associated with Europe’s shameful past. This is in particular true for a second post-war Western generation, grown up in a moral climate of historical injustice and “the guilt of nations” (Cf. Barkan, 2000).

In sum, tourists will feel welcome in destinations that offer them an unambiguous touristic biography of a place, which, however, is not the same as the complex history of historians, and which covers stories they can identify with. What tourists are seeking is already biased and framed. Like most of us, they would rather walk along the beaten track, internalising their impressions as an embodied, personal experience (Cf. MacCannell, 1976; Löfgren; 1999; Lippard, 1999). For the growing number of urban Holoscapes and other camp- and terruscapes where traces of the twentieth-century world wars and mass atrocities are being staged as tourist experiences, it means that visitors are being expected to identify with victims without being disturbed by the historical complexity of victims, such as communists or “collaborating” ethnic minorities, being framed as perpetrators, or “terrorists”, in the eyes of others.

The delocalisation of Anne Frank

The Holocaust is of course the “hottest” story one can consume, even after Srebrenica, Rwanda, and the many other more recent massacres. Yet, many tourists don’t want to be directly confronted with this darkest side of Europe’s twentieth-century history. Rather than listening to the thousands of witness stories in The Spielberg Archive, they prefer to identify with a single

victim, a young girl framed not in the surrounding of a death camp, where she actually experienced her death (after Auschwitz in Bergen-Belsen), but in a decent canal house that was once her hiding place. Anne Frank has indeed become the ultimate symbol of the Holocaust memory boom, and in contrast to most Dutch people, including Amsterdam's Jewish community, many American teenagers identify with her diary, *Het Achterhuis* (1947). Anne Frank's status as a Holocaust icon, if not idol, is due to the English and American edition entitled *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* (1952). It was the recipient of considerable media attention already in the 1950s thanks to a Broadway play and George Stevens's award-winning film *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1959), which initiated what Tim Cole named "the selling of the holocaust" (Cole, 1999). Since then, Anne's diary has been translated into more than fifty languages, enjoying higher sales than even the Bible, the Koran, and Harry Potter, and has been commodified as a universal story of victimhood. This "Americanisation" or, more in general, "globalisation of the Holocaust" (Cf. Flanzbaum, 1999; Novick, 2000; Levy & Sznajder, 2001), might also explain why the small Amsterdam Anne Frank House Museum attracts more than one million visitors annually – almost as many as come to the entire campscape of Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Thanks to this American appropriation, Otto Frank received permission from the city government to rescue his commercial building from demolition and restore the annex or back house as a museum of hiding (Cf. van der Lans & Vuijsje, 2010, p. 93-130; van der Laarse, 2010b; Somers, 2014). In the *Cadogan Guide*, as we saw, the Anne Frank House Museum functions as the link between Jewish Amsterdam and the Jordaan. In contrast to the Auschwitz State Museum, located in Europe's largest formerly Nazi terrorscape, at its opening in 1960 the Amsterdam museum, located at Prinsengracht 263, barely possessed a collection, since most of the objects used by the family during the war were stolen by the Nazis. And it is by virtue of its emptiness that the museum still offers an emotional experience of authenticity. Interestingly, this musealisation of loss conveyed by absence was explicitly intended by Anne's father Otto Frank, the only one of his family to survive, who after the restoration of the house remarked: "During the war everything was looted, and this is how I will keep it" (Lee, Westerveld & Stoks, 2002, p. 290).

The Anne Frank House thus became one of the first European Holocaust memorial museums, even though the museum is strictly speaking neither a place of remembrance nor an exhibition space such as Yad Vashem or the later USHMM. Yet the Anne Frank Museum functions as what Patrizia Violi calls a "trauma site museum", for it is the indexical relation with the

Figure 2.5 Rooms at the Anne Frank House

Courtesy of Anne Frank Stichting; photo by Cris Toala Olivares

historical site, the place of Anne's hiding, which visitors want to experience (Violi, 2012; Violi, 2014). In staging emptiness, the Anne Frank Museum invented a new script for presenting, representing, and performing the void of the Holocaust, one that has since been cited and transformed in hundreds of places.

Absence, moreover, has become a practical necessity, since each addition of objects or photos on display would lengthen the visitor's stay, resulting in an unacceptably long waiting line outside the entrance. Even though the Anne Frank House has not become a real memorial site – such as the *Hollandsche Schouwburg* (unknown to most foreigners) – this small local memorial museum transformed into one of the Netherlands' most successful tourist destinations, has also become almost the leading international Holocaust memorial site for Israeli and Jewish-Americans anchoring their identity as *roots tourists*, in a way which brings to mind the many African-Americans who visit the slave fortresses of Ghana.

With the universalisation of Anne's story, tourists from other parts of the world who have no relation to the Holocaust also come to visit the home of their idol. Among them are many Asians who combine their visit with one to the Van Gogh Museum. (Van Gogh, too, is popular in Japan). And to reach those who do not come to the museum, the museum itself travels to

Figure 2.6 Tourists are lining up to visit the Anne Frankhuis in Amsterdam in 2017



Photo by Linde Egberts

sell Anne's story to the world. In 2009, the Anne Frank Museum founded a branch in Buenos Aires. The building's interior is an exact copy of the Amsterdam house museum, with an Anne Frank itinerary which ends with a short video clip about freedom and tolerance (*Free2choose*). Remarkably, the museum script of this Centro Ana Frank Argentina is also oriented to an experience of authenticity. On the one hand, the museum is located in the house turned museum of a family whose members went into hiding during the 1970s dictatorship of Videla, while, on the other, it seeks to offer a complete Anne Frank "experience". Visitors enter a carefully recreated Amsterdam interior which even has a replica of the iconic secret bookcase hiding the door to the annex. And it provides a view of an Amsterdam canal when one gazes out the window, while in the garden a branch grows on the authentic "Anne Frank tree" (Centro Ana Frank Argentina, n.d.).

Holocaust memory sites are places where universal values are communicated to visitors, lessons are drawn from history, and identity politics is performed. When conceived in terms of the heritage paradigm, however, such memorial sites are also a way of packaging the past as a heritage experience by means of certain markers (Prentice, 2001; Ashworth, 2005). Sites are crucial because they produce an identification with the past by means of an "authentic experience". Yet, what museums and heritage sites

do is to move objects from one context to another (van Mensch, 2001); and in the same way whole town- and landscapes can be decontextualised and transformed by politics of musealisation into “heritagescapes” (Kolen, van Krieken & Wijdeveld, 2009). The authenticity of a heritage experience is in that sense strongly related to the power of signification; for objects only have meanings for specific visitors in specific contexts.

This is why the famous Dutch historian Johan Huizinga might have experienced a “historic sensation” by touching an original letter of a famous ancestor (Ankersmit, 2005), whereas for others than historians such a heritage experience could easily be created by “staged authenticity” (MacCannell, 1976; MacCannell, 2011, pp. 13-40). This works even thousands of kilometres away from the original site, by means of “prosthetic memory” tools such as in the case of an almost perfect replica of the iconic bookcase of the Amsterdam “Achterhuis” at the Centro Ana Frank Argentina (Landsberg, 2004). It confronts us with an awkward paradox. By definition heritage carries the suggestion of authenticity, the sensation of the original object, but what we find at tourist destinations are often some banal objects transformed, or marketed, as heritage because of our expectations.

Yet, on the other, heritage is seldom rescued and restored for only commercial reasons, and the idea that museums or monuments, or even the cultural sciences, may survive by the “windfall gain” of commodification – described as “valorisation” in today’s EU bureaucratic language of politicians and managers – completely underestimates the notion of trust; trust between producers and consumers, which is just as fundamental in the world of banking, or in the fabrication of motor cars, as in the world of art and culture. People might believe in myths, but only as long as they *believe* them to be true, or at least convincing, which of course doesn’t say anything about their veracity.

In addition to a loss of trust in truth and authenticity, as defined by authorised heritage discourses (Smith, 2006, pp. 29-34), there is another risk of people losing confidence in heritage sites. For how *do* we want to keep heritage alive: as a place of contemplation or as a touristic experience? The preservation of memory always requires selection and forgetting. What we do at our heritage sites is “remembering to forget”, to quote the Italian historian Portelli, for every memory excludes another (Portelli, 2007). This is why heritage is not simply a collection of things with intrinsic values. Heritage is not history, and in contrast to what one may think, it offers no guarantee of preservation. Moreover, the destinations of heritage tourism do not show the past as it *really* was, but as we would like it to be remembered, as a cleansed, purified past free from dissonances. Nevertheless,

heritage is always full of dissonances; it encompasses not only the rescued and saved, but also the contested, and nothing is as intensely conflicted as the heritage of war and the Holocaust. Most of the sites involved may have been completely forgotten before their preservation, but after having been rescued from silence and decay they often become transformed from orphaned spaces without owners into the heritage of many owners.

Thus the heritage of one owner is seldom that of another. In the first place, according to the logic of musealisation we may say that when a site becomes more important, its iconic status calls forth more interventions, and thus more threats to its authenticity. Secondly, the musealisation of objects and places always presupposes a dynamic process of appropriation. Sites often seek to promote identification by means of name-giving, as in the case of a burned Westerbork barrack, used as a farm shed, which became known in the international press as the so-called “Anne Frank barrack”. After realising the symbolic weight of that association the Dutch parliament voted immediately for a resolution “to return” the original barracks back to Westerbork as an orphaned heritage of the Holocaust, even though most of them had been sold to farmers in the late 1960s as “Moluccan” barracks (van Ooijen & Raaijmakers, 2012; van der Laarse, 2013b). For what was demolished then was known as the Moluccan camp Schattenberg, where migrant families from the former East-Indies were housed since 1950. Yet decades after their move to “normal” Dutch villages, and after the transformation of the open area into memorial camp Westerbork, the “Jewish” barracks have now returned as ghosts from the past in collective memory. Therefore, in the third place, such icons are often misleading; they may lead to misinterpretations, unexpected associations, and changes of meaning, as we saw in the case of the Amsterdam Jewish quarter. And when dealing with the past threatens to become painful and anxiety-provoking, remnants and traces have often been erased to wipe out traumatic memories. From the artefacts and places which are still extant only the most iconic ones are developed into tourist destinations. And once subjected to the tourist’s gaze, they will tend more and more to look like each other, “transnationalised” as European heritage sites and squeezed into the same, recognisable formats. Thus, Auschwitz and the Anne Frank House are competing for heritage tourists with the Jewish Memorial in Berlin, and possibly with Verdun, Normandy and Stalingrad, as well.

Finally, heritage is more than a Kantian *Ding an sich*, preserved and displayed in splendid isolation – authorised by agents of memory it produces meaning, changes the way space and things are experienced, and transforms locations into destinations. Heritage offers an experience of the

past as an act of identification with earlier generations, whether these be heroes or victims. And this transformative power has huge consequences for the “performance of the past”. For heritage sites are not simply historical places where something happened, but places where things happen now, to us and to these very places (Cf. van der Laarse, 2015). Thus heritage is at one and the same time about loss and appropriation. The process will never end, as the musealisation of absence will be followed by experiencing staged authenticity by means of material traces as well as virtual reconstructions – hence the growing interest in heritage centres for authentic objects and the rise of the memorial museum (Williams, 2007). This phenomenon is not necessarily related to the traditional fetish of authenticity, but much more to a rethinking of the means of storytelling employed in heritage tourism after the “postmemorial archival turn” (Hirsch, 2012, pp. 227-50), as major symbolic objects and monuments give way to personal items and photos. These postmemory installations may add a new layer of signification to older experiential designs, such as the piles of hair, shoes, and glasses at Auschwitz or Majdanek, or to the emphasis on absence, as at the Anne Frank House. Such a staging of the past is, however, not restricted to the display of authentic objects; it also includes the offering of smart combinations of staging and “backstaging” of experiences through monumental redesigns as well as by literally looking behind the scenery (Goffmann, 1959).

To conclude

What we are witnessing today at many Holocaust memorial sites is the vanished world of Daniel Mendelsohn’s documentary novel *The Lost. A Search for Six of Six Million* (2007). It recounts the vain quest that a Jewish classicist from Princeton undertakes, along with his brother and sister, to find relatives in former Polish Galicia, now in the Ukraine. It led him to conclude that “the stories don’t fit into reality anymore” (Zeeman, 2007; van der Laarse, 2013a, pp. 50-2). What this means to us is that heritage should not be seen as a collection of authentic relics with intrinsic values for local or national communities. Our heritage has become at once global and local. The traces might be still there, but the objects have become displaced and are often more meaningful to others than to ourselves, including the many refugees from beyond Europe who are nowadays being driven into diaspora again. By appropriating the orphaned objects of others, we are reviving them with new meanings; they now signify something different than for their former owners. And in doing so we may search for a past that no longer

exists anywhere, and change places into something which they might have never been (van der Laarse, 2010a). Or, in contrast, we might be confronted with a “present past” (Huyssen, 2003) that is too dark and difficult even to be packaged as a heritage-tourism site, and yet, we try.

It is this combination of alienation and the marketing of trauma that is questioned in Boris Pahor’s *Necropolis* (2011). When decades after the war the Slovenian author visits together with a group of tourists, the former *Konzentrationslager* Natzweiler where he was imprisoned in 1944, “everything is still the same, except for the guards on the watchtowers”. Yet his memory isolates him from the group of tourists with their guide, whom he can’t manage to avoid. Even the image of the restored barracks of the French wooden monument was unbearable to him. “It was as if someone implanted fresh, living cells in rotting meat”. As for Pahor, one could only experience a slave labour camp at a day plagued by torrential rains and wind gusts. Yet, “the summer sun burns, and pebbles are crunching under my shoes, what evokes in me the image of a Sunday in the park. This is the image to which I oppose, because I can’t accept that visitors will try to imagine the camp in such a pleasantly warm, peaceful dreamy atmosphere” (Pahor, 2011, p. 19, 42, 48).

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