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Ruined Landscapes and Residual Architecture

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Ruined Landscapes and Residual Architecture

Affect and palimpsest in trauma tourism

L A U R I E B E T H C L A R K

THE PROBLEM WITH RUINS

Lonely Planet's online guide to Kraków in Poland describes the Jewish cemetery as follows: 'Although it's the "new" Jewish cemetery, it was established as early as 1800. There are some 9000 surviving tombstones, some of which have eerie and elaborate carvings' (Lonely Planet n.d.). While it's not formally designated as a memorial, the cemetery is a registered heritage monument and is mentioned in contexts that allow it to be visited as part of memory tourism to the Kazimierz ghetto. For me, it was one of the most moving memorials I have encountered in the course of my research, rivalling the cadavers in Rwanda for its affective power. Its impact has little to do with the supposedly 'eerie and elaborate carvings' but rather was the result of its scale and state of neglect.

The cemetery is derelict – the gravestones are skewed, broken, displaced and overgrown. Although tombstones were recovered after the

war (having been taken by the Nazis for use as construction materials) and although the grounds were ostensibly renovated in 1957, the cemetery has the appearance of having been left untouched following a pogrom. It's not without evidence of contemporary engagement, however. Periodically one finds a recently extinguished or still burning yahrzeit candle or small stones placed in memorial gestures by visitors. The day I visited it was cold, wet and overcast (as it so often seems to be in Poland) and the effect of the scene was melancholic.

I use the word 'melancholy' with caution, however, as trauma ruins pose a problem for theories of melancholia, particularly when they are the ruins of the machinery of violence. Certainly, it makes sense to mourn the vandalism of a Jewish cemetery, just as it does to find poignant the outline of the shell of the 'A-bomb Dome' amidst the new high-rise buildings in Hiroshima's downtown in Japan. But what sense does it make to feel



■ Photos Clark/Peterson



melancholy at the ruins of a crematorium? Or a torture centre? Shouldn't we celebrate its demise? Yet decay, whether of the laudable or the reprehensible, seems to induce a relatively consistent response of sombre contemplation.

Ruins have interested Western culture since antiquity. There is literature as early as the seventh century BCE that romanticizes ruins. Both the Italian Renaissance and British Romanticism actively embraced ruins. More recently, a revival of interest in ruins has focused on the ruination imbricated in modernity. In the United States, contemporary ruin gazing has its epicentre in Detroit, Michigan, where tourists come to photograph the 70,000 abandoned buildings, which include a mix of factories, government buildings, modest residences and mansions (Binelli 2012). While ruins appear to be the perfect vehicle for commemoration, seeming to evoke an 'appropriate' melancholic response, Rose Macauley's assertion that ruins are a *pleasurable* pursuit highlights one of several fraught paradoxes that this essay will explore – that ruins are not reliably signifiers of pain (Macauley 1953). Given the long (Western) history of ruin gazing, it is important to realize that our comfort with ruins as a memorial strategy does not fully derive from their putative 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 (Clark 2014: 23).

Ruins are implicitly part of all site-specific memorials, even in places where there are no actual remains, but many trauma memorials explicitly embrace ruins as a core element of their exhibition strategy. It is rare in any developed memorial for ruins to be as comprehensive as those of the Jewish cemetery described above. But we find partial ruins deployed within memorials in Africa, Asia, Europe and North and South America. Like traumatized objects (Clark 2013), ruins perform their abjection in the service of memory culture. However, unlike objects, ruins do not stand in for the bodies of victims. Rather, they work affectively to invoke and evoke the environment, milieu or situation within which trauma was allowed to occur by deploying the visible residue of that trauma on the landscape. Ruins are what Yael Navaro-Yashin calls 'affective spaces', places where 'subjectivities and residual affects ... linger, like a hangover, in the aftermath of war or violence' (2009: 5).

In this essay, I look at the palimpsestic deployment of ruins at trauma memorials that I have visited in the course of my research into trauma tourism over the last fourteen years. While memorials purport to create specialized zones for commemoration, the use of ruins as a mnemonic trope reveals the pervasive and persistent nature of trauma in the everyday. In the spirit of Pierre Nora (1989, 1996), Michel de Certeau (1998) and Yi-Fu Tuan (2001), I consider the manipulations of space and place within memory culture.

Palimpsests are layered texts, whether manuscripts, landscapes or crime scenes. In ruins, the layering is the product of historical forces, both violent and commemorative. When we are in the midst of these layered environments, we may attempt to read the different texts. But, more often, we are emotionally impacted by their contradictory valences, producing a complex mélange of responses that we may or may not be equipped to unravel.

RUINS AS A COMMEMORATIVE TROPE

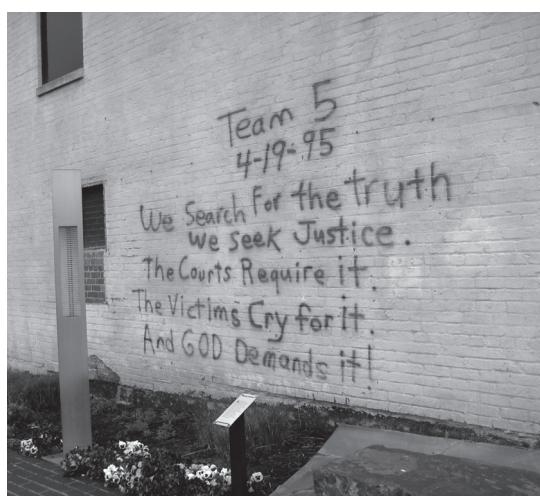
What kinds of spaces does trauma leave in its wake? Concentration camps and (clandestine) torture centres, killing fields and battlegrounds, vacant lots and tunnel systems, military complexes and demilitarized zones, cemeteries, prisons, castles, synagogues and churches, ordinary houses, and neighbourhoods.

In Argentina, the former torture centres *Club Atlético* and *Mansión Seré* both include partial ruins that are archaeological digs in progress. *Club Atlético* is located under an overpass in downtown Buenos Aires. On one side of the street, a constructed memorial includes elements made from concrete and wrought iron. Across the street, an open excavation exposes some of the framework of the athletic club turned detention centre that was buried by highway construction. In this messy and informal space, *Instituto Espacio para la Memoria* stages an annual ceremony in homage to those sequestered here. During the ceremony, torch bearers scramble up a muddy slope to place lights around the silhouette of a figure which is larger version of the outlines that were used on the streets during the 1960s and 1970s protests to claim space for the disappeared. Perhaps the open wound of the architectural dig better exemplified the still unresolved question of Argentina's many *desaparecidos* than the clean-edged, closed symbolic system of the highly designed memorial across the street. The pairing of a museum of memory with an ongoing archeological excavation on grounds of a municipal park in Morón works in a similar way. Whereas the museum strives for retrospective clarity, the ruins of *Mansión Seré* (one of the most active regional detention centres during the dictatorship) provide supplemental affectivity.

For a number of years, the Ground Zero site in the United States also had the characteristics of an archeological dig, as the excavation that would eventually allow for the construction of a new memorial proceeded with extreme caution to preserve any residual human or architectural remains. When I visited and wrote about the site in 2004, I had this to

say, 'In some ways, the World Trade Center is a more effective memorial right now than it will ever be again. A fully functioning train station, evidence of the resilient city, is literally immersed in the excavation' (Clark 2006: 137). At the time, the memorial was the ruin. Visitors looked through a mesh fence, beyond historical photographs of the city, to view the aftermath of the towers' collapse. Today (2015), the memorial is pristine, with a pair of fountains and a new memory museum. While there is still demolition underway in adjacent lots, it's now clearly framed as part of the revitalization efforts. There is no place for a ruins aesthetic in the triumphalist narrative embraced by this memorial community.

Similarly, the multiple commemorative structures at Oklahoma City in the United States leave little room for melancholic remnants; site developers, working with strong voices in the survivor community, chose a theme of triumph rather than melancholy for the memorial. However, two charged fragments have been preserved. One is a part of the fence that was installed to protect the site of the Murrah Building immediately following the bombing in 1995. It has provided a receptacle for more than 60,000 'tokens of love and hope' that visitors have donated to Oklahoma City. On-site signage identifies them as such. It also marks a partial wall, upon which the following text is inscribed: 'broken bricks and a mangled fire escape left as it looked following the



bombing'. Site architects have made structural repairs that tried to preserve the 'look' of having been bombed. 'Black brick window openings and the dark glass windows here leave the sense of void created by the blown-out glass following the bombing' (on-site signage). In a memorial that relentlessly chooses heroism over lamentation in every facet of its memorial agenda, this one concession to the display of damage is only permissible in light of the clearly articulated message – writing on the wall left by rescue workers that reads:

Team 5

4-10-95

We Search For the truth
We seek Justice.
The Courts Require it.
The Victims Cry for it.
And GOD Demands it.

Inside the museum building, where the meaning of detritus can be fully controlled, there are extended displays that include broken drywall, bent electrical conduits, the debris of cinderblocks and collapsed shelving, all cleanly preserved in glass vitrines. Neatly corralled, it is the inverse of the derelict cemetery described at the start of this essay.



The Atomic Bomb Dome (Genbaku Dome or Hiroshima Peace Memorial) is an emblematic ruin. Framed within the skyline of rebuilt Hiroshima, this world heritage site was 'preserved in the same state as immediately after the bombing' (UNESCO n.d.). The skeleton of the Hiroshima Prefectural Industrial Promotion Hall was the only building left standing in the vicinity of the hypocentre. One of several anxieties that emerge around the need to sustain, restore and maintain ruins – the fear that they may lose their authenticity – is implicit in this disclaimer on the official UNESCO website:

The authenticity of the Genbaku Dome is not open to challenge: The ruined structure stands exactly as it did after the atomic bomb exploded on 6 August 1945. The only interventions since that time have been minimal, designed to ensure the continuing stability of the ruins. This may be likened to work carried out on archaeological sites around the world. (UNESCO n.d.)

More often, however, concerns about restoration are centred on the perversity of bolstering or reconstructing horrific structures like torture cells or crematoria. At Birkenau in Poland, where the 'authentic' barbed wire is decomposing, there is a dilemma regarding whether to renew this signifier of trauma. At Argentina's *Centro Clandestino de Detención, Tortura, y Exterminio el Olimpo*, our guide articulated the staff's dilemma over whether to expend resources to restore sadistic architecture. At present, the memorial is 'merely' a garage (Clark 2014: 24).

WHY SPACE MATTERS

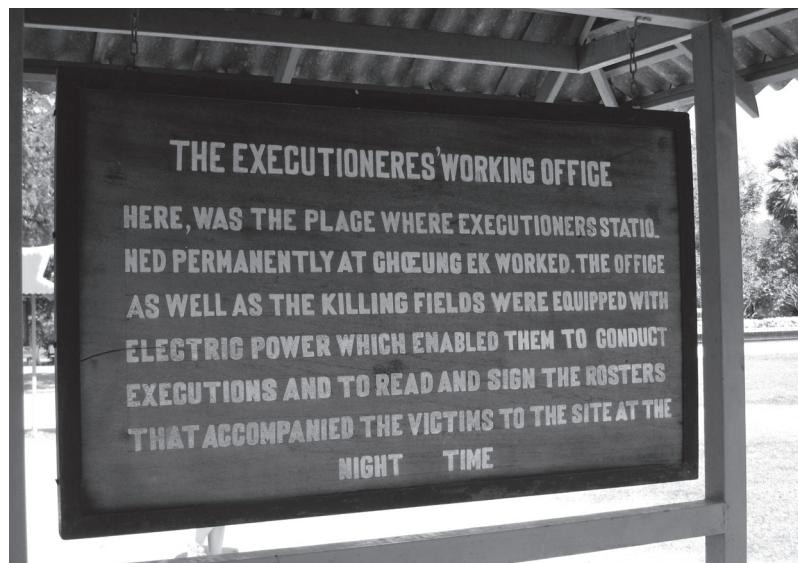
Clearly, a myriad of ethical dilemmas face the developers of site-specific trauma memorials about how to maintain, preserve and restore desecrated landscapes in order to make them available for pilgrimage and tourism. But why are these spaces so important to us? What is it that we believe about place and space that compels us to build memorials at (or to make pilgrimages to) what Pierre Nora called '*lieux de mémoire*' (1996)? What do we mean when

we say that a landscape is haunted by the events that have transpired on that site? Are we talking about the accrued cultural context, or something that can be discerned from the site itself? And what responsibilities do we have to desecrated locales? Is it best to let 'nature' take its course, gradually degrading and recuperating residual architectures? Or is there value in preserving or reconstructing sadistic spaces and other architectures of atrocity?

This essay is concerned specifically with what happens to places where terrible things have transpired, spaces so marked by atrocity that they are no longer fit for quotidian uses. I explore both violated landscapes and residual architecture, whether ruined or reconstructed. In other words, this is an essay about site-specific memorials. The merits of site-specificity have been extensively articulated in the context of the visual and performing arts to embrace works that are grounded by 'distinct topographical features' of the landscape and/or the community (Kwon 1997:85). Values claimed by artists on behalf of site-specific artworks include congruence of content to context and heightened locational investments.

Can we make similar claims on behalf of site-specific memorials? Are they morally superior or more socially efficacious than their off-site counterparts – museums built at state centres or in the midst of diasporic communities? What is the value of siting the horror exactly where we are standing? For example, at Birkenau in Poland, a sign reads, '*In this barrack, SS doctors murdered newborn babies and their mothers by phenol injections*' (my emphasis). How do we receive this information differently from reading the same text without the locational 'in this barrack'? Surely, it is equally horrifying to learn that 'SS doctors murdered newborn babies and their mothers by phenol injections' whether or not we are standing on the very spot where such trauma was inflicted.

Signs at numerous sites emphasize the 'situated-ness' of the trauma. Mass graves at Murambi in Rwanda are marked alongside a sign that says 'FRENCH SOLDIERS WERE PLAYING VOLLEY HERE' during the genocide.



Alongside the stadium in Kibuye in Rwanda, a sign indicates that MORE THAN 10,000 PEOPLE WERE INHUMED HERE. At Choeung Ek in Cambodia large signs show us that HERE, [sic] WAS THE PLACE WHERE EXECUTIONERS STATIONED PERMANENTLY AT CHOUEUNG EK WORK and HERE WAS THE PLACE WHERE THE KILLING TOOLS ... WERE STORED. Similar signs at Son My in Vietnam draw our attention to THE COCONUT TREE OF MR. PHAM CHINH'S [sic] that 'REMAIN[S] WITH BULLET HOLES IN IT'S [sic] TRUNK AFTER THE MASSACRE' and 'THIS DITCH' that 'REMINDS [us] THAT ON MARCH 16, 1968, THE GIS KILLED 170 VILLAGERS' on this spot. The emphatically locative adverb 'here' and adverbial phrases 'on this spot' or 'in this barrack' draw our attention to the fact that our bodies occupy the specific site of the violence commemorated while the marking of a specific tree places us alongside something still living that also 'witnessed' or 'participated in' the violence.

As a practice, trauma tourism relies on this assumption of a link between location and memory. Arguably, there is no reason why Israeli high school students *need* to travel to Poland in order to recall the Holocaust; they *could* remember from the comfort of their homes or the discomfort of their classrooms. Or they could visit memorial museums, like *Yad va Shem*, that are more

geographically convenient. And yet, each year, millions of tourists cross the globe to stand in concentration camps in Poland and Germany or slave forts in Ghana and Senegal. Their travels to sites of violence take on the attributes of pilgrimage. In 'Why we go to Poland' Jack Kugelmass argues that visits by Jews to death camps constitute a 'secular ritual'. Such tours follow a 'well-trod route'. Participants engage in 'prescribed modes of behavior' and 'in activities that they often avoid in their everyday lives' with 'tremendous potential for generating catharsis'. Kugelmass argues that these tours evoke 'the Holocaust *dramaturgically* ... by going to the site of the event and reconstituting the reality of the time and place' (Kugelmass 1994: 175, my emphasis). Visits by African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans to East Africa are also imbricated in a matrix of ritual and, perhaps even more so than Holocaust tourism, are driven by a desire for redemptive transformation – for healing the social wounds that are the legacy of slavery.

Thinking about trauma tourism in terms of the dramaturgy of a pilgrimage ritual draws our attention to the value of going, with intentionality, to a destination that is linked with a desired transformation. Within a pilgrimage ritual, destinations are not arbitrary. Something that has happened previously at the specific location matches the 'theme' of the travel. In the cases of religious pilgrimage, it is often a sacred occurrence that makes a place into hallowed ground. In the case of trauma tourism, terms are reversed. It is desecration that has made the ground unsuitable for normal quotidian uses. It is often the case that the physical location where an atrocity has occurred is so socially scarred that it is, in effect, removed from circulation. But even when this is not the case, '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' (Clark 2014: 17).

But how does space hold memory? There is no doubt that from the earliest of times and across a wide range of cultures, people have endowed

place with memory, have relied on the landscape to serve mnemonic functions. While I don't want to insist that such understandings of place are purely cultural, I also do not think that scientific knowledge can give us objective answers to these questions. We may say that trauma inheres in place, that there is a dimension of congruence between features of the landscape and narratives invoked – a remaining limb at just the right height for a lynching or a ditch that could be a mass grave. This is also an effect of the discontinuity between these sites and more quotidian ones. There's uncanniness in certain features. The ordinary distorted, made unfamiliar. Geographers like Karen Till talk about spaces being haunted. She uses the phrase 'spectral traces' to refer to the not necessarily visible markings on places that 'can be seen as thresholds through which the living can connect to the voices, imprints and inheritances of those who have gone before' (Till 2010: 7). For Till, the significance of sites is produced through a web of social relations.

The thick walls and underground dungeons of the slave fort ruins at Cape Coast and Elmina could suggest trauma but the white-washed 'castles' (as they are called locally) set against the relentlessly blue sky work against any secure reading. In scale and expenditure, they dwarf most local architecture. Their majestic siting on the ocean adds to the splendour of the buildings whose military history is more evident than their mercenary one. The dungeons that once housed slaves before they were consigned to the sea are now clean spaces suitable for accommodating tourists. Perhaps for that reason, guides point out the stain on the wall indicating the level to which excrement had accumulated. Similarly, the tour of the courtyard at Elmina Castle and Fort included an invitation to stand first in the courtyard where female slaves were brought to be selected for sexual services to the officers and merchants, and then on the balcony from which the selection was made.

These strategies reflect a lack of faith in the affectivity of site. Yet we know from many accounts that visitors to the slave forts report

feeling the presence of ancestors, even to the point of being overcome by those feelings. Seestah Imahküs describes the life-changing experience of being surrounded by naked, sick women with terror-filled faces (1999: 18). Saidiya Hartman, on the other hand, describes the pain of failing to witness anything. She writes, 'I closed my eyes and strained to hear the groans and cries that once echoed in the dungeon but the space was mute' and that each time 'it was the same. I failed to discover anything. No revenants lurked in the dungeon. The hold was stark. No hand embraced mine. No voices rang in my ears' (2007: 116, 118). In keeping with Till's premise, Hartman finds other powers of memory in her research. They do not emerge from the resonance of place but rather from the efficacy of narrative and social relations.

SEARCHING FOR RUINS

Searching for the affectivity of ruins demonstrates the longing that undergirds trauma tourism. Markings that may originally have been utilitarian may continue to function as memorials when populations disappear. All over Europe and North Africa, one finds residual evidence of Jewish populations, in the markers left on buildings and in the names of streets: Jew-Town Road, Jew Street, Rue des Juif, Judegass, Judenstrass, Jlzydowska. Former Jewish ghettos are articulated as tourist destinations in guidebooks for many countries even when there is no tourist infrastructure. Tourists in search of vestiges of Jewish culture visit synagogues wherever Jewish communities have abandoned them, whether through the immediate violence of trauma or through more long-term forms of racist attrition. In Calcutta, India, we followed unlikely sounding directions in Footprint India (Dare and Scott n.d.: 595) to gain access to the Moghan David Synagogue and the Beth El Synagogue. We were directed to visit Nahoum & Sons bakery to request permission to visit the synagogues. There, our permission came in the form of a handwritten note that we carry from the Hindu-dominated city through a Muslim quarter to arrive at

the architectural remains of India's Jews, two 'cavernous' synagogues that once served vibrant communities that have long since emigrated.

Whether Jewish communities (were) dispersed en masse, as occurred during the Spanish Inquisition and the Holocaust, or whether they dispersed more slowly as a result of anti-Semitism and through emigration, their remains linger in minutiae. Photographer Chris Schwarz and historian Jonathan Webber painstakingly document the 'traces of memory' in Polish Galicia (Schwarz and Webber 2006). Looking not for the evidence of the past but rather for its persistence in the present, they document ruined synagogues and abandoned cemeteries, unmarked fields where local farmers avoid plowing former burial sites, fragments of ghetto walls, gravestones repurposed as lintels or pavers and modest hand-painted signs that say only 'please pay respect to this place' that bear witness to the vibrant Polish Jewish community in the 800–900 years preceding the Holocaust. Looking for comparable residues of Greek Cypriots in Turkish Cyprus, Yael Navaro-Yashin suggests that a 'spatial melancholia' is 'exuded by dwellings, objects, and spaces left behind by another community after a cataclysmic war' (2009: 4).

LIVING WITH/IN RUINS

Visits to ruined neighbourhoods where 'victims' still live can be found in the United States, South Africa, Brazil, India and Kenya. While guides (whether walking with a small group or speaking over a bus's public address system) generally emphasize the positive aspects of local culture, what motivates tourists is darker. We may be drawn to Soweto in part because of its significant role in South African history but we come to Dharavi to learn something about how the very, very poorest survive.

Critics of slum tourism protest that it's voyeuristic and unproductive (Odede 2010). Proponents argue that it brings resources into needy communities (Weiner 2008). There is no doubt that slum tourism draws into sharp focus a contradiction at the heart of trauma

tourism. It's not only the discomfort of being the object of a tourist gaze; it's the fact of the trauma (poverty) being an ongoing condition. What is the place of the rhetoric of 'never again' in visits to a site where the trauma we are observing (mostly poverty) is ongoing? Do these visits provide any kind of traction in grappling with economic (often hand-in-hand with racial) inequities? Does 'humanizing' victims help us to move towards a world without systemic violence?

Mumbai, India is one of the newer entries into slum tourism. There, Reality Tours offers trips to '[e]xplore Dharavi, one of Asia's biggest slums' to 'find out how the residents live and work' (Reality Tours n.d.). Inside Dharavi, tours emphasize 'small scale industry' of 'recycling, pottery making, embroidery, baking, soap factory, leather tanning, poppadum-making and many more' (Reality Tours n.d.). In contrast to the depth of analysis in Katherine Boo's moving work of creative non-fiction, *Beyond the Beautiful Forevers* (2012), set among garbage sorters in Annawadi (another Mumbai slum), my quick view of Dharavi's 'recycling industry' during my tour was superficial. Whereas Boo underscores the precariousness of the lives of all the garbage workers, Reality Tours' guides highlight opportunity and industriousness. (Even the difference on the valences of the words 'garbage' and 'recycling' gets at these alternate orientations.) On the other hand, my experience of reading Boo's prose was anchored by my tour of Dharavi five years earlier. Looking back to the questions I posed earlier about the values of travelling to a trauma site in order to reflect on it, I will stipulate that my tour of Dharavi supplied affect for what would otherwise remain an abstracted reading experience.

PALIMPSESTS

A striking dimension of the Argentine and Chilean torture centres is also their imbrication in neighbourhoods. Like the visits to neighbourhoods in states of ongoing ruination, tours to the former clandestine torture centres in Argentina and Chile remind us that many of

these facilities were embedded in communities. From the grounds of the ESMA (*Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada*) complex in Argentina, one is aware of the many surrounding high-rise apartment buildings with views directly into the military installation. The detention centre at Olimpo was built into an existing Buenos Aires neighbourhood garage; the torture centre *José Domingo Cañas* in Santiago, Chile was formerly a home in a residential neighbourhood; and *Centro de tortura Londres*, also in Santiago, was in a downtown row house. Chile's *Villa Grimaldi* was a suburban restaurant and a meeting place for intellectuals and artists before it was surrendered to the army to serve as a torture centre. A tourist may well wonder how life as usual proceeded alongside the extreme violations of human rights that were enacted in these and other 'community-based' torture centres. Didn't neighbours notice that something was amiss? But in keeping with Pedro Matta's reflections on the purpose of releasing torture victims back into society as deterrents, the placement of torture centres within communities may well have served to instil repressive self-regulation on the part of ordinary citizens (Matta 2009).

All of these torture centres are buildings repurposed from other societal functions: schools, police stations, private homes. A tourist encounters and responds to affective dimensions of all three layers: the original function prior to the abuse, the specific architectures of atrocity, and the memorial installation. At *Tuol Sleng* in Cambodia, one sees a school, which has a certain kind of disciplinary architecture but also very positive association; certainly the red and white linoleum tile would never have been installed for any of the subsequent deployments. Layered over and built into the school are structures that enabled incarceration and torture: barred windows and brick partitions, and various instruments of torture. Framing both of those for visitors are museum exhibition strategies and memorial devices: vitrines, explanatory texts, documentary photographs, commemorative gestures.

In the same way, at *Villa Grimaldi* one can easily read the pleasant ground of an estate, with spaces for gardens and farming and even a swimming pool. Most evidence of trauma was dismantled long before the memorial was established; in its place, commemorative devices (and guides) do the work of conjuring for us the ephemeral memories of confinement and torture. New plantings, monuments and signs frame the current role of the space as a memorial. While there is a purpose-built genocide centre at Murambi in Rwanda, it's on the grounds of a technical school that subsequently served as a French military camp. Classrooms are filled with palettes of limed cadavers. This pattern is evident at any of these multifunction spaces: memorial layered over torture centre layered over school, and so forth.

Prison memorials are palimpsests. In these cases we may see the intensification of affect as one trauma overwrites another, as space constructed for one violent purpose is redeployed. While these buildings were constructed for the purpose of internment, they may have been used by more than one regime. Hỏa Lò Prison in Vietnam was built and used first by French colonists but then taken over by the North Vietnamese. The same cell must therefore communicate to visitors unjust/extreme conditions in one era and just/humane conditions in another. The same is true for Seodaemun Prison History Hall (former prison and museum) in South Korea that commemorates the violations of the Japanese occupation but then skips over the subsequent forty years during which the prison was used by the South Korean government before it became a museum.

At the slave castles (where a Dutch-built fort was used by the English in the slave trade and then retrofitted with rudimentary tourist infrastructure), the palimpsestic arrangement takes on a further layer with the intrusions of the contemporary quotidian. As we wait for our tour to begin, we listen to the final plays of the World Cup game that all the guides are watching. Looking beyond the sign that reads 'SLAVE EXIT TO WAITING BOATS', through the 'DOOR OF

NO RETURN' or out any window and over any parapet of the castle, we see the small fishing boats and the basic housing of this relatively poor economy. In other words, we are confronted with the contemporary conditions in Africa at the same time as we consider its complex history.

An overlay of past and present function also takes place throughout Chile and Argentina at police stations and military installations that continue to operate in venues that served as torture centres during the periods of dictatorship and state-sponsored terrorism. Activists are working to mark violations of human rights in the very same buildings where police and military enforce the law on behalf of newer, democratically elected, governments. The often unvoiced question regarding these sites is the extent to which a continuity of personnel complements the continuity of venue.

These palimpsests at memorials ask visitors to reconcile the most extreme behaviours (torture and murder) with the everyday (education, farming, car repair). The divergent associations push us to think about trauma as something that happens not only far away and in alien environments but also close to home in familiar spaces.

SPACE AND PLACE

Memory is practised through space and place. Michel de Certeau and Yi-Fu Tuan offer us inverse definitions of these terms, both of which have been taken up by many subsequent scholars. For Tuan, space is undifferentiated territory while place has identity and aura (2001). Tuan's space is abstract, while his place is endowed with values. De Certeau is interested in the same differentiation but he reverses the terms. He uses place (*lieu*) to mean location while space (*espace*) is contextual and practised (de Certeau 1988:117–18). For de Certeau, places are stable but spaces are transformed by stories. Let's add to this mix Pierre Nora's terms '*lieux*' (sites) and '*milieux*' (real environs) that he uses to differentiate between locations that are merely marked and those that are activated by collective memory (Nora and Kritzman 1996:7).

De Certeau, Tuan and Nora all place great importance on the difference between thin and thick landscapes, landscapes that are mute and those that are legible; all three would agree that it is human narrative, rather than features of the landscape, that make this difference. All three would also agree that the terms are mutually produced, that neither is a meaningful construct without reference to the other.

For Tuan, '[w]hat begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value' (2001:6). While Tuan insists that there is a biological basis for our relationship to our environment that is shared by non-human animals ('places are centers of felt value where biological needs, such as those for food, water, rest, and procreation, are satisfied'), he also suggests that 'people also respond to space and place in complicated ways that are inconceivable in the animal world' (4). For Tuan, humans have 'exceptionally refined capacity for symbolization'; we are beings who 'attach meaning to and organize space and place' (4). We exercise our capacity by turning undifferentiated space into specific place. 'Space is transformed into place as it acquires definition and meaning' (36). 'When space feels thoroughly familiar to us', Tuan claims. 'it has become place' (73).

Nora agrees that '[m]emory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects' (2006:9). But while de Certeau and Tuan imagine a cultural context of sites that is vital and vibrant, Nora famously argues that we no longer have organic communal recollection and that these have been replaced with historical imperatives. He clarifies this distinction in the negative – 'If we had been able to live within memory, we would not have needed to consecrate *lieux de mémoire*' (8). '*Lieux de mémoire* originate with the sense that there is no spontaneous memory, that we must deliberately create archives, maintain anniversaries, organize celebrations, pronounce eulogies, and notarize bills because such activities no longer occur naturally' (2). For Nora, we must engage in a process of 'rememoration' (16) as a site 'becomes a *lieu de*

mémoire only if the imagination invests it with a symbolic aura' (4).

While de Certeau confirms that there is a 'spatial acting-out of the place' (de Certeau 1988:88) (remember that the terms are reversed), he elaborates that the process is not a straightforward one. Rather,

[p]laces are fragmentary and inward-turning histories, pasts that others are not allowed to read, accumulated times that can be unfolded but like stories held in reserve, remaining in an enigmatic state, symbolizations encysted in the pain or pleasure of the body. (de Certeau 1988:108)

According to de Certeau, '[t]here is no place that is not haunted by many different spirits hidden there in silence, spirits one can invoke or not' (108) but 't]he surface of this order is everywhere punched and torn open by ellipses, drifts, and leaks in meaning: it is a sieve order' (107). Indeed for de Certeau, 'it is the very definition of a place, in fact, that is composed by these series of displacements and effects among the fragmented strata that form it and that it plays on these moving layers' (108).

Ruins are palimpsests, texts that have been overwritten. Medieval scholars are able to decipher prior ancient uses of parchment, reading through subsequent deployments. At trauma memorials, with so many affective dimensions at play, it's not necessarily legible which layer is impacting the viewer. We are challenged to negotiate their competing claims on our emotions. Sometimes, the challenge is to reconcile competing claims (sunny days, spectacular landscapes and generous hosts with horrific histories of atrocity). At other times, the challenge is to differentiate multiple claims that too neatly coincide. For example, at Tuol Sleng, are we responding to the disciplinary quality of educational architecture or to that of prisons? To what extent can these be re-oriented by didactic panels and other museum strategies? In the Kraków cemetery, can I possibly distinguish between the funereal qualities of any cemetery, the chaos of the broken and returned headstones and the impact on me of the cold and dismal weather?

Far from being overdetermined and fixed as a monolithic narrative, the meanings of memory sites are made ambiguous by the multiple forces at play. Even in circumstances where the cultural contexts are vigorous, the legibility and meaning of a site are vulnerable. From the palimpsestic layering of historical and contemporary functions to the dispersal of many traumas, to diverse belief systems regarding persistence and revenants, the affective capacity of memorials is always a product of tensions and negotiations between competing forces. Using language that resonates with Jacques Derrida's suspensive and spectral notion of deconstruction, Nora confirms that 'the *lieu de memoire* is double: a site of excess closed upon itself, concentrated in its own name, but also forever open to a full range of possible significations' (Nora 1989:24).

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