

ETHICAL SPACES: ETHICS AND PROPRIETY IN TRAUMA TOURISM

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In downtown Montevideo, Uruguay, the Punta Carretas Shopping Centre is built into the shell of a former prison. Although it is common knowledge that the prison operated as a clandestine torture centre, no commemorative plaque or any other information about the building's history is available to visitors nor has anything been done to suppress the historical function of the building as a prison. Rather, in true postmodern style, the unusual architectural features are showcased and combined in aesthetically interesting ways with the newer mall construction (Fig. 1). Iron gates have been left in place in what appear to be original prison hallways that now connect the mall to the parking lot, and it's hard to tell whether the razor wire on the parapets is intended to keep prisoners in or thieves out.

When I say 'common knowledge' I mean that almost anyone I asked casually about where to find the shopping mall that used to be a prison knew what I meant and was able to give me directions. For tourists, information about the building's history can also be found online in travel blogs and through tourist websites though it is not mentioned in the print version of the *Lonely Planet* guide to Uruguay. But for most at the mall—there to meet friends, eat ice cream or shop—the building's appalling history is irrelevant.

The only reference to the prison's history that I was able to find was in one of the mall's bookstores where many copies of a book called *La Fuga de Punta Carretas* (*Escape from Punta Carretas*) were prominently displayed (Fernández Huidobro 1991). This sensational documentary novel chronicles the 1971 prison break of over a hundred Tupamaru guerrillas.

In contrast, the Montevideo Museo de la Memoria ('museum of memory') is built in a mansion that has no site-specific history related to the violations of the dictatorship in Uruguay from 1973 to 1985. The building is the former home of General Maximo Santos. It was built in 1878 and restored between



FIG. 1. Punta Carretas Shopping Centre in Montevideo, Uruguay. Photograph courtesy of Clark Peterson.

2000 and 2005 as part of the kind of preservation effort that is generally aligned with state power rather than with a critique thereof.¹ It was simply a building, and not even a particularly convenient one, that was within the jurisdiction of the municipality when it was agreed upon that a museum should be designated. Within this opulent architecture, the basement has been repurposed by video artist Hector Solari for a video installation that evokes (rather than represents) a torture centre.

Why shouldn't a torture centre become a shopping mall? What is it about this use that rubs us the wrong way? Why do we find it troubling that the Peace Park at Nagasaki is used by skateboarders as a terrain park or that children like to hop from stele to stele or play hide and seek at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin or that picnickers and romantic couples outnumber 'penitents' at Parque de la Memoria ('memory park') in Buenos Aires? Why do we expect congruence between a site's history and its subsequent function? What are the limits of what is an allowable use for the site of an atrocity? Are there certain spaces that are *so* violated that they should be

preserved as memorials for all of futurity? Which spaces and what violations would merit this designation and what lesser violations would we permit to have their sites re-functioned? Why do certain uses of spaces seem wrong? And when they seem wrong, does that mean that they violate our sense of propriety or our sense of ethics?

Ethics asks us to develop a sense of right and wrong by following specific principles. Ethics is a science of human conduct which articulates the rules that follow from our moral obligations. It is concerned with respect for ourselves as human beings as well as with the rights of others. By definition, ethics makes its demands on *all* humans.² Ethics makes claims about what is best for a society as a whole and tries to articulate these values in ways that can be adjudicated. This may be through the legal system, through authorities within a profession or through the allocation of resources and property.

In writing this essay, I found it useful to differentiate ethics from propriety, not because such a distinction is hard and fast but because it enables us to draw attention to more facets of this complex set of social practices. Propriety refers to 'conformity to established standards of good or proper behavior or manners' and 'appropriateness or suitability to the purpose or circumstances'.³ I want to suggest that it is our sense of ethics that applies when we consider the more or less permanent uses of trauma sites (the civic designations, landscape design and architectural modifications that we do or do not allow to happen at a site) while it is our sense of propriety that comes into play when we consider what we might allow to take place within the already designated and designed trauma sites. It may be unethical for us to fail to mark the site of a former torture centre, but once we have built a shopping centre it is not inappropriate for teenagers to giggle there, although comparable behaviour would be constrained at a designated memorial. I am not asserting my opinion here about whether it is necessarily ethical or unethical to use spaces in particular ways. Rather, I mean to propose that our societal decisions to do so is a matter of ethics, that how we use land and architecture demonstrates something about the belief systems of our various societies, whereas the ways in which we regulate behaviours at these spaces is a matter of etiquette (propriety).

Propriety manifests itself as a concern at many established trauma sites. In some places, actual guidelines are posted. For example, at Choeung Ek (better known as the Killing Fields) in Cambodia, visitors are asked to 'dress suitably', 'keep quiet', remove hats and shoes and 'meditate before the boned monument'. Visitors are prohibited from opening the monument's doors, carrying weapons

or using drugs. In Berlin, rules are posted at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe that (in addition to providing safety precautions about the slope of the monument) prohibit dogs, music, running, skateboarding, rollerblading, barbecuing, drinking alcoholic beverages, smoking and climbing or jumping from stele to stele.

What we have here is a mix of rules so universal that it is surprising they need to be specified (no weapons or drug use), rules that seem to respond to specific past infractions (don't open the door, don't climb the stele), rules that try to teach local cultural practices (take off your shoes) and rules that are aimed at producing an *appropriately* sombre environment (don't laugh, run, play, etc.). There is hardly a consensus about the posting of such rules. For example, architect Peter Eisenman, who designed the Berlin memorial, actually objected to the posting of behaviour guidelines, arguing that quotidian use of the monument is a productive way to engage with history (Sion 2009).

Regulation of behaviour is often less explicit than in the aforementioned cases; it is accomplished through architecture, example or interaction. Buildings and spaces are designed in ways that communicate norms of behaviour. Carol Duncan and Allan Wallach (1980) have written about how buildings like museums and libraries put spectators in their place by scale and structure. Memorials use similar strategies to similar ends, suggesting, through monumental architecture and strategic design, that we move at a decorous pace or speak in hushed voices. Architectural devices are used to subtly or blatantly control the flow of traffic, to mark an artefact as significant or exclude a feature of the landscape from the 'text' of a site. Trauma sites may provide barriers to keep visitors from engaging directly with artefacts, like the plexiglass that protects Anne Frank's collection of photographs.

Trauma sites also tell us how to behave by invoking other spaces for which behavioural norms are established. The most widespread mimicry is of cemeteries, but trauma sites also frequently look like places of worship or museums, all of which imply solemnity and reverence. Trauma memorials also frequently look like parks, which is one of the reasons why the prohibition of park-appropriate behaviour (music, barbecues, pets) needs to be specified through signage.

The presence or absence of a gift shop or a cafeteria, its placement and its contents all help to clue the visitor into the kinds of behaviours considered appropriate. At Auschwitz, it is possible to buy coffee and crackers from a vending machine within the visitor's centre at the entrance, but it is necessary

to leave the grounds in order to have a substantial meal. At the Jewish Museum in Berlin, on the other hand, there is an elegant and large cafeteria that serves a kosher Jewish and Israeli-inflected menu. At Kazimierz (the former Jewish ghetto in Krakow), food *is* the memorial. Themed restaurants have been created that serve the cuisine of the disappeared (*gefilte* fish, *kugel*, *tzimmes*) as well as honorific foods and beverages (kosher vodka, *klezmer* cake). At the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre in Rwanda, the cafeteria is well off the beaten path and caters to employees rather than tourists. Even the placement of the restrooms (beyond the borders of the trauma site) communicates something about the place of quotidian demands within memory culture.

Like food concessions, gift shops reflect both the tenor and the content considered suitable for the locale (as well as for economic and social factors). When I visited, all of the items for sale (postcards and books) at Dachau were black and white and a sign clarified the demand for sales on behalf of past visitors and the use of revenues for site maintenance.⁴ At the Cape Coast and Elmina sites associated with slave trade in Ghana, the gift shops have no items that document the site, reflecting the lack of capitalization in the country in



FIG. 2. Souvenir vendor at Khe Sahn, Vietnam. Photograph courtesy of Clark Peterson.

general and in this venue in particular; rather, they sell local handicrafts that provide an opportunity for visitors to participate in alleviating the region's endemic poverty. At Vietnam War sites, souvenir sales are scattershot and impromptu, consisting mainly of real and fake war memorabilia (dog tags, zippo lighters) with some communist kitsch (Fig. 2). The gift shop at the Oklahoma City Memorial, like the museum, emphasizes rescue efforts over the trauma and has a larger range of gifts for children than most others, including story books, toy ambulances and stuffed search and rescue dogs. The gift shops at Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek have extensive video selections that place *The Killing Fields* (the 1984 dramatization of the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia) alongside *The Simpsons* (the longest-running animated sitcom dramatizing middle-class American life). In Japan, the gift shops allow for explicit activism (from paper crane supplies to T-shirts) but are also far more permissive of kitsch (Hello Kitty Hiroshima and Hello Kitty Nagasaki) than their European and North American counterparts.

Memorial sites also regulate behaviour through example. In their rapid removal of all traces of spectators' contributions (artefacts, mementoes, graffiti),



FIG. 3. Fence with mementos at the Oklahoma City Memorial, USA. Photograph courtesy of Clark Peterson.

sites discourage participation by suggesting to a visitor that no one else before them has chosen to leave anything behind. Other sites mark certain kinds of participation as appropriate. At Dachau, a room-size glass-fronted display showcases memorabilia from governments and heads of state, showing that official mementoes are permissible but individual tokens are not. By contrast, sites in Japan have strategically-placed flower receptacles and racks or vitrines for housing paper cranes; these serve not only to encourage but also to constrain the placement of artefacts. At Oklahoma City, a portion of the fence that served as the impromptu shrine immediately following the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building has been preserved as part of the permanent memorial, and visitors frequently arrive with mementoes they intend to contribute (Fig. 3).

Finally, visitors are told how to comport themselves at places of memory through interactions. Guides, guards and other tourists all tell us what we should and should not do. We are asked directly to be quiet, to stay with our group, not to run and indirectly not to ask too many questions or questions that are too confrontational. At My Lai village in Vietnam, at the conclusion of my tour of the massacre site, my guides sat me down at a table with a comment book and a box of tissues (with the implication that I would/should cry). At Cape Coast, I was offered the opportunity to purchase a prayer for the ancestors. At a number of sites in Rwanda, I was handed a donation box or instructed by my driver to tip the guard.

It is common for tour groups to be segregated in order to defuse tensions emerging from different notions of propriety. In Vietnam, war veterans from the United States run their own tours, distinct from those of the general population of North American, European and Australian tourists. In Ghana, African Americans and Afro-Caribbeans visit the site independent of white tourists. In both countries, local tourists (mostly school groups) do not mix with either of the international groups of visitors. Auschwitz arranges special events for survivors and the World Trade Center Memorial has a portion of the museum that is accessible only to the families of victims.

Despite all of this explicit and implicit guidance, visitors to trauma sites manage to misbehave all the time. The viewing platforms at the World Trade Center site were covered with commemorative graffiti as soon as they were opened to the public. People leave mementoes at trauma sites even when the management actively discourages it; the Vietnam Veterans Memorial has collected so much memorabilia that they have had to plan for a museum to house it. In my tour group at Auschwitz, a child carried her scooter with her. Children

do play hide and seek in the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe and adults eat their picnic lunches on top of the stelae. Adolescents use the Peace Park at Nagasaki to skateboard and couples like to canoodle at the Parque de la Memoria in Buenos Aires.

A recent controversy erupted round the Australian artist Jane Korman's trip to Poland where she videotaped (and then posted on YouTube) her father Adolek Kohn (an 89-year-old survivor of Auschwitz), herself and her three grown children dancing to Gloria Gaynor's song 'I Will Survive' at locations that included concentration camps, ghettos, synagogues and memorials.⁵ Many people found this behaviour (the dancing and the posting of the video) objectionable. But many others defended the project. Here's a blogger's response that covers a multiplicity of feelings in a short span:

People seem to be up in arms over the video (titled 'Dancing Auschwitz: I Will Survive'), some angered because they believe it's disrespectful. Personally, it made my stomach twist and my heart swell. I literally teared up. Though we lost a great many, we did, as a people, survive. And I'm all about stomping on our horrific past through subversive acts, even if it includes employing a hokey *b'nai mitzvah* party disco standard.⁶

Certainly disco dancing at a genocide site falls well outside many established social norms. The Korman-Kohn case raises a plethora of issues. Among these are the questions of what is appropriate behaviour for an artist, for a tourist, for a holocaust survivor, for his family and for those viewing the work on the Internet and in galleries. While acts represented in the video represented a breach of propriety, the artist's project was an 'ethical' one in that it intentionally draws attention to the bourgeois normalization that limits the ways in which we might respond to horror.

If actions that are transient and open to debate fall under the rubric of propriety, then what would it mean to say that it is *unethical* (as opposed to inappropriate) to use a trauma site for what are perceived to be frivolous activities? What ethical principles does it make recourse to? Is it something we owe to the dead, to the living or to the land? To say that the designation of memorial sites is a matter of ethics would mean that spaces that may legally be private spaces belong to the public in some way. And therefore it means that in a discussion of trauma memorials, we must always consider who has the power to determine whether or not a site will be designated as a memorial. In the debates

over the reclamation of the World Trade Center site, for example, some of the most irreconcilable differences were between those who had commercial interests in the site and those who understood it as having come to belong to the community of the dead.⁷ In *Tourists of History: Memory, Kitsch, and Consumerism from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero*, Marita Sturken (2007) details the conflicts at Ground Zero between the claims of family members of the victims (who consider the entire terrain to be a mass grave) and the developers (who think that the prime real estate they own is being held hostage by social agendas).

As far as our debts to the dead and to the living, as Avishai Margalit argues in *The Ethics of Memory* (2002), our 'thin' relations (to humanity as a whole) provide a less compelling case of our obligation to remember than our 'thick' relations (to our immediate communities). This suggests that although most trauma sites deploy rhetoric about their importance to society, they are in fact sustained by their network of social connections to victims, survivors and members of politically or ethnically allied communities.

Over and above our general obligation to remember, there is something we believe specifically about the power of *place* to invoke and sustain memory that makes us more likely to (p)reserve the actual sites of atrocities for special uses. Many people believe that the dead or their spirits inhere in or revisit places: land, architecture, trees.⁸ Practices based on this include providing food, spirits, money, flowers or burning incense for the dead. But people who do not subscribe to specific place-based beliefs about the dead often behave as though they do. People go to graveyards to talk to dead relatives, make pilgrimages to battlefields and maintain roadside shrines at the location of traffic accidents, and an endless supply of films feature buildings that are haunted by the ghosts of people who were murdered there.

Karen Till suggests that 'places can be seen as thresholds through which the living can connect to the voices, imprints and inheritances of those who have gone before' (2010: 2). She uses the term 'spectral traces' to refer to the not-necessarily-visible markings on the sites of traumatic histories. The significance of such sites may be sustained through oral histories and archives and 'through acts of discovery, juxtaposition, re-presentation and relocation.' The not-yet-visible, she says, is defined through a web of social relations:

Spectral traces, especially at places marked constitutively by acts of violence and injustice, often re-emerge when a society is undergoing

change; individuals may come into contact with past lives through objects, natures, and remnants that haunt the contemporary landscape. [...] Such remainders constitute the social realities of place; their resonance forms an affective network granting thick meaning to an inhabitant's experience of belonging. Caring for place, then, invites an *ethical* relationship with spectral traces and recognizes how these past presences occupy the realities of our lived worlds—even while we also understand them as existing 'elsewhere,' beyond the realms of the living (ibid.: 1–2; emphasis added).

Till's evocations of ethics in this context draws attention to the ways in which site sacralization is practised. Nancy Gates-Madsen, citing Mircea Eliade, explains that 'the sacred manifests itself in certain places, which are substantially set apart from profane space' (2012: 157). Sacred spaces are 'qualitatively different' from their surrounding milieu, 'set apart from the ordinary' (ibid.: 157–8). According to Gates-Madsen, this implies that 'humans do not choose these spaces; rather, they arise seemingly independent of human influence' (ibid.: 158). In the conventional understanding, it is an 'act of (the) god(s)' that sets spaces outside of the quotidian. But in the case of historical trauma, I argue, it is the *inhumanity* of the atrocity that partitions the trauma site from its human surroundings. In other words, memory sites are made sacred by their desecration. But, as Gates-Madsen points out (citing Chidester and Linenthal), humans are key players in making spaces sacred. Sacralization must be practised (and is also limited by practise). Individuals and bureaucracies are active participants in sustaining the sacred status of a trauma site.

Because ethical obligations require (some degree of) social consensus, the project of site-specific memory is significantly hampered (if not thoroughly impaired) in countries that lack social consensus. Citizens of many countries in South America have profound political disagreements with one another about their shared history. There is no consensus about whether their dictatorship period constituted a trauma. The disappearances may be considered acts of state terror or justifiable actions on the part of legitimate governments. Disagreements exist about how many people disappeared and whether or not the disappeared could be considered enemies of the state. In such an environment, the designation of memorial sites is considerably more fraught, so that throughout Argentina and Chile former detention centres continue to be used as police stations, automotive repair shops and (as mentioned above) shopping malls. In the *Shock Doctrine*, Naomi Klein (2007) describes how a film crew chances

upon evidence of a torture centre inside the upscale mall Galerías Pacifico in Buenos Aires. The ruins of the detention centre at Club Atletico in Buenos Aires, buried by highway construction in late 1977, were uncovered in early 2002. In the former case commerce goes on without any indication of history, whereas in the latter case a site-specific memorial has been constructed.

Lack of agreement about just what needs to be remembered may also explain why the violence of the partition of India and Pakistan is recalled through ephemeral rather than site-specific memorials. But the absence of site-specific memorials may also reflect cultural differences about the practice of memory. For instance, memory cultures clashed following the bombings in Kuta, Bali. Families of international victims (a majority of whom were Australian) felt strongly that the sites should be developed as memorials whereas the Balinese were anxious to return to business as usual. This was not merely a matter of crass commercialism or even financial desperation but rather a religious conviction that once a ritual cleansing ceremony had restored 'a sense of balance and harmony to the island's community, marking *the end* of its dark period' (Tumarkin 2005: 62; emphasis added), further marking of the site was not only unnecessary to the Balinese but actually counter-indicated.

Sometimes social consensus is achieved by fiat, as is the case in Rwanda where the post-genocide dictatorship has legislated mourning in the form of government-mandated rituals practised at ubiquitous memorial sites. In making this observation, I do not mean to underplay the trauma suffered by and need for healing on the part of the Rwandan people. Rather, it is to draw attention to the way in which President Paul Kagame's government has used the horrors of the genocide to bolster its power and suppress opposition (Meierbach 2011). In his definitive project, *Les Lieux de Memoire* ('the places of memory'; 1984–92), Pierre Nora draws attention to the integral role of nationalism to the project of memory in France (see Nora 1996–98). Japan and Israel have also effectively played their victim roles for nationalist purposes (Takahashi 2004; Novick 1994). Some iterations of the plans for the World Trade Center Memorial do the same (Sturken 2007: 165–218). Thus, the deployment of traumatic memory does not always hold a moral high ground; sometimes its ethics are questionable or even reprehensible. Nonetheless, *unethical* behaviour is still a matter of ethics.

If we were to agree that we have an ethical obligation to use trauma sites commemoratively, then one of biggest challenges we face is a question of limits. What is our responsibility to violated spaces? Is there an extremity of violence that is not recuperable? What is the level of violence at which it is permissible

to reclaim space? After all, we live within a world of violence. Many (possibly even most) places are former battlefields or graveyards. While controversies spring up over the protection of the Indian burial mounds in Wisconsin or the African American cemetery in Manhattan, by and large, we understand that the loci of certain deaths are potentially reusable. In the United States cemetery plots are sustained in perpetuity, or at least for so long as the maintenance fees continue to be paid, whereas in Europe graves in public cemeteries are reused after as few as 30 years. Deathbeds are also birthplaces and we think of this as an acceptable, even desirable, cycle of life. Even if we limit memorial designation to places where massacres and genocides have taken place and agree that such places should be forever preserved as memorials, what do we do in countries like Rwanda and Cambodia where evidence of genocide continues to be uncovered on a daily basis, in the form of the bones of victims, and it seems as though every inch of land is tinged with blood? It would be neither possible nor ethical to remove the entire country from its agricultural function and to make every killing field into a memorial. Rather, the function of memory is consolidated into synecdochic sites. Bones are collected in ossuaries (discussed below) and these sites concentrate memorial functions.

Trauma memorials by definition emerge from troubled situations. This means that the process of moving from trauma to memorial is far from straightforward. A number of different factors impede memorial construction. Obviously, a trauma neither proceeds nor concludes with memorial construction (and how perverse it would be if it did). As a result, the raw materials at a trauma site are inevitably lacking. What follows is a discussion of the ways in which decisions about space allocation and space usage, which seem to have ethical implications or ramifications, may result from pragmatic constraints. Site developers may begin with a decimated lot or an evocative ruin. They may choose to reconstruct the infrastructure of atrocity or to add commemorative architecture. They may be forced to work with sites that are still in use or they may be barred from such sites altogether and forced to place memorials in alternative venues. The trauma commemorated may be fully documented or discovery of the extent of the atrocity may still be underway. In all these cases, the kinds of options that developers exercise within these constraints reflect their own ethics, the ethics of the society as a whole and the ethical responses they hope to elicit from visitors to the site.

It is not uncommon in the wake of a trauma to try to erase all evidence thereof. The US military forces destroyed all evidence of wrongdoing at My

Lai. Erasure is not necessarily the work of denial—at least not denial in the political sense, though it may be denial in the psychoanalytical sense. The impulse immediately following a tragedy is to clean it up. Sometimes, this is a highly ethical impulse (as in the wake of almost any environmental trauma). More often, it is somewhere between pragmatic (we need to get back to work in this space) and therapeutic (we don't want to look at this crisis anymore) needs. Cleaning up can be part of empowerment on the part of a suffering population. It may proceed directly out of rescue efforts, as it did at the World Trade Center sites.

What was unusual about Ground Zero, however, was the rapidity with which memorial design proceeded. Almost from the moment of the crisis, proposals for memorials were put forward and some (like the Tribute in Light annual art installation at the 9/11 memorial site) were enacted very early on. Moreover the World Trade Center wreckage was sieved not only for human remains and evidence but also stored with an eye to memorial design. There may not be a single other example in the world of where a memorial process was so quickly conceived and enacted. It is far more common for the work of building memorials to belong to the next generation, not championed by those who survived the trauma but rather by their children.⁹

Holocaust memorialization efforts, for example, began in earnest in the 1960s. Jewish families looking for roots in Eastern Europe typically found no evidence of the *shtetls* from which their ancestors emigrated or were forcibly removed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. What was not obliterated in pogroms was usurped by local residents. So many authors have written about Jews searching for unavailable ancestral homes that it has become a familiar trope. The best-known representation and one of the most beautiful is the moment in Leiv Schreiber's film of Jonathan Safran Foer's book *Everything Is Illuminated* (2002), where the main character finds a completely preserved phantom archive. What makes this image so poignant is its impossibility: the protagonist finds what we imagine used to be there, lovingly preserved. The Théâtre de Complicité production *Mnemonic* (1999) also features this journey of unrequited longing through Eastern Europe, as does Lilly Brett's novel *Too Many Men* (2001). Such a journey of desire has also been carefully documented in a non-fiction work by Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer (2010). In a lecture in Madison that preceded the publication of *Ghosts of Home: The Afterlife of Czernowitz in Jewish Memory*, Hirsch beautifully summarized the encounter

with an unavailable remainder in her lecture title: 'This is it, this is it. Only it's completely different.'¹⁰

Empty spaces can prove hauntingly evocative as trauma memorials. Many visitors to Poland's concentration camps point out that the massive voids of Birkenau—the largest Nazi concentration camp—signify loss more effectively than the pavilions full of information at Auschwitz. Similarly, the empty grounds at Treblinka (near today's Warsaw) and the sparse signage at My Lai suggest the absence they commemorate more successfully than sites cluttered with memorial sculptures.

In places where memories have not been completely erased, there are ruins. In some ways, ruins are the most ideal architecture for a trauma memorial to inherit. On the surface, they are the least ethically fraught. They evoke the 'right' emotions, the kind of longing, sorrow, wistfulness that we believe to be the appropriate emotions for memorial sites. Ruins move us in two directions: they provide evidence both of survival and of destruction. They are simultaneously devastating and uplifting. According to a review of Robert Ginsberg's *The Aesthetics of Ruins* (2004), Ginsberg gives extensive treatment to this 'uncanny' quality of ruins which 'shifts between familiarity and unfamiliarity, repulsion and attraction, . . . being and becoming' (in Trigg 2006: 119).

Sites in Poland, Japan, Ghana, South Africa and Rwanda all make productive use of ruins. Near Krakow, the many acres of Jewish cemetery are today in nearly the same state as they were left in at the end of the war. The overgrown and shattered headstones are a haunting and effective reminder of the scale of the community that was lost. In Hiroshima, the preserved shell of a destroyed building has come to be known as the Atomic Bomb Dome. Now designated as a UNESCO world heritage site, the architectural skeleton nestled into the functional skyline is a poignant reminder of the destructive capacity of nuclear weapons. The power of the Ghanaian slave forts in part derives from their state of decay which evokes the violence of the buildings' former deployment. And, with each passing year, the decaying genocide site at Ntarama in Rwanda only seems to be more effective in communicating the awfulness of the massacre that took place in that church.

However, ruins as memorials are less ethically reliable than they first seem. As Rose Macaulay elaborates in her book on the *Pleasure of Ruins*, Western cultures have taken 'delight in decayed or wrecked buildings' (1953: xv; emphasis added) since Roman and Victorian times. She details how 'down the ages, men

have meditated before ruins, rhapsodized before them, mourned *pleasurably* over their ruination' (ibid.; emphasis added) and finds:

[I]t is interesting to speculate over the various strands in this complex enjoyment, on how much of it is admiration for the ruin as it was in its prime [. . .], how much is association, historical or literary, what part is played by morbid pleasure in decay, by righteous pleasure in retribution [. . .], by mystical pleasure in the destruction of all things mortal [. . .], by egoistic satisfaction in surviving [. . .], by masochistic joy in a common destruction [. . .] and by a dozen other intertwined threads of pleasurable and melancholy emotion (ibid.: xv–xvi).

In other words, looking at ruins, at least for Westerners, has a long history associated with pleasure. It is important to realize that our comfort with ruins as a memorial strategy does not fully derive from their seemingly ethical capacity to communicate concrete evidence of an atrocity and its cessation. Rather, our ease with ruins reflects a historically complex engagement with a multiplicity of satisfactions alongside our grief and condemnation.



FIG. 4. Interactive exhibit at Seodaemun Prison in Seoul, South Korea. Photograph courtesy of Clark Peterson.

If a trauma site does inherit a ruined structure (or intact architectural remains), a set of dilemmas about preservation emerges almost immediately. At the Centro Clandestino de Detención, Tortura, y Exterminio el Olimpo ('the clandestine centre for detention, torture and extermination') in Buenos Aires, a guide articulated this concern for us: Should we expend additional resources on sadistic architecture? For the present moment, their decision is to preserve but not restore. There is something paradoxical about using resources (either funds or labour) to bolster evidence of atrocity, to restore or maintain a torture cell, a gas chamber or a crematorium. This ethical dilemma is a profound one for many site developers. I find similar concerns at work in many parts of the world, particularly at concentration camps, prisons and torture centres, where the sites straddle evidentiary and bereavement functions.

But if it is perverse to preserve evidence of evil, how much more so is it to (re)build such structures from scratch? Reconstructions not only elicit similar ambivalence about expenditures but they also risk undermining the veracity of evidence. The bunkroom at Dachau in Germany, which was rebuilt for visitors to comprehend with ease the living conditions in the camps, is too clean to evoke the horror of actual conditions and plays into the hands of holocaust deniers through its artificiality.

Even more troubling are some of the immersive environments that have been created at memorials to help tourists understand what it felt like to be there during the trauma. At Oklahoma City, spectators begin their tour of the museum in a closed room that abruptly begins to shake, simulating the experience of workers in the Murrah building at the moment of the blast. At Nagasaki in Japan, an immersive installation uses flashing lights to recreate the moment of the blast and represents victims using mannequins with melting flesh. At Seodaemun Prison in Seoul, South Korea, visitors walk down a hallway listening to soundtracks of prisoners screaming from behind closed doors, crawl inside an inhumanely small isolation cell and sit in a chair in front of a mannequin jury whose verdict causes the visitor's chair to drop beneath them (Fig. 4).¹¹

What is disconcerting about these participatory exhibits, all of which emerge from the best intentions of designers and curators to help tourists move beyond the cerebral and cognitive to understand an affective dimension of the trauma they document? Immersive installations at trauma memorials border on (or cross over the line over into) kitsch. As overly sentimental and reductive treatments of weighty content, they threaten to cheapen the experience of trauma. They also blur the distinction between shock (dismay) and sensation



FIG. 5. Limed corpses at the Murambi Genocide Memorial Centre in Rwanda. Photograph courtesy of Clark Peterson.

(thrill) and, since they rely on technologies and strategies similar to those used by haunted houses and other environments that mine fear for pleasure, they seem incongruous in the otherwise sombre and reverent milieux of memory culture. By playing the atrocity for thrills, they threaten to move the spectator towards prurience and away from contemplation. Moreover, they offer us representations and experiences unlinked from criticality.¹²

Almost diametrically opposed to these trauma installations is the remarkable work that Memoria Abierta ('open memory') in Buenos Aires is doing to reconstruct clandestine torture centres *virtually*. They are compiling the fragmented memories of former detainees (none of who were ever allowed more than a glimpse of their environment) to assemble three-dimensional virtual simulations of the spaces where they were held that have been destroyed or that remain inaccessible to the public. These memory recovery efforts are not undertaken with tourists in mind. Their purpose, first and foremost, is evidentiary; they are to be part of the judicial record of the crimes committed there. What is more, they are part of a recovery effort, helping survivors to reach closure by placing concretely outside themselves and into communal memory the experiences they survived in isolation.¹³

Some of the best-known memorials in trauma culture and some of the most troubling are the ossuaries in Rwanda and Cambodia. Though there is a long history of Catholic reliquaries, most westerners find the amassing and display of human remains in Rwanda and Cambodia unnerving.¹⁴ Advocates of the ossuaries, which consist largely of skulls and femurs neatly ordered in rows that allow for enumeration, defend them on the grounds that they provide undeniable evidence of the scale of the genocide. But the sites in Rwanda are also active functioning parts of the communities in which they are situated. Each local site serves as a repository of all the bones uncovered throughout the year until they are ceremonially integrated each April. At first, whole lime-preserved bodies were left in place where they fell at a church in Nyarubuye. This aspect of the Nyarubuye Genocide Memorial has now been dismantled, but bodies are a dominant feature of the Murambi Genocide Memorial Centre where classroom after classroom is filled with pallets of desiccated corpses (Fig. 5).

Visceral responses evoked by these memorials may be attributed to the estrangement of contemporary spectators from death, the resemblance of the figures to our own, the unfamiliar smell or the contorted postures of many of the figures that could be construed to reflect painful deaths. Sara Guyer has written persuasively about the way such memorials fail:

The memorials expose impersonality: they do not restore individuals; they do not turn corpses into names. This impersonality certainly can be understood as the impersonality of genocide. But it also is the impersonality of death in general, revealing again the threat to memorialization that genocide effects. In leading us to see the dead as the perpetrators of the genocide saw the living, the memorials also lead us to see just the dead: the bones and cadavers of which every one of us is composed and will become, and which signal the event of death without rendering it intelligible. The memorials do not give us insight into death or genocide, apart from the negative insight of its enduring unrecollection—even at the sight where it occurred, even through the very remains of the dead (2009:174).

As the discussions of ruins, reconstructions and ossuaries illustrate, there seems to be an almost universal expectation that people should ‘feel something’ at memorials (that it would be appropriate for them to do so). To walk away unmoved would signal a failure of the site. Yet what one should feel (grief, anger, shock) and, perhaps even more so, how one should be made to feel it remains unresolved.

Whether or not there are ruins to preserve, most memorials contain some new construction to supplement, enhance or stand in for residual architecture. These newer constructions are used to fulfil the commemorative burden of the sites and to house artefacts and documentation of the atrocity. The former aspires to be affective, the latter informative. This tension between pedagogy and emotionality is one of the core tensions of memorial design. Affective memorial architecture is remarkably formulaic. Most sites rely on a limited vocabulary of architectural tropes: walls of names, plinths and stelae, empty chairs, descending/ascending spirals, symbolic gardens and water features. Since the construction and unexpected success of Chinese American architectural artist Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington DC, walls of names have become *de rigueur* for trauma memorials. Building on the convention of engraved stone burial markers, such walls intend to recognize individuals and at the same time to mark the grander scale of loss. Interesting variations on this can be found at the Parque de la Memoria in Buenos Aires where only one-third of the total estimated *desaparecidos* ('disappeared') have been identified by name. There, blank markers far exceed those that are engraved. In Rwanda, where whole families and communities were lost, it is rare to be able to provide any names at all. But the monument at Nyarubuye, which tries to make a mass death individual with un-engraved markers, demonstrates the transcultural reach of this memorial trope even into settings where the victims cannot be identified.

To represent the monumentality of loss, giant tomb-like plinths are a popular choice. Both Peter Eisenman's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe and Daniel Libeskind's outdoors memorial sculpture 'Garden of Exile' within the Jewish Museum in Berlin feature this type of architecture. The empty chair is perhaps an over-obvious symbol for absence. Empty-chair memorials can be found at Oklahoma City (where larger and smaller chairs help differentiate between the adults and children who perished), in the former Polish ghetto of Podgorze (where Schindler's well-known factory was located) and near the airport in Santiago, Chile (in honour of three martyred school teachers). Spirals are another common memorial form, claiming to represent descents into the abyss of the atrocity as well as ascents towards hope. Though often set in the landscape, as done in the courtyard of the School of Architecture at La Plata or the memorial at Columbine High School, spirals are also placed indoors, quite effectively, for instance as seen at Hiroshima. Frequently offered as a healing environment, memorial gardens are also often used symbolically. At the Villa

Grimaldi peace memorial in Chile, each rose variety is given the name of a female victim or survivor, whereas the gardens at the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre have such elaborate symbolic schemes that an audio guide is provided to decipher them. Water features, such as fountains, pools and streams, are commonly provided for meditation and reflection.

A number of factors have contributed to this uniformity in memory culture. Curators of memorial sites from all over the world belong to the same professional organizations and meet each other regularly at international conferences to share 'best practices.' The same limited pool of jurors and architects select and design most high-profile memorials. Lower-profile memorials are often designed in imitation of (or in homage to) the better-known memorials, in part because survivors and victims' families often insist on the use of conventions they have seen implemented successfully elsewhere. The international audience for trauma memorials finds most legible those elements that are familiar. Furthermore, memorial tropes are largely derived from pre-existing funeral practices which have also been unified globally through colonization, religious homogenization and mass media.

Existing architecture may be enlisted to house the volumes of information and artefacts that are found at most memorials. This is the case at Auschwitz where the former barracks are dedicated to a series of thematically organized displays. But in the absence of sufficient surviving real estate, many memorial sites construct museums to house the repositories of artefacts of which they are custodians and to present the voluminous information necessary to complete their educational mission. Such museums differ little from their off-site counterparts; that is they are constructed functionally. The elaborate museum displays found in existing architecture at Dachau differ little from their counterparts in new constructions at Oklahoma City, Nagasaki and Kigali. In these cases, the residual architecture is not being used for its evocative function as a ruin nor is the new architecture serving a commemorative purpose. Rather, they are warehouses.¹⁵

Although the predominant strategy of memorialization is to segregate the spaces of trauma from ongoing activities (as described in the earlier discussion of 'site sacralization'), a number of trauma sites round the world are located within actively used spaces. For example, the United Service Organizations-led tours of the demilitarized zone (DMZ) in Korea are built round historical events leading up to the Korean War (1950–1953), but the DMZ itself is still a tense border where tourists are given strict guidelines on how to comport

themselves, in this case not for reasons of propriety but rather for security, so that the act of a tourist does not incite new violence. Coin-operated binoculars provide an enhanced view across the border but tourists may not raise their hands or wave. Although on my visit I had the sense that the danger was being overplayed by tour guides, there *have* been border skirmishes fairly recently in some of the same spaces where tourists go.

Many of the Rwandan churches where massacres took place are still in use. Our guide reported that there was substantial conflict between survivor communities and the Catholic Church about whether to resume worship at locations where the church failed to protect the refugees who had congregated for asylum. Although the church at Nyamata has been rendered non-functional by the metonymic evocation of the deceased through mounds of their clothing stacked on pews, the church at Kibeho holds regular services in an environment that is marked to remind users of the events that transpired there. During the genocide, holes were punched in the walls of the church by *génocidaires* in order to murder the people sheltered there. When religious authorities insisted that the church be restored, Rwandan congregants decided to paint the replaced bricks in purple, the colour of mourning.

Related strategies for inserting memorials into actively used spaces can be found in Argentina and Germany. The organization Barrios por la Memoria y Justicia has been working with neighbourhoods throughout Buenos Aires to install mosaic plaques commemorating residents who disappeared. In Berlin, artists have created a number of effective interventions in the urban landscape, such as Christian Boltanski's Missing House, Renata Stih and Freider Schnock's Memorial to the Deported Jewish Citizens of the Bayerische Viertel and Micha Ullman's Bibliotek Memorial to the Nazi book-burnings. These urban interventions are effective in drawing attention to the fact that many traumas are not localized at memorial sites but are rather dispersed throughout a culture/country. France and Italy also have widespread practices of dispersed memorialization, with documentation of official history and resistance offered in plaques and site-specific web links.¹⁶

In this essay, I have mostly been concerned with questions about how the desecrated grounds of traumatic violence are recuperated as memorials. But I would like to take a moment to consider the inverse question: (why) does a memorial *need* to be located at the site of a trauma?

Numerous reasons exist not to build site-specific memorials. Assigning traumatic histories to specific locations may obscure the widespread nature of

traumas, which do not take place only at bomb sites, crematoria and clandestine torture centres but are enacted throughout society—socially, economically, politically, juridically and even interpersonally. By concentrating memorial functions, we may inadvertently pardon those who should be held accountable. In some cases, as exemplified by the Armenian genocide, the locus of the trauma may be politically unavailable. Turkey still refuses to admit historical events of the genocide let alone allow memorials to be constructed. Instead, memorials to the Armenian genocide can be found in 30 other countries.¹⁷ But even for the Holocaust, although multiple trauma sites have been recuperated as memorials, diasporic populations in the United States, South Africa, Argentina and in many other countries have felt the need to commemorate the Holocaust where they live.¹⁸ As mentioned earlier, the placement of a memorial may be merely opportunistic, the availability of a particular plot of land or a particular building at serendipitous timing. Along these lines, Gates-Madsen (2012) has written a thorough analysis of the confluence of forces that led to the placement of the Parque de la Memoria on the Costanera Norte in Buenos Aires and the work that was done afterwards to make the place significant.

In spite of these strong arguments in favour of off-site memorials, I would still argue that site-specific memorials, while imperfect, offer a unique opportunity. I opened this essay with a set of questions about what our *obligations* to desecrated spaces. I would like to conclude with some thoughts about *opportunities* such spaces afford. Visitors come to these sites as pilgrims, in a heightened state of awareness, prepared to engage with difficult questions, and are therefore more receptive to ethical mediations.

Montevideo, despite its relatively limited set of trauma memorials, offers us another interesting example in the Espacio de Arte Contemporaneo Excarcel Miguelete. Located in a former women's prison, this museum embraces the political opportunity afforded by its architectural history. In the same way as the museum's name draws attention to its prior function, so too the architecture and the curatorial policy of the museum are structured to draw attention to the politics of the site. Within the museum, large portions of the prison that remain un-reclaimed are available to viewers through a panoramic, two-storey tall glass window. Artists (or museum curators) have added text and installation elements that clarify the history of the building and invite further reflection. In addition, the artwork on display often interacts productively with the history, even when it is not site-specific. For example, the travelling exhibit on display there in the fall of 2010 showcased survival strategies of the disenfranchised

from many parts of the world. By placing such displays within reclaimed prison cells, the already poignant content of the exhibition was given added resonance.¹⁹

The South African memorial at Constitution Hill, like the Punta Carretas Shopping Centre, is built in and on the remains of a prison. In this case, it is the Old Fort Prison complex where political prisoners were held and tortured during apartheid. But unlike the clueless postmodernism of Punta Carretas, the merger of ruins with new construction in Johannesburg is founded in a political project. By embedding its constitutional court in a former prison, South Africa reminds its legislators on a daily basis of the political struggle from which the new government emerged. Rather than a suppression or erasure of the site's tortured history, this site performs a disclosure. Rather than suggesting that recovery from trauma means returning to commerce as usual, this building insists that the work of post-traumatic societies is juridical vigilance.

It is clear that trauma sites are highly charged. Whether we prefer a spiritual understanding of these spaces or one that is socially determined, we can agree that stakeholders (survivors and victims' families, perpetrators and their descendants, curators and site managers, governmental authorities and human rights organizations, neighbours and tourists) are deeply invested in the deployment of space. Insofar as trauma sites draw spectators in heightened states of awareness, such spaces provide the opportunity for activism, for thinking beyond their site-specific histories towards our responsibilities for intervening in ongoing trauma towards alternative outcomes. What such sites can do is to invoke an ethical response, a response that draws questions about ethics to the foreground—not the ethics of what to do with the designated space but the ethics of what was done there historically and the ethics of what we continue to do in the world today.

NOTES

- 1 The term used on site for the restoration '*recuperación patrimonial*', which can be translated as 'asset recovery', actually makes blatant the bolstering of state that underlies heritage projects.
- 2 Paraphrased from an email from Dr Rita Clark, a psychoanalyst who teaches medical ethics, and from <http://www.dictionarygeek.com/?url=http://www.-wordnik.com/words/&word=ethical>.
- 3 <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/propriety>.
- 4 The sign reads: 'The International Committee of former Dachau prisoners has initiated the sale of brochures and photographs upon the request of visitors

to the site. The net proceeds accrue exclusively to the Committee, which is dedicated to the improvement and completion of the museum and the memorial site.'

- 5 <http://videosift.com/video/I-Will-Survive-Dancing-Auschwitz>.
- 6 <http://www.jweekly.com/blog/full/58598/disco-dancing-on-concentration-camp-grounds/>.
- 7 In their Introduction to *Of Property and Propriety: The Role of Gender and Class in Imperialism and Nationalism*, Judith Whitehead, Himani Bannerji and Shahrzad Mojab (2001), point out that property rights and notions of propriety are (not only) etymologically related. Their project is to demonstrate how culturally specific notions of propriety and underlying property rights are bound up in one another and to consider how identities are 'legally and ideologically articulated . . . as a sense of entitlement to citizenship in the nation' (ibid.: 4). Thus, the question of ethics (in terms of property rights) and propriety (in terms of behavioural norms) that I am trying to distinguish are inextricably intertwined.
- 8 Practices associated with spirits of the dead can be found in Catholicism, Buddhism and Animism in Africa, Latin America and Asia and among African Americans and Native Americans in North America.
- 9 In *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities* (2007), Paul Williams argues that the pace of memorialization is accelerating. Following his logic, it may be the case that the rush towards commemoration at the World Trade Center site is because it is contemporary. Memorials were also built fairly quickly at Columbine, Colorado, after the Columbine High School massacre in 1999 and at Oklahoma City after the bombing in 1995. It may also be true that highly capitalized spaces move more quickly towards memorials. Thus, by this logic, we see a very short turn around, a matter of a few weeks, between the attacks on the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel in Mumbai, India, and the erection of a memorial there. Also refer to Madrid's Atocha Station memorial monument to the victims of the suicide attacks in 2004.
- 10 Lecture at the University of Wisconsin on 29 October 2007 (<http://humanities.wisc.edu/workshops/past-mellon-workshops/trauma-tourism/>).
- 11 The Cu Chi tunnels in Vietnam and the Anne Frank House in the Netherlands are not reconstructions but share an immersive sensibility. They invite spectators to fantasize about surviving under adversarial conditions. Like museums that document the deprivation of the depression in the United States or the war years in London or Tokyo, they also encourage a kind of nostalgia that is not exactly a remembrance of loss.

- 12 These three-dimensional tableaux also share a problem with two-dimensional representations of trauma, such as paintings, in that as representations they run afoul of our cultural consensus regarding the fundamental unrepresentability of trauma.
- 13 This project is being developed by Gonzalo Conte (<http://www.memoriaabierta.org.ar/>).
- 14 Majdanek in Poland also has a massive repository of human remains but the ashes it contains do not elicit the same identificatory response that is produced by human bones. The human fragments that will be part of the memorial at Ground Zero are also unrecognizable and will be kept in a viewing area that can only be accessed by family members.
- 15 In lower-resource circumstances of developing countries, it is common to replace the museum function with personalized guide services. In Ghana and Vietnam, the sites' legibility depends on the information the guide delivers, whereas the information in the guided tour at Auschwitz is a *précis* of and redundant to that which could be garnered from the information panels.
- 16 <http://resistenzatoscana.it/>.
- 17 Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Cyprus, Egypt, Ethiopia, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, India, Iran, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, Netherlands, Poland, Switzerland, Syria, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States, Uruguay, Venezuela (<http://www.armenian-genocide.org/memorials.html>).
- 18 Wikipedia lists more than a hundred Holocaust memorials, less than a quarter of which are actually located at sites directly associated with the traumas they commemorate (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Holocaust_memorials_and_museums).
- 19 <http://www.artespain.com/06-10-2010/noticias/exposicion-post-it-city-ciudades-ocasionales-en-montevideo>.

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