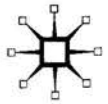

MEMORY AND POSTWAR MEMORIALS

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28. For other aspects of evidence at memorial sites and museums, see Laurie Beth Clark's comments in chapter 8.
29. Based on the author's interview with the public programming coordinator, July 5, 2011.
30. Their removal was rationalized as a public health precaution after the outbreak of the bubonic plague at docks where Xhosa were heavily employed. For more about this "sanitation syndrome," see Vivian Bickford-Smith, "Mapping Cape Town: From Slavery to Apartheid," in *Lost Communities, Living Memories: Remembering Forced Removals in Cape Town*, ed. Sean Field (Cape Town: David Philip, 2001), 15–28.
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Chapter Eight

Mnemonic Objects: Forensic and Rhetorical Practices in Memorial Culture

Laurie Beth Clark

Some of the best-known elements of memory culture (and some of the most infamous) are the objects—hair and shoes at Auschwitz, clocks and watches stopped at the time of the blast at Hiroshima (8:15) and Nagasaki (11:02), bones in Rwanda and Cambodia. We have a special relationship with objects in that they inhabit three-dimensional space with us. Even when we are not allowed to touch them, we experience them with a kind of sympathetic kinesthesia. We translate data that we take in with our eyes into imagined touch. We often use objects as mnemonic devices. We trust that they will serve as place holders for things we want to recall and we believe that they have the capacity to call up memories in others. Objects are familiar to us and they are our familiars, in the sense of belonging to our households. They are on close terms with us. Even when they are representatives of violence, we regard objects with presumption because they are lodged in the most ordinary nooks and crannies of our lives. This chapter explores the kinds of objects that can be found at memorial sites, objects that are deliberately deployed toward the project of making memory. It relies on my own field work in 21 countries, with examples from locations in Europe, Asia, Africa, and North and South America that commemorate a wide range of violent histories: genocide, slavery, apartheid, nuclear war, torture, and state-sanctioned "disappearance." I am interested in the challenges posed by the acquisition, management, and display of artifacts and the tensions exposed through their deployment. I begin with a discussion of the ways that memorials add objects to their collections, but the way objects work as components of memorials is not necessarily aligned with their provenance. Rather, objects function in heterogeneous and contested ways.

Memorial culture is comprised of such contestation and, I would argue, is best served when contradictions are left exposed. In the use of objects as memorial devices a fundamental tension emerges between a forensic impulse (which claims objects as evidentiary) and a rhetorical effect (whereby objects stand in for the dead or disappeared). Moreover, the pleasantly nostalgic dimension of many historical artifacts is incongruous with the somber expectation that they represent abjected human populations. Bones and cadavers present a limit case in the discussion of mnemonic objects. That human remains can be analyzed as objects is an effect of the atrocities that have taken place at sites of violence; perpetrators of genocide—not the curators of memorials—objectify humans and treat body parts as industrial materials. A consideration of human remains, whether in excess or in absentia, demonstrates the extent to which object-based memorials, far from answering questions about the violences they recall, are most effective at showing us what we cannot fully know or understand.

Acquisition

Some trauma memorials have a plethora of objects and some have very few. To a certain extent we can account for this difference by the historical distance from the violence commemorated. That the West African slave forts have no objects to speak of certainly is due in part to the passage of more than 100 years between the abolition of slavery in the Americas and the emergence of memory tourism in the second half of the twentieth century. But a paucity of object-based memory culture may also reflect economic circumstances, both the economic abjection of slavery itself and the endemic poverty of contemporary West Africa. The volume of objects at a memorial may reflect specific conditions of the violence commemorated. The Rwandan genocide befell a comparably impoverished nation. Both victims and perpetrators may have had limited personal belongings.[1] But the manner of the killings also meant that there was no direct association between the deaths and any of the victims' possessions, other than perhaps their clothes and rosaries (both of which figure prominently in the memorials), whereas the volume of objects at the European camps is literally a product of the extermination practices, which included industrial harvesting of not only the personal effects of prisoners but also hair. The dearth of artifacts in most of the South American memorials may reflect the structure of the disappearances—that victims were removed from the context of their possessions—but emptiness at these memorials is also an effective and affective metaphor for disappearance.

By contrast, the large volume of objects at memory museums in Japan, which can be attributed in part to an exhibition strategy of relentless

evidence, also reflects another common feature of memorials: they are repositories for residual objects we do not otherwise know how to manage. This is true of both objects that inflict violence (weapons and instruments of torture) and objects that suffer/reflect violence (scarred, melted household goods). The War Remnants Museum in Saigon receives unsolicited artifacts from veterans of the American war, including items like the Chapstick used by a serviceman during his tour of duty. It also appears to be the final resting place for weapons of all sorts, armaments used by both Vietnamese armies (North and South) and items captured from or left behind by the United States. The collection at the Cambodia Landmine Museum originally accrued through Aki Ra's Relief Foundation, which deactivates mines. In Rwanda and Cambodia memorials are the designated delivery site for the skulls and bones that are routinely uncovered by farmers and others who have reason to dig.

Visitors also regularly leave mementoes at memorials that must then be managed by museum authorities. School groups traveling to Hiroshima and Nagasaki carry wreaths of paper cranes that are received and housed in special displays. In the days following 9/11 firefighters from all over the country who were tourists in Las Vegas left t-shirts at the New York New York hotel; these are now in permanent display cases. Tourists arrive at the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, DC or at the Oklahoma City Memorial and Museum with items they intend to leave behind, including American flags, stuffed animals, license plates, and flowers. The website of "[t]he 9/11 Memorial welcomes visitors bringing tribute items to the Memorial" and tells us that "[n]on-perishable items will be collected, reviewed, and kept at the discretion of the Memorial Museum curatorial staff."[2] In addition, some museums actively solicit tokens of the victims from their families, as was done for all 168 people who died at the Murrow Building in Oklahoma City. Over and above such voluntary donations museums and site-specific memorials may inherit archives associated with the violence they commemorate or the physical sites they occupy, and they may also systematically collect. The shoes at Auschwitz may have been recovered on site, but those at the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC certainly were not. This raises a set of questions about the market for mementoes of evil. It is unlikely that Jewish hair or Rwandan bones are auctioned, but that is exactly how the Farmington Hills Holocaust Memorial Center bought their box car, which "is believed to be one of the last in existence."[3] To build more narratively comprehensive collections, museums may select from a large reserve of inherited artifacts or they may strategically purchase representative items. A visitor does not necessarily consider, when contemplating victims' personal possessions, instruments of torture, or human remains, the question of who stockpiles horrific artifacts and who benefits from the

acquisition process. What ethical considerations apply when purchasing mementoes of trauma? How does the relative good of taking such memorabilia out of offending hands balance with the relative bad of contributing to such a market? How does verifying the authenticity of an object also participate in revalorizing the trauma?

Finally, some objects on display are blatantly, deliberately, casually, or necessarily inauthentic. They may be representative objects from a comparable period serving as surrogates or they may be reconstructions. The Jewish Museum in Berlin tells us in one exhibit about the pre-Holocaust life of a survivor that "[s]elected objects which were a fixed component of her life are given a place in the exhibition's archive shelves." The objects are representative illustrations of articles mentioned in the text rather than surviving mementoes: a pile of firewood, a period typewriter, a stethoscope. Dachau reconstructed bunkers in the prisoner barracks. The Apartheid Museum uses new barbed wire as an evocative element in the display, but the rusting wire at Birkenau is original. As it decomposes, curators face ethical dilemmas when deciding whether to invest resources to remake violent histories.

Nostalgia

It is common for objects to be used to recall a way of life that was lost through a trauma. In this the Jewish Museum in Berlin is paradigmatic. Its permanent exhibition chronicles "Two Millenia of German Jewish History," presenting "well-known historical events ... alongside the fates of individuals and families."[4] Framed by original and replicated documents, the exhibit uses objects to evoke elements of both secular and religious life with a mix of Judaica. Each object provides an object lesson: a teachable moment with regard to the rites and the rights of Jews over time. The display characterizes Jews both as unique (observing rituals, collecting for specific charities) and as just like everyone else (attending the theater, taking and giving piano lessons). The objects show that Jews were the source of some of the items we recognize as German (Levis) and that common German items were re-made for Jewish consumption (kosher Gummi bears). One of the difficulties presented by chronological histories of violence is that, in attempting to explain the context and causes, they may inadvertently suggest that violence was an inevitable outcome of a particular historical trajectory. When the Holocaust is the climactic moment of an exhibit (as it is in most Holocaust museums), what came before figures as prologue, what comes after as epilogue. In other words, narrativizing objects as representatives of trauma can be reductive. Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett articulated this dilemma as one of the great challenges in her role as academic

curator of the core exhibit for the new Museum of the History of the Polish Jews in Warsaw (which opened in 2013).[5] In its mission to emphasize "the rich civilization they [Polish Jews] created over the course of almost 1000 years" rather than its demise, the Polish museum hopes to "contribute to the formation of modern individual and collective identities amongst Poles and Jews, Europe and the world."[6]

There is also a dimension of nostalgia at work in the display of objects to invoke that which has been lost. Svetlana Boym defines nostalgia as "a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed." According to her, "[n]ostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy."[7] Articulations of multiple generations of anti-Semitism notwithstanding, exhibits of Jewish life prior to the Holocaust are romanticized through their representative objects. Since it is more likely for a museum to have an artifact from a bourgeois family than an impoverished one (both because these families would have had more objects and were in a better position to save or recover those objects), the economic hardships of life before violence may be less visible. Moreover, object-based displays that are created to emphasize the richness of a culture, thereby underscoring the magnitude of its loss, exaggerate density and uniformity in a culture that was no doubt differentially practiced.

Highly invested in nostalgia, the District Six Museum in Cape Town documents the 1981 forced removal to outlying townships of residents of a culturally diverse, predominantly Coloured community in central Cape Town. It is full of sentimental objects to reminisce about a bygone way of life: toys and games, hula hoops, a checkers set, period cosmetics, barber tools, and a period bubble hair dryer. In their effort to tell a convincing story about the value of what was lost, District Six, with its almost relentlessly celebratory perspective, nearly overlooks the hardships of life prior to displacement.[8] It is revealing that a diorama at the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria, which bemoans the plights and celebrates the heroism of Afrikaners, includes the same kind of everyday items recalling a bygone way of life at a site with diametrically opposed political values. Alongside a covered wagon the Voortrekker features not only a bowl, a lantern, a fishing pole, and a camp chair, all authentic objects, but also "fake" ones such as dough, an egg, and a tree. Realizing that the same kinds of everyday objects can serve a variety of political perspectives toward similar ends (romanticizing the good old days) makes clear just how reductive a force nostalgia can be. Compare this with the three museums in Cape Town (Holocaust Centre, Apartheid Museum, and District Six Museum) that have benches painted with the words "Europeans only. Slegs blankes." The Holocaust Centre pairs theirs with a wall-size photo of a German bench prohibiting Jews. Here, at least, some effort is made to

attend to the politics of objects, to the ways in which they participate in the demarcation of space and to the persistence of repressive strategies across cultural contexts.

Though it seems less likely that we would romanticize life *during* violence than life before it, displays of survival are also highly nostalgic. This is particularly true for artifacts that recall activities of which people are proud, such as being a member of the resistance. The Museum of Danish Resistance (Frihedsmuseet) in Copenhagen opened in 1957 to illustrate "how the resistance movement developed within the ever-changing framework provided by Danish society."[9] The current exhibit, installed in 1995, is full of memorabilia of life during occupation. Many of the items relate to the publication of underground newspapers and other resistance literature, including several items with retro appeal like vintage printing presses and a stunning rusted typewriter. Looking at these items invites us to identify with their users and to feel good about them and ourselves by imagining heroic behavior in difficult circumstances. The Warsaw Rising Museum (Muzeum Powstania Warszawskiego) is another nostalgia-laden environment. It uses a mix of actual artifacts (canteens, rucksacks, metal helmets) and reconstructed ones (burlap sandbags, cobblestones) to celebrate Polish resistance to Nazi and communist occupations. Strikingly similar types of objects appear in Montevideo's Museo de la Memoria: printing presses, protest placards, prison uniforms, and laminated badges with images of the disappeared that say "Madres de Uruguayos Desaparacios en Argentina" (mothers of the disappeared Uruguayans in Argentina). There are also emblems of life in exile: cancelled Uruguayan passports and passports from countries where dissidents took refuge, as well as ephemera documenting political participation by expatriates overseas.

Less predictable still, the hardship of survival during difficult times also has a nostalgic dimension. We may celebrate ingenuity or even sacrifice. At Showa-kan, whose brochure proclaims that "we display the life of Japanese during and after World War II," exhibits recall the "hardship of citizens' lives" during the war years.[10] In displays designated to represent phases of parting with family, family life, hardship of school children, air raids, end of war, and starting afresh, there are glass cases filled with ordinary items with retro-appeal (a record player for LPs, baseball gear, children's text books), as well as items more specifically representative of "making do" (an iron made of ceramic to compensate for metal shortages during the war, alternative foods eaten due to scarcity of rice). Similarly in Denmark we see an aluminum kettle used in place of a gas oven and a pair of gloves knitted with a nail. In Uruguay, Denmark, Chile, South Africa, and Poland, there are also displays of prisoner art. With limited resources

prisoners made sculptures from chewed bread, carved soap, and folded blankets. Such items are important tokens of creativity under duress.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life* Michel de Certeau valorizes the ways in which ordinary citizens creatively remake culture from given materials.[11] In this sense creative survival during war time, while inspirational, is evidence of resilience rather than trauma. This celebration of creative austerity is amplified for contemporary spectators from North America and Europe where the hipness of DIY culture now makes an art form of all sorts of strategies for living partially off the grid. Doing more with less is not a cause for regret or sympathy but rather regarded as a source of inspiration. Furthermore, contemporary popular media makes a game of surviving, as in the eponymous television show and many others like it, where people compete to live in reduced circumstances. There is such an extensive contemporary market for clever alternatives for cooking, sleeping, and sanitation away from "civilization" that we may blur volitional survivalism with compulsory subsistence. When we imagine surviving, it looks like fun and it looks much better than the alternative—meaning not surviving. Moreover, when we fetishize (fixate on) survival, we always identify with those who lived to tell the story rather than those who perished.

The present-day South African celebration of the Rainbow Nation removes the adversity from the diversity. Though the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg is explicit in its discussion of the violence in South Africa's past, it segregates political exhibits from cultural ones. The cultural displays include shadow box portraits of the ancestors of all the many kinds of people that make up the new South Africa. In these we find residual elements of the mundane: a pipe, a shoe shine kit with polish and brush, a wood carving done by a carpenter, a bible, an iron, glasses, and a bell belonging to a domestic worker and tenant farmer. There is a comparable distancing of hardship from cultural difference in Poland's philo-Semitic district in Kraków (and other restaurants scattered throughout eastern Europe) where decorations recall vanished cultures with sewing machines, lace table cloths, menorahs, and musical instruments. While these objects could have been in use immediately prior to the Second World War, the paintings of *rebbes* and students and Hasidic dancers make clear that the culture being recalled is anachronistically nineteenth century.[12]

Evidence

Not all the objects at memorials belonged to victim populations. Some were wielded by perpetrators. In this category weapons are by far the most common. There are extensive displays of weapons at several trauma memorials, and it is not always clearly delineated when a museum intends to

celebrate the weapons and when it means to lament them. The perspective of the Cambodia Landmine Museum is never in doubt as the piles of rusting munitions (bombs, cartridges, missiles, machine guns, blast mines, etc.) are surrounded by prolific text panels and horrific photographs, all proclaiming the hazardous consequences of their deployment. But at a site like the War Remnants Museum in Saigon, the mix of seized military equipment including planes and tanks, jars with fetuses deformed by dioxin, "tiger cages" for housing political prisoners, and "a military telephone set transformed into a torture instrument which can discharge electric shock to the tortured," as well as the above-mentioned personal memorabilia returned by American servicemen, make it almost impossible to fix the museum's point of view. As a result, different objects in the museum are available to be read by differently positioned visitors as advocating different perspectives on militarization.

Weapons displays are inherently unstable in their meanings. Weapons, even when highly contextualized, can never quite escape being fetishized. Guns and larger weapons are objects of irrational reverence or obsessive devotion. And while the Yushukan Military and War Museum in Tokyo and the War Memorial of Korea in Seoul may seem unabashedly celebratory of warfare, with dozens of fighter planes on display at the former and hundreds of military vehicles at the latter, both include representations of their native populations as victims as well as victors. Whenever a museum invests in a whole vehicle, it becomes a spectacle. This is as true of boxcars, which are a fixture of Holocaust museums in the United States, as it is of the Casspir (a large armored personnel carrier used for 30 years by police) on display at the Apartheid Museum in South Africa. In contrast, munitions rarely find a place in displays at Holocaust memorials in Europe or abroad (they would seem irreverent in this victim-centric context), but Dachau has crematoria that look almost like bread ovens and Majdanek has a room full of Zyklon B gas canisters used to poison victims.

Any nostalgic function seems disrupted by the palimpsest on display at Hòa Lò Prison Historic Vestige. Here the stabilizing and delimiting forces of nostalgia are undermined by the multiple conflicting histories represented. The prison, which was built by the French (1896) on the site of a ceramic production village (represented in the museum by three white ceramic bowls), and then subsequently used by the Japanese and the Vietnamese, contains artifacts of all periods. There are two guillotines, a "water basin French secret service agents used ... to torture prisoners before trial," and a sewer door (a big chunk of concrete) with a label indicating that in 1945 "over 100 political prisoners creeped [*sic*] through the underground sewer door ... to ... participate in the anti-Japanese movement and general insurrection." Inside the prison cells actual shackles are

used to secure sculpted figures, placing the objects not only into an explicit narrative context but also displacing them out of the realm of artifact and into the realm of diorama. The best-known objects here are "souvenirs" of John McCain's captivity, but there are also other prisoner artifacts: a shirt, black dress shoes, tennis shoes, bocce balls, sandals, a tea pot, a toothbrush, a shaving brush, and a razor. This museum faces the tough challenge of communicating that the awful space used by the French to house Vietnamese prisoners was a humane space when the Vietnamese housed American prisoners. The museum falls back on wall panels and distributed brochures to secure meaning, claiming that "American pilots suffered no revenge once they were captured and detained. Instead they were well treated with adequate food, clothing and shelter," but as already suggested, an object's identificatory tug may undermine a text's cerebral appeal. A paradox of objects on display is that they claim to provide "material proof of crimes" (as at Auschwitz), yet in fact objects-as-evidence are largely illegible without text. Just as we cannot on our own necessarily differentiate crematoria from bread ovens or shower heads from poison gas dispensers at a concentration camp, so too must the cane on the desk at Hòa Lò be identified for us as a torture device rather than a walking stick.

This instability regarding the meaning of weapons is somewhat less true of instruments of torture, though anxiety about how they may be read leads to some odd display strategies. Most peculiar is the exhibit of torture instruments at Constitution Hill in Johannesburg. The apparatus are enclosed in a wooden box that nearly fills a room of the old prison. A grid of 16 sliding panels is designed to accommodate spectators of various heights; these can be slid open to allow a limited view of a display of restraints and devices for inflicting pain. Ostensibly meant to prepare the casual spectator for these "shocking" implements, the actual effect is more like a peep show. In this sense the objects are eroticized by the very exhibition context that seeks to communicate their abuse.[13] Not all displays of torture instruments are so sensationalized. At the Danish Resistance Museum, the Gestapo's whip, pliers, and chain used to subdue prisoners are part of the same display as equipment for tapping telephones. At Toul Sleng, sets of shackles, some with receptacles for multiple prisoners (up to 20 slots for ankles), can be found in glass-fronted display cabinets alongside skulls, shovels, and clothes. An adjacent room contains devices for water boarding and torture racks. But the matter-of-fact displays in the classrooms of this school-turned-torture center-turned-museum are most efficacious. Each of a dozen classrooms contains a set of almost identical equipment: a metal bed frame, an ammo box, and shackles made of rebar. On the wall of each room is a photograph taken in what appears to be that same room of a dead or unconscious prisoner locked on the bed with the

shackles. Not just the pictures themselves are disturbing (which they are), but rather the combination of photo, space, and objects (Figure 8.1). The match of the floor tiles from the ones we stand on to the ones in the photograph places us within the site of torture, and the fact that we share the space with the instruments pictured asks us to position ourselves in relation to the events portrayed. The functioning of objects as our familiars described above works most strongly in this context. We are interpellated by the scene.

Metonymy

The museums at Hiroshima and Nagasaki take an inverse approach in their object displays, with a focus on showing evidence of violence by using objects that demonstrate the impact of the weapons, rather than the weapons themselves. At Nagasaki a sign reads "If you would know the horrors of war, behold what remains." Exhibits include melted items (coins, bottles, porcelain cups, ceramic bowls, fountain pens, Buddha statues, a school lunch box), bamboo with scars from the heat rays, a piece of a wood with a permanent shadow of leaves, charred barley, and the well-known clocks stopped at the moment of the blast. It seems like the goal of these displays is not only to demonstrate that there was a blast and that it was destructive,

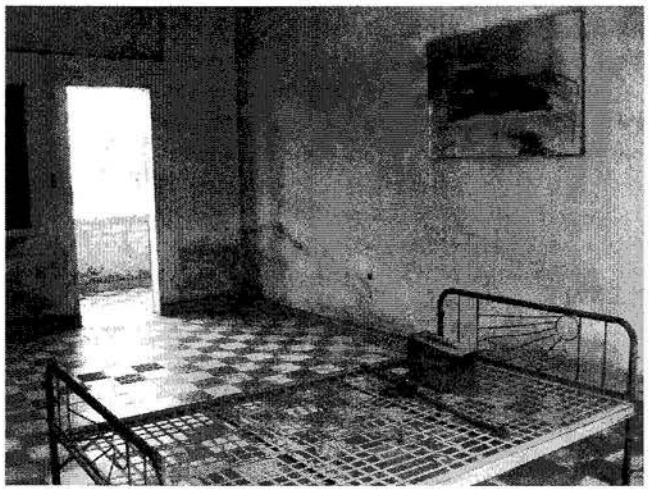

Figure 8.1 At Toul Sleng (Cambodia) classrooms contain torture equipment and photographs taken in those same rooms of dead or unconscious prisoners.
Source: © Clark Peterson.

but also that it touched every part of ordinary life. Most items are in glass vitrines, but a few are installed to accommodate the aforementioned desire to touch, such as roof tiles "deformed or partially melted and fused by the extreme heat." The displays are far more graphic and explicit than anywhere else in the world: actual body parts, such as a preserved tongue with purpura (purple spots caused by internal bleeding), hair that fell out due to radiation, and nails and skin identified as belonging to a junior high school student. There is a scientistic quality to these displays, which include machinery for measuring radiation and models of keloid scars. I call these displays procedural because they seem to be systematically lining up an overwhelming volume of incontrovertible evidence toward an indictment of the perpetrator, or short of that, ensuring that no one can claim these events did not occur or try to minimize their horror.

Some of the buildings at Auschwitz also make forensic claims, such as the one labeled "*Rzeczowe dowody zbrodni.* Material proofs of crimes," where we find mounds of personal artifacts. There is a pile of wicker picnic baskets and suitcases on which Jewish stars, names, and sometimes short numbers have been written in white paint. Coupled with the illustration in a proxemic hall of "robbing new arrivals of their property," these suitcases invite me to imagine Jews leaving home with food and other supplies for train travel. I remember wondering whether the mound of white, blue, and red enamel cups were items used in transit or after arrival. There are piles of eyeglasses and endless mounds of shoes. The prayer shawls (*tallitim*) are hung more respectfully, but the crutches and prosthetic limbs are left in a noticeably chaotic jumble. This curatorial choice draws attention to the point I want to argue here: such objects are not so much evidence of crimes committed as they are evidence of people discarded. In other words the objects function as metonyms, standing in for the victims. The former concentration camp at Majdanek goes the farthest in the use of metonymic objects. One enormous structure is devoted to vertical and horizontal wire grids filled with shoes (Figure 8.2). The height of the units and the way the cages are spaced with aisles between them makes them look like library stacks, an efficient way to compress a great volume of material. The cases are just above human height and the spaces between them are narrow, so the warehouse is dominated by these relics. Although the shoes represent only a fraction of the victims—the items remaining in the warehouse at the time of liberation—their overwhelming numbers point to the scale of the crime.[14]

Many Rwandan memorials also have piles of clothes, sometimes alongside bags of bones awaiting burial. Nyamata Church, one of the most effective memorials I encountered, contains long rudimentary benches made of wood, metal, or brick in a v-formation that once served as church pews. These benches are now filled with clothing draped over all possible seating,

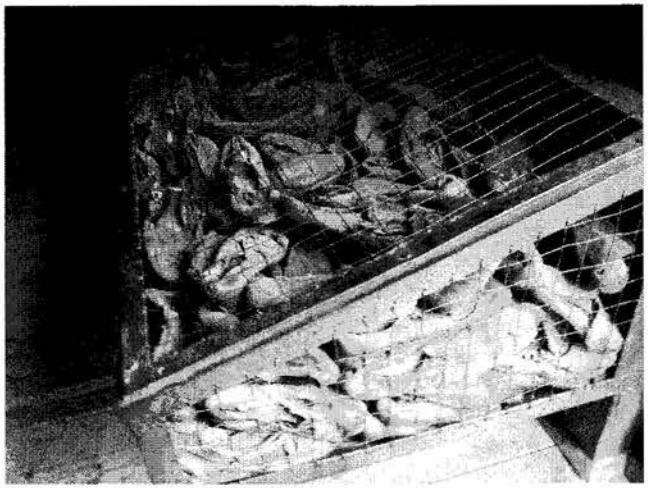

Figure 8.2 These shoes were photographed at Majdanek (Poland) where there is a large building that contains nothing but wire cages filled with shoes.
Source: © Clark Peterson.

and there are additional mounds of clothes on the floor surrounding the altar and in other open spaces (Figure 8.3). Their volume makes clear that these are the clothes of far more people than could have been seated in the congregation. Their metonymic function is to stand in for the many people who crammed in to the church for asylum, only to be murdered on site. At the end of one row a single hat that sits on top of the draped clothes provides a focal point to singularize a mass of death. Over and above its striking visuality this use of objects at Nyamata disrupts any practical use of the church for ordinary worship. Neither the clothes nor the pews can be integrated into a business-as-usual rhetoric.

Shin's tricycle is one of the best-known metonymic objects of trauma culture. Housed in a glass vitrine at the eye level of a child, it is a paradigmatically scarred object. Its story is chronicled in a children's book with global distribution, and the object is the main attraction for many visitors to the Peace Museum at Hiroshima. Initially buried by Shin's father along with the three-year old who was riding it at the moment the atomic bomb fell on Hiroshima, the tricycle was subsequently exhumed to be part of the display when the museum was constructed. The book's author notes that this "battered tricycle serves as a reminder of all the young victims that tragic day."[15] Items like Shin's tricycle perform their abjection, that is to say their ruined-ness, in the service of memory culture, standing in

Figure 8.3 The church benches at Nyamata (Rwanda) are filled with the clothes of the many people who sought asylum there only to be murdered on site.
Source: © Clark Peterson.

for the traumatized and disappeared bodies of their owners. Metonymy is a figure of speech in which a thing (or a concept) is used to stand in for something with which it is closely associated. In the simplest sense, then, clothing and personal artifacts meet the definition of metonymy in that they are closely associated with victims. Metonymy is sometimes considered a lower rhetorical form because metaphor is expansive and original, whereas metonymy is literal and conventional. But metonymy may be the better choice for memorials exactly because it is delimited. By offering a smaller part of an unthinkable trauma, a metonym allows us to consider something which might otherwise prove overwhelming. Not only does its literalism remove undue burden from the beholder, it also restricts the range of possible associations, thereby keeping museumgoers on task in their contemplation of violence. Moreover, because they work through established conventions, metonymic structures fit with other practices of repeating mnemonic tropes across cultural contexts.

Synecdoche

The most obviously metonymic items at sites of violence are the human remains in Cambodia and Rwanda. In fact, the bones are a unique subset of the metonym, called synecdoche, in which a part stands for the

whole. If metonymy is more literal than metaphor, then synecdoche is the most literal of all. But far from provoking a narrow range of responses, the bones—human beings made into objects through violence—have yielded the most debate, dialogue, and discourse.

Cheung Ek Memorial (better known as the Killing Fields) is dominated by a tall stupa filled with shelves of skulls. Visitors are directed as to how to behave and offered incense to burn. People disregard these cues and move in close with their cameras but they do talk in hushed voices as they do so. Surrounding the stupa, the balance of the Killing Fields are park-like with signs that warn the visitor not to walk through mass graves and periodic text panels, some of which are linked to site-specific displays. These include a glass case with the dimensions of a fish tank containing "[p]ieces of bones remaining after excavation in 1980," a small shrine with a few bones on it, and some neatly stacked bones in what looks like an excavated grave. These small piles resemble bones found elsewhere in Cambodia, at local shrines such as Kok Sang and Wat Sauphy, sometimes roughly piled and sometimes neatly stacked with femurs and similarly shaped pieces below and skulls above. In all there are 81 of these local memorials, as counted by the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-CAM), whose "main work is to collect, document, and catalogue materials related to the Khmer Rouge regime."[16] On the whole there are not as many human remains on view in Cambodia as one would imagine, given the international attention they receive, and less than in Rwanda, though many more people perished. The few skulls at Toul Sleng are placed alongside a long discussion of the debate regarding whether or not to display them. Tensions emerge between an evidentiary imperative and local religious practice. Under ordinary circumstances, family members would cremate human remains in order to "liberate the victims' souls for reincarnation." However, the absence of identifiable family members (or their unwillingness to come forward) leaves the bones in the hands of curators and human rights advocates, who believe they have "a more important function in society" as "a reminder to future generations of ... suffering and devastation" and as "evidence of crimes committed." In their display strategies the curators attempt to assuage Cambodian discomfort with "boxing" or "sealing" that limits access of the spirit to the bones by designing pedestals with spaces between the slats, "thus allowing the spirits to come and go as they wish." Against those who argue that the bones should be put to rest, one sign says: "The bones cannot find peace until the truth they hold in themselves has been revealed."

The Rwandan memorials host some of the best-known human remains in the world. But if tourists come to Rwanda expecting to see the room full

of cadavers that Philip Gourevitch described in the *New Yorker* essays or his prizewinning book,[17] they are likely to be disappointed by the Kigali Memorial Centre, the Aegis Trust-sponsored memorial that features gardens, historical panels, and displays in an attempt to give a sense of humanity and individuality to the mass of victims. Tourists *can* find information in guidebooks about nearby memorials at Nyamata (30 km from Kigali) and Ntarama (20 km).[18] There are only a few bones mixed with the other relics at Ntarama, but at Nyamata, in a clinically tiled room below the clothes-filled church pews already described, some skulls and femurs can be found in glass cases, and many, many more are stored in the underground "crypts" that have been constructed alongside the church. Conversely other memorials make little effort to evoke the humanity of the victims. At the Bisesero Memorial Site, for example, skulls are in "temporary" storage in a corrugated aluminum shed geographically situated down the hill from the memorial under construction. Placed on tables covered with green plastic tarps, in grids of more than 100, all facing in one direction, the skulls do not appear to be "on display" either literally or symbolically. Femurs are similarly arrayed. There are multiple tables in this relatively dark space, so that a long view takes in more skulls and femurs that can be assimilated. A sense of warehousing and cataloguing prevails. This scenario is reproduced on larger and smaller scales at hundreds of community memorial sites across Rwanda. There are bones in crypts, classrooms, and storage sheds. Often there are burlap sacks and cloth bundles that I came to recognize as bones awaiting burial.

Most unnerving are the cadavers, preserved in lime, which I saw at Cyahinda, Kibeho, and Murambi. At Kibeho they lie on shelves that are reminiscent of the bunks at Poland's concentration camps, and at Murambi they rest on tables in the many classrooms of this former school. Five or more cadavers are on a table or a shelf. Many of the bodies are shrunken and mangled, so two fit head to toe into the space that would be needed for one, outstretched (Figure 8.4). The figures remain individual but also present a volume. Some are more distinctly human, others more contextually so. You can pick out skull, torso, waist, hips, thighs, knees, shins, but where are the feet? Some are clothed and others not. One cadaver has hair and several hold rosaries. These bodies are removed from the places where they died. Did they die with the rosaries in hand, or were these reverentially positioned afterwards by those that managed the remains?

The cadavers are intimate and they are estranged. They invite us to speculate. Some of the bodies look peaceful and some seem to be contorted arthritically or writhing in pain. Sara Guyer describes them as "arrested in the final stages of the death struggle, their mouths frozen

Figure 8.4 At Kibeho (Rwanda) cadavers lie on tiered shelves that are reminiscent of the bunks in Poland's concentration camps.
Source: © Clark Peterson.

in a silent cry."[19] Gourevitch reads these positions as "half agony, half repose," but it is a kind of anthropomorphism to assign these attributes of the living to the dead.[20] Some lie on their sides with their knees bent in a near fetal position. Several of the cadavers are positioned so that they seem to be spooning. Again, it is easy to imagine they died this way, seeking comfort from one another, but it is just as likely they were positioned this way for efficient storage. With the flesh shriveled, all the figures look starved, but this also assigns an attribute of the living to the dead. Fat or thin in life, a desiccated cadaver will look emaciated. These withered skeletons with their prominent ribs remind me of the living corpses in the Buchenwald liberation photos.[21] So many different things come to mind, not all of them appropriate. White from lime, the figures look like *Dia de los Muertos* skeletons. Guyer likens them to a George Segal sculpture.[22] According to Gourevitch:

> The dead looked like pictures of the dead. They did not smell. They did not buzz with flies. They had been killed thirteen months earlier, and they hadn't been moved. Skin stuck here and there over the bones, many of which lay scattered away from the bodies, dismembered by the killers, or by scavengers—birds, dogs, bugs. The more complete figures looked a lot like people, which they were once.[23]

And later:

> The dead at Nyarubuye were, I'm afraid, beautiful. There was no getting around it. The skeleton is a beautiful thing. The randomness of the fallen forms, the strange tranquility of their rude exposure, the skull here, the arm bent in some uninterpretable gesture there—these things were beautiful, and their beauty only added to the affront of the place.[24]

When we reach the point where we are looking at a whole body, we really can no longer talk about metonymy or synecdoche. We no longer have a part standing in for the whole, rather we have the whole for the whole. It might be possible to consider the concentric synecdoches of the cadavers, one body standing in for the many others who died, one memorial site representing many killing fields. And we might even see the sum total of all the Rwandan memorials in a synecdochal relation to all the genocides of the world. My immersion in Rwandan memorials stands in for all the genocides in which I have not immersed myself.

Facing the cadavers, we cannot escape the confounding literality of human remains, the one-to-one correlation between the person who died and the cadaver who represents him or her. And, at the very same time, we are aware when looking at these bodies of the myriad discourses in which they are imbricated—the extended debates about whether and when it is ethical or appropriate to leave human beings unburied, the hope that they will serve as irrefutable evidence of genocide, the absence of funeral rites sufficient to the anonymous dead, the instrumentalization of the bones in service either to justice or to retribution. Of all the objects on display at memorials human remains are the most blatant and the most recalcitrant, the most literal and the most elusive. While they seem to circumvent some of the reductive logics of nostalgia and metonymy, they also short circuit our ability to make meaning or metaphor. The deployment of remains within memorials begs allegory. We may hope, wish, imagine that the dead bodies offer deeper moral or spiritual meaning but we do not find it there. Gourevitch concludes: "it was still strangely unimaginable. I mean, one still has to imagine it."[25]

The presence of human remains in memorials moves us toward both empathy and alienation. They make trauma more familiar, more accessible, but limit its ramifications. Do they offer anything in the way of legibility? Gourevitch "couldn't settle on any meaningful response: revulsion, alarm, sorrow, grief, shame, incomprehension, sure, but nothing truly meaningful,"[26] while Guyer writes, "[a] pile of unrelated bones or a shelf with rows of carefully arranged skulls does not commemorate a person."[27]

> They lead neither to a clearer understanding of the genocide nor to the restoration of power of mind in the face of violence, but rather produce confusion, despondency, even senselessness: the bones at these sites resist a meaningful narrative, and the very effort to make them signify the genocide also renders them figures and stand-ins rather than the real, singular material that they must be in order to obtain their massive importance.[28]

As I read Guyer reading the Rwandan memorials and accounts of them, I struggle with what we (have a right to) expect the objects in memorials to do for us. Do we really expect them to make genocide legible? If the presence of human remains poses such irreconcilable dilemmas, let us think for a moment about what happens in the absence of such remains. In the 2010 film *Nostalgia for the Light* director Patricio Guzmán interviews "Las Mujeres de Calama" (the women of Calama) who are searching in Chile's Atacama desert for the remains of relatives "disappeared" as political prisoners under Pinochet. Turning over pieces of the vast desert with hand shovels, the six remaining women have sifted the sands of the desert for 28 years. They find fragments, some teeth, part of a forehead or a nose, the side of a skull, a foot. They describe the moments of finding identifiable fragments as both joyous and disappointing. They hope for some kind of clarity about the nature of the deaths and some kind of reconciliation. One of the women, Violetta Berrios, says: "Sometimes I feel like an idiot because I never stop asking questions, and nobody gives me the answers I want."[29]

It seems that neither a plenitude of overdetermined remains nor a dearth of enigmatic ones can help us to make sense of such horrifying violence. Perhaps then, to the extent that memorialization is an encounter with death, the state of memorialization is always one of knowledge held in abeyance.

Notes

1. A plaque at the Kigali Museum reads: "I don't have any photos of my family. I couldn't find any souvenirs of my parents or my brothers and sisters—Bernard 16." (All quotations and transcriptions from memorial sites and museums not cited otherwise are from my own research.)
2. 9/11 Memorial, "Tribute Items," National September 11 Memorial and Museum at the World Trade Center, http://www.911memorial.org/tribute-items (accessed December 11, 2012).
3. http://www.vosizneias.com/114065/2012/09/24/farmington-hills-michigan-in-photos-historic-holocaust-boxcar-to-become-museum-exhibit (accessed December 11, 2012).
4. Jewish Museum in Berlin, "Exhibitions," http://www.jmberlin.de/main/EN/01-Exhibitions/00-exhibitions.php (accessed December 11, 2012).
5. See "A New Meaning of Actuality," interview by Tomasz Łysak, February 9, 2009, http://www.jewishmuseum.org.pl/en/cms/news/366/ (accessed December 26, 2012).

6. Museum of the History of Polish Jews, "Mission Statement," http://www.jewishmuseum.org.pl/en/cms/mission-statement/ (accessed December 11, 2012).
7. Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), xiii.
8. See Robyn Autry's comments on the District Six Museum in chapter 6.
9. Frihedsmuseet, "The Museum of Danish Resistance 1940–1945," http://natmus.dk/en/besoeg-museerne/frihedsmuseet/museumofdanishresistance/ (accessed December 11, 2012).
10. "Showa-Kan: We Convey the Life of Japanese during and after the World War II," Showa-kan/National Showa Memorial Museum, http://www.showakan.go.jp/pdf/showakan_en.pdf (accessed December 11, 2012).
11. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Stephen Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).
12. See Geneviève Zubrzycki's comments on Jewish ghetto tourism in chapter 5.
13. Michael Peterson points out that "showing the instruments" is a standard part of the performance of torture. How paradoxical, then, to find it at work in the very displays intended to condemn it. See "Force Multiplier: What Can Performance Do for and against Torture?" in *Estudos Performativos: Global Performance/Political Performance*, ed. Ana Gabriela Macedo, Carlos Mendes de Sousa, and Vitor Moura (Ribeirão: Edições Húmus, 2010), 143.
14. This description of Majdanek is as we saw it in 2008. In 2010 the building was destroyed in a fire. See: http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/fire-at-former-death-camp-majdanek-destroys-prisoners-memorial-1.307226 (accessed April 5, 2013).
15. Tatsuharu Kodama, *Shin's Tricycle*, trans. Kazuko Hokumen-Jones (New York: Walker, 1995), n.p.
16. Documentation Center of Cambodia, [Brochure], http://www.d.dccam.org/Abouts/Brochure/pdf/DCCAM_2008_brochure_final_final_final.pdf (accessed December 11, 2012).
17. Philip Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families: Stories from Rwanda* (New York: Picador, 1998).
18. Philip Briggs and Janice Booth, *Rwanda*, 3rd edn, Bradt Travel Guides (Guilford, CT: Globe Pequot Press, 2006), 113.
19. Sara Guyer, "Rwanda's Bones," *boundary 2* 36, no. 2 (Summer 2009): 171.
20. Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform You*, 16.
21. For a thoughtful analysis of the ways in which we cross-process distinct historical violences, see Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).
22. Guyer, "Rwanda's Bones," 171.
23. Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform You*, 15–16.
24. Ibid., 19.
25. Ibid., 16.
26. Ibid., 19.
27. Guyer, "Rwanda's Bones," 163.
28. Ibid., 169.
29. *Nostalgia for the Light*, directed by Patricio Guzmán (Brooklyn: Icarus Films, 2011), DVD.