

Laurie Beth Clark

Coming to Terms with Trauma Tourism

Snapshots

At Nagasaki, there is a large statue of a man pointing at the sky where the bomb came from. Tourists like to stand in front of this sign and take pictures of themselves posing in the same position as the statue. This is so popular that at the tram stop the sign to the memorial park actually uses this gesture of posing for a photo as the marker of the park's location.

Over three days at three different concentration camps in Poland, I see a dozen different tour groups of Israeli high school students. In these groups, every student carries a flag large enough to wrap themselves in. The groups mark the site with a particular Zionist reading of the Holocaust, not just for themselves but for all the other spectators as well.

In Phnom Penh, I cannot leave my hotel without being asked by a tuk-tuk driver if I would like to visit the "killing fields." Both the use of the term from the popular film *The Killing Fields* (1984), over Cheung Ek (the monument's actual name), and the presumption that as a "baraing," I will at some point be purchasing transportation to the genocide memorials, indicate the prevalence of the global practice of "trauma tourism". [1]

Background

My interest in "trauma tourism" dates to 18 September 2001 when I paid my first visit to the World Trade Centre site in New York City. I was one of thousands of visitors that day, and although I did not take any photographs, many other people did, holding their cameras above the crowd as the police asked us respectfully to keep the pilgrimage moving along. I did try to buy a postcard but local vendors were already sold out of (and had not yet nostalgically reprinted) the cards of the Manhattan skyline that still featured the twin towers. Already that day, there were street vendors selling reproductions of amateur and professional photographs of the burning and collapsing buildings.

That experience spurred my investigations into what cultures do with sites that are so marked by trauma that they cannot be fully recuperated for normal, quotidian uses. In the intervening years, I have visited concentration camps in Germany and Poland, atomic bomb blast sites in Japan, slave forts in Ghana, killing fields in Rwanda and Cambodia,

apartheid memorials in South Africa, memorials to *los desaparecidos* in Chile and Argentina, and locations for commemorating the “American War” throughout Vietnam. [2]

Destinations



Figure 1. Extermination Camp, Treblinka, Poland

Trauma tourism is a firmly established practice in Europe. Each year, hundreds of thousands of tourists visit the sites of former concentration camps in both Germany and Poland. [3] That the German government publishes a guide book directed at Jews visiting concentration camps makes clear their understanding of this form of travel as a significant part of their tourist economy. In Krakow, Poland, the former Jewish ghetto of Kazimierz operates as a kind of “theme park” for the disappeared. Cafes feature “Jewish” foods, klezmer music, and even “kosher” vodka, largely for non-Jewish clientele and to some curious Jewish tourists as well.

In Japan, the atomic bomb blast sites at Hiroshima and Nagasaki have extensive Peace Parks that include indoor libraries and museums, outdoor gardens and sculpture parks, shrines and altars. Because these venues have dedicated themselves explicitly to anti-nuclear activism, they have a strong pedagogical component and a greater degree of “proceduralism” than most of their counterparts. [4] East Asian popular religious practices also lend themselves readily to interactivity, and this, combined with the ubiquity of folded paper cranes as a reconciliatory gesture, has made these sites models for the global practice of trauma tourism. Notwithstanding this, Japan is also the home of some of the most kitsch engagements with trauma I’ve encountered.



Figure 2. Peace Park, Nagasaki, Japan

In Africa, “return” and “heritage” tours visit former slave forts in Ghana and Senegal. At these sites, which have provided a focal point for Afro-American and Afro- Caribbean tourists since the sixties, visitors perform ceremonies that honour (the) ancestors and stage walks back through the “door of no return.” So important is this tourism to the economies of West Africa that the governments of Benin and Ghana have even offered tourism development funds to communities along the routes of the slave trade.

Since the opening of Vietnam to trade and tourism in 1989, there has been a steady flow of visitors, largely European, to locations that were significant in the American War. An increasing number of these visitors are the US veterans of that war who return with hopes of redemption and reconciliation. Their tours, and those of tourists with personal histories of war protest, treat the memorialisation in Vietnam as dispersed and diverse. Veterans not only mourn at sites of violence, but also camp out on battlefields and sing period songs. They not only do service work, but also stay with families and learn to cook Vietnamese food as part of their reconciliation programs.

Globally known memorials have been developed more recently at two sites of atrocity in Cambodia: the prison called Tuol Sleng and the mass graves at Cheung Ek. Tourism at these locations capitalises on international visitors’ familiarity with the atrocities committed there, through films and other popular media. It is less well known that there are eighty other genocide memorials spread throughout Cambodia which are painstakingly being catalogued by the Documentation Centre of Cambodia (see: www.dccam.org/).

Mountain gorillas are Rwanda's major tourist attraction, but almost everyone who travels through Kigali is very aware of the nation's all too recent genocide (1994), and many choose to stay on in the capital in order to visit the Aegis Trust-sponsored Kigali Memorial Centre. Guide books also direct tourists to the churches at Ntarama and Nyamata and memorials are being developed as international study centers at Bisesero and Murambi. Like Cambodia, these tourist-frequented memorials are but a small fraction of the extensive infrastructure for memorialisation. "Local" sites, each of which house thousands of human remains, are activated each April in government-sponsored commemorative ceremonies. Rwanda is a country still in a state of trauma, with new bodies being uncovered routinely, and the performance and architecture of memory there is driven as much by the problem of managing the remains as it is by a commemorative impulse.



Figure 3. Memorial, Kibeho, Rwanda



Figure 4. Apartheid Museum, Johannesburg, South Africa

Tourists in South Africa who venture beyond Kruger National Park are likely to include in their itineraries at least one of the sites that document the history of apartheid. The destinations for this kind of tourism are Robben Island and the District Six Museum in Cape Town and the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg. While the Cape Town venues are site-specific memorials, the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg is built on the grounds of the gold rush theme park Gold Reef City. What distinguishes the South African approach to memorialisation from most of its global counterparts is its decidedly upbeat approach. Rather than mourn the tragic history, these venues all celebrate its overcoming. [5]

Trauma tourism is less well established in Latin America, where sites are just now being developed to mark the long history of the struggle for human rights. Venues for memorialisation of the victims of the “dirty wars” include Villa Grimaldi and Cementerio General in Santiago, Chile and Parque de la Memoria and ESMA in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Located in former clandestine prisons and torture centers, Villa Grimaldi and ESMA are site-specific memorials while Parque de la Memoria and Cementerio General (like Johannesburg’s Apartheid Museum or Berlin’s Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe) are purpose-built Monument[s] to the Victims of State Terrorism, as the Parque de la Memoria is known. Many tourists to Argentina observe or join the marches of the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* as a way of engaging with the country’s troubled past. Trauma tourism in Latin America also includes some more personal tours by “survivor” guides. [6]



Figure 5. Villa Grimaldi, Santiago, Chile

Strategies for Performing History

Places of memory perform histories of atrocities that pertain to the immediate locale as well as ones that are more broadly applicable. To do this, site developers deploy existing and new architecture, evidentiary objects and constructed dioramas, text panels and multimedia presentations, live and recorded audio guides. However, the developers do not fully determine the meaning of the performances enacted at sites of memory. Visitors to these sites bring their own desires, and it is a negotiation between the constructed environment and the spectator behavior that determines meaning. Sometimes the aims of curators coincide with the desires of audience members and sometimes they are out of alignment. The performative strategies of tourists include preparation, sometimes arduous journeys to and from the site, interactive engagement through photography, consumerism, the taking and leaving of mementos, and for some, subsequent acts of community service. Trauma memorials are called upon to serve multiple functions for these complex constituencies, which include education, mourning, healing, nationalism and activism.

Strategies: Stories

All the major memorials perform pedagogical functions. Graphically designed display panels (boards with some combination of texts, historical photographs, maps, diagrams, and timelines) are the most pervasive form of historical documentation in industrial countries (and at externally funded memorials in developing countries).

Auschwitz and Dachau offer very detailed historical pavilions to illustrate events prior to the war and actions taken at the camps, that identify specific perpetrators and victims. Similarly, the Japanese sites have large halls devoted to the history of World War II, including both Japanese militarism in the Pacific, and the opportunities that the US had to end the war without the display of nuclear power.

In Vietnam, crude reproductions of the famous photograph – which those of us who lived through the war years in the United States recall from its widespread media distribution – can be found at every site. The reproductions induce in me as spectator a multiple consciousness: renewed horror at the events they represent, curiosity at the Vietnamese government's embrace of these products of the Western news media, and a paradoxical warm, fuzzy nostalgia for the anti-war protest era. The African memorials have still fewer resources with which to develop and construct this sort of display. The museum at the former slave fort at the castle as Elmina has no text panels at all, but the one as Cape Coast does have one externally-funded section designed to teach Ghanaian school groups about the plight of slaves in the Americas.

It would be tempting to generalise that less industrialised countries rely more heavily on storytelling to teach history, and to some extent it is true that the economies of West Africa or Vietnam make it more expedient to assign each cluster of spectators a personal (and often highly qualified) guide, unlike in industrial countries where labour is more expensive. But before rushing to romanticise a “third world” use of storytelling, we had best remember the pervasive use of Sadako Sasaki and Anne Frank as paradigmatic victims of the atomic blasts and the Holocaust respectively. European and North American school children learn to identify with victims of the Holocaust by reading Anne Frank's diaries, and with those of the atomic bomb blasts by folding Sadako-inspired paper cranes.

There is no question that tourist experiences in West Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America are substantively shaped by interactions with tour guides. At Cape Coast, my guide was a Ghanaian graduate student in Diaspora studies at a North American University (stuck indefinitely in Ghana due to post 9-11 visa issues). His sophisticated read on the structures of tourism – in other words, his willingness and ability to provide both narrative and meta-narrative – was integral to my experience of the site. At Robben Island, former prison inmates guide tours to provide “authenticity” to the narratives – a role which also provides work for them. In Santiago, many students and scholars have had the moving opportunity to learn about the clandestine torture centers through survivor Pedro Matta's personal tours.

It was at Son My (My Lai) in Vietnam where my interaction with the guide most intensely shaped my encounter. The guide, who personally walked two of us through the village grounds, stopped alongside the ditch where villagers were executed as she described in great detail how different individuals pleaded for their lives. Tears streamed down her face as she anchored her narrative with descriptions of the specific survivors from whom she had personally learned the details. The proximity and intensity of the emotion was such that it felt inappropriate to break the eye contact to raise a camera. But stepping back just a bit from the captivation of the moment, it occurred to me that she must have told this

story hundreds of times in the seven years she had been a guide. When asked about this, she smiled and said that her nickname among her friends was “the girl who cries every day”. She in turn told the story of an eighty year old survivor who told her, ‘I only think of these things when I come here.’ So she asked her, ‘How often do you come?’ and was told, ‘every day.’

While my guide was certainly a highly skilled storyteller and a compelling performer, she and the aging survivor are both also ritual mourners, who stage at this traumatic site a service of remembrance for the dead, for the community, and for trauma tourists.

Strategies: Space

Memorial spaces frequently rely on structures, rather than – or in addition to – narratives, to facilitate participation and identification. Passageways are ideal for the performance of embodied knowledges because they can provide a spatial chronology of the slaves’ or prisoners’ journeys from points of first arrival, through the sites of transportation or extermination. But many sites lacking residual architecture construct descending hallways, including a highly effective spiral descent at Hiroshima and underground mausoleums at several Rwandan memorials.

Some efforts to create immersive environments are less successful. The over-determined use of lighting and sound effects in the museum at Nagasaki invokes “haunted house” more than it does pilgrimage. A similarly kitsch theatricality in Vietnam is achieved through the placement of mannequins in actual structures and in reconstructed dioramas. Vietnam is full of three-quarter-sized, three dimensional representations of posed bodies – shackled, tortured, fighting, and surviving. Vietnam is also particularly prone to the use of other theatrical devices: reconstructing bomb shelters, propping up helicopters as though they were in the midst of crashing, and repainting tanks with US logos.

One of the most consistent aspects of memorial sites, and one of the most problematic issues for designers and spectators alike, is that sites of trauma are, by and large, empty. Majdanek, Birkenau, and Treblinka are all massive evocative voids where open space is used to communicate desolation. One of the strongest feelings I remember having when I visited the World Trade Centre in May 2002 was that, after waiting several hours for access to the viewing platform, there was, in fact, nothing to see. People had to point out to one another where the buildings had been. What was left at My Lai after the infamous “massacre” was razed by the US military a year later in an effort to destroy any residual evidence. The site today is park-like with periodic stone stelae, each commemorating the members of a single family who were killed. There have been some minimal efforts at reconstruction and a few signs to draw attention to that which is no longer evident, or that which is barely so.

Sometimes, bits of residual evidence are used to signify an absence. At the slave forts at Cape Coast and Elmina, stains on the wall are shown to demonstrate the extent to which human excrement accumulated. At Tuol Sleng, a particularly effective use is made of the

interrogation “classrooms” (Tuol Sleng was a school before it was a prison). Largely empty and unchanged since occupation, each one houses a bed frame, an ammunition box, and a large format photograph of the same space with the dead body of a tortured person in it. Perhaps because we are moved by decay to read loss, many trauma sites cultivate a “ruins aesthetic”. However, at Robben Island it is a source of pride that the prison cells are kept in excellent condition, in stark contrast to their degraded state when they were occupied (evident in photographs placed on location).

Strategies: Objects

There is an oscillation at each trauma memorial site between the self-evident horror of the events memorialised and rigorous appeals to the evidentiary. Some sites begin with the presumption that visitors recognise the injustice and immorality of the events that the sites recall, while others provide sufficient evidence to make the case for an indictment. Culturally specific norms, available artifacts, and the actual nature of the crimes also contribute to differences in levels of “proceduralism”. Japan’s own shock and disbelief at the destructive capacity of the atomic weapons manifests in an excessive and obsessive presentation of scientific evidence with a candor and insistence that confounds Euro-American propriety. One object after another documents the factual elements of the bombing: melted housewares, permanent shadow imprints created by the brightness of the blast, and the iconic clocks and watches stopped at the moment of detonation. At the Old Fort Prison Complex on Constitution Hill in Johannesburg, a tour guide graphically mimed a humiliating process in which prisoners were searched, while instruments of torture were sequestered in closed wooden cases with small sliding panels in a kind of “peep show” arrangement.

The display of skulls and bones at Rwandan and Cambodian genocide memorials has been the subject of much international and local debate. Proponents argue that the skulls provide incontrovertible evidence of the war crimes and should be kept on display. For sheer evocative power, I found the church at Nyamata unrivalled. Far more than the better-known piles of human remains, which always produce an ambivalent response, the piles of clothing on the church’s pews were effective in communicating the horror and the scale of loss.

Objects at trauma sites function concurrently as trace evidence and as symbols. Some of the best known objects in trauma culture are the piles of hair and clothes at the concentration camp memorials and also at off-site Holocaust museums. Because the Nazis harvested and stockpiled these artifacts, their resonance is multiple, as they represent not only the human loss but also the industrial quality of that particular genocide. This double functioning makes them allegorical objects, both imbricated in and in excess of the stories they perform.

Strategies: Interactions

Visitors bring a performative impulse to memory sites. Whether the site invites or discourages participation, visitors do want to “do something.” By far the most extensive infrastructure for participation can be found at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, where protected repositories and even archives are not only provided for the ubiquitous paper crane wreaths throughout both cities, but there are also receptacles for flowers, incense and candle holders, and room for offerings. Perhaps the widespread practice of leaving water, food, and incense at shrines creates the ready context for memorial participation. Although the concentration camp memorials provide little opportunity for individual participation, which is discouraged explicitly by signs and also tacitly by showcasing artifacts of state participation, small gestures are made, particularly the transcultural gesture of placing stones.

The placement of flowers, candles, notes, and mementos at sites of trauma, which is thought of as a grassroots gesture, has become the normative memorial performance. Immediately following the events of 11 September 2001, impromptu shrines were constructed at locations all over the world that could be identified with New York, including embassies, hotel chains, and even the New York-New York casino in Las Vegas, which has now enclosed these objects in permanent display cases. The designers at the Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum incorporated the fence – which initially emerged as a “spontaneous” memorial gesture – into the permanent memorial. It is clear that many tourists arrive on site with something that they are intending to leave. In Washington DC, plans are under consideration for a new museum to house and showcase the thousands of mementos that have been deposited in front of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

Even when there is no other opportunity for engagement, a memorial is likely to have a place for visitor commentaries. At the conclusion of my tour of My Lai, I was deposited at a table with a guestbook, a pot of tea, and a box of tissues. In Rwanda, I was frequently handed a guestbook in front of a donation box. The comments in such books are fairly predictable. They tend to express shock at the horrific crimes, solidarity with the victimised populations, and different versions of “never again”.

There are, however, instances of resistant uses of guestbooks. While apologies to the people of Vietnam dominated the entries in English in the Khe Sahn guestbook, my guide told me that previous guestbooks had been removed by the government because the comments were “not so good” – comments such as “liberation is a bitch” or “I’m sorry the US could not protect us from the lie of communism.” On my recent visit to Tuol Sleng, there were several very angry entries in the guest book that pointed out the ways in which such violence was going on in the world today.

By far the most common way that tourists perform their participation is through photography. It is common to dismiss tourist photography as alienating, and to restrict the use of cameras at trauma sites as disrespectful. To the contrary, my experience of tourist photography is that it is used to bring the site closer to the spectator. Photographers attach

themselves to the site with each click of the shutter, like what a suture or stitch might do to two pieces of fabric. They are leaving a bit of themselves at that spot, and are marking the spots as those that mattered to them. They are constructing frames around parts of the more expanded experience that allow them to focus. They are indicating their plans to revisit the image on their computer screens or in their photo album, to give it more careful consideration and to share it with friends.

Tourists also use shopping as a way to make material their otherwise ephemeral experiences. While shops at Holocaust memorials mix Judaica with educational literature, the extensive video selection of the souvenir shop at Tuol Sleng has popular films for entertaining children shelved alongside documentary films about the genocide. At the Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum, the gift shop, like the museum, is focused on recovery. I brought home a stuffed rescue dog. In West Africa, the sale of local crafts allows visitors to feel they are doing something to alleviate the proxemic poverty. At Khe Sanh, a single vendor lurked furtively at the edge of my tour group, offering souvenir dog tag that ostensibly had been dug up with metal detectors, but could just as easily have been faked distressed metal. In Saigon, zippo lighters for sale bespeak the peculiar mix of nostalgia and regret that is at work in the recall of this war.

Tensions

The work of developing sites of memory for tourism may be done by government or non-government organisations, private foundations or public trusts, international or local groups, preservationists or activists. The range of visitors also varies widely to include victims, survivors and their families; those who are politically or ethnically allied; students and scholars and intentional and accidental visitors. They bring with them a wide range of expectations, hopes, goals and needs, and an extraordinary variety of desires and behaviours. They may be seeking redemption, reconciliation, or revenge. They may come in solidarity with or in opposition to the professed politics of the site. They may be well prepared regarding the political and social history or they may be completely naive.

Tensions are part of the emerging global practice of trauma tourism but they are exacerbated in places like Vietnam where there are discrepancies over the official and popular, domestic and international meanings of the events commemorated. Similarly, Latin American populations often remain divided over the political necessity of the repressive dictatorships, in contrast to post-Holocaust Europe where there is relative consensus regarding the horrific nature of that genocide. In South Africa and Japan, there are strong internal conflicts over whether it is better for the future of the country to remember or to forget: an impulse to “put the past behind us” competes with a desire to “never forget.” Even in the established sites in post-Holocaust Europe or the slave forts in West Africa, tensions emerge between those with personal (familial, ethnic, racial) ties, and those with more distant connections. Tensions also emerge between the tourists “returning” from the diaspora and the descendants of those who remained.

The African sites experience some of the most active contestations. Just as the position of the administration of Holocaust memorials is complicated by the re-emergence of anti-Semitism in Europe and by the untenable political position that Israel has (often in the name of the Holocaust) to come to occupy, so too are subject positions of the African hosts fraught. Contemporary Africans face a challenge in interacting with the projections of deeply invested tourists from the Americas. On the one hand, African American descendents of slaves look to Africans whose ancestors were never enslaved as a source of pride. On the other hand, they must come to terms with the fact that many African ancestors were complicit in the slave trade. Moreover, my guide told us that the administration has found it necessary to segregate the three major groups of spectators (blacks from the Americas, whites from Europe and North America, and Ghanaian school groups) to avoid altercations over perceived appropriate behaviour.

Like West Africa, Vietnam has several intersecting tourist constituencies with competing claims and conflicting desires. The Vietnamese government, European tourists, Vietnamese tourists from the North, Vietnamese tourists from the south, US tourists and veterans with regrets, US tourists and veterans with pride all shape some aspect of the memorial discourse. These groups are largely segregated from one another. I shared the bus with progressive European and Australian tourists but veterans book their own groups. My guide's conversational discretion – using neither the rhetoric of Vietnamese victory nor US defeat – could have been driven by personal politics or market factors.

Propriety is a concern for many trauma sites and efforts are often made to police the behaviours of visitors. At the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, a metal plaque is positioned at each corner that offers guidelines for appropriate behaviour. Prohibitions include smoking, drinking, playing musical instruments, skateboarding, rollerblading and jumping from stele to stele. It is reported that site designer Peter Eisenman actually objected to the placement of these prohibition signs, arguing that quotidian engagement with the memorial was actually part of reconciliation (Benjamin, 2005). In Cambodia, there is a larger-than-life, almost cartoonish, outline drawing of a smiling face with a red "Do Not" circle and line through it. Given that in Cambodia laughter is a common cultural response to uncomfortable situations, it is questionable by whom this admonition was suggested.

Much veteran tourism to Vietnam is tied up with redemptive charitable projects. At My Lai, a new museum is being built by veterans, and the Tours of Peace website lists humanitarian projects that include 'help to a school of the visually challenged' and 'custom made wheel chairs for disabled young people' (Tours of Peace, 2008). But my guide at My Lai was quick to point out that these humanitarian gestures fall far short of the need. My Lai remains a subsistence community to this day, as the United States government has done nothing to contribute to the economic recovery of Vietnam. Similarly, Cambodia offers a range of opportunities to "make a difference" from the amputees begging just outside the gates of the Genocide Museum to the much more structured fundraising efforts of several groups working to deactivate landmines and unexploded ordinance.

The violence that many of these countries seek to memorialise does not necessarily belong to particular locations, but rather is dispersed throughout, though it may concentrate. Thinking about particularly desecrated locations may serve as an avoidance of the more generalised nature of the atrocity. When violence is metonymically assigned to a particular site (as when My Lai is considered a paradigmatic site for the Vietnam War), while it effectively provides a pilgrimage locus, it also obscures the widespread occurrence of the atrocity. And, paradoxically, as it asserts its representative function, it does so at the cost of losing the specificity of the events at that particular site.

Terminology

I began using the term “trauma tourism” in 2002 because I thought it captured the contradictions inherent in the practice of visiting memory sites (Clark, 2002 and Clark, 2005). I found the oxymoronic quality to be most accurate about the ambivalence I was observing. While I first thought the internal tension of the term was between the association of tourism with pleasure and trauma with pain, I now feel more convinced that the tension is between a sense that trauma is sacred while tourism is considered profane.

There are a few other terms in use that have some degree of overlap with “trauma tourism.” The closest is A.V. Seaton’s (1996) term “thanatourism” (derived from the Greek term for the personification of death). This term has been taken up by a number of scholars, including Brigitte Sion (2008) in her recent work. Maria Tumarkin (2005) has chosen “traumascape” to draw attention to the site specificity of trauma memorials, while Lucy Lippard (2000) chooses “tragic tourism” to refer to both cultural and natural sites. Malcolm Foley and John Lennon (2000) have popularised the term “dark tourism” in a study that includes not only sites of political atrocity but also more sensational interests like the homes of mass murderers. The internet site www.grief-tourism.com catalogues some of the same kinds of practices as those that interest Lennon and Foley. Without coining or adopting neologisms, excellent work on trauma tourism is being done by Marianne Hirsch (2006, 2009), Christina Schwenkel (2009), Marita Sturken (2007), Paul Williams (2008), and Lisa Yoneyama (1999) and many others.

I get mixed responses when I use the phrase “trauma tourism”. By far the most common response is bewilderment. Listeners are so unprepared to hear the two words paired that I am asked to repeat the word “trauma” several times. And when they finally accept that they have really heard what they think they have heard, they still cannot imagine what it means. However, I have also experienced outrage as well as delight. The most articulate moment of indignation was by a curator at Cape Town’s District Six Museum who felt that trauma tourism described the antithesis of the kind of engaged activism that they and their partners in “museums of conscience” perform.

Internet and text-based research has revealed a number of concurrent independent instances of the term “trauma tourism”, which usually appears in quotation marks but never with attribution. The marks are not suggesting citation but rather signalling irregularity, discomfort, or unfamiliar usage. There is no shared source for this term but rather a

common impulse to voice ambivalence. One context for this term is in the writings of bloggers, both amateur and professional. For example, blogging about a trip to Poland with 13 “blokes,” Wolf E. Boy writes:

Day two and the rest of the mob are off to Auschwitz for the day, forty miles up the road. I wasn't up for being traumatized again; S21 in Phnom Penh, Cambodia was quite enough for this sensitive soul. So as the lads tramped off, I took myself out for a leisurely amble around the City to investigate its sights. (Wolf E. Boy)

This is followed by several paragraphs describing the town, after which he continues:

Culturally fulfilled, I made my way back to the apartments, to wait for the crew to get back from their “Trauma Tourism” at the Death Camps. It was a longer day than they'd expected, and it soon became evident that the effect on them had been a deep one, but even so, humour being one of the most basic human defenses against such harrowing ordeals, the stories came across throughout the group, of trying to be “atrocitised” ... when another gorgeous looking Polish lass would stroll past, and they'd follow her with their eyes and then have to wipe the floor dust off their tongues. (Wolf E. Boy)

In discussions of Cambodia, the term “trauma tourism” comes up when referring to the thirty-year lease of one of the best known killing fields to the Japanese company J.C. Royal, to develop its tourist potential. The implied fear is that Cheung Ek will become a genocide theme park (see, for instance, Doyle, 2005). Whereas in Europe, the weight of “untrustworthy” practices is placed on the tourist (suggesting that they choose to visit the site as part of their tour), in Cambodia the thrust of the judgment implied by the term “trauma tourism” is towards the government (who offered the lease), and the company who purchased it – both of whose motives are perceived to be financial rather than memorial in nature.

Regarding Rwanda, the term is also used to reflect the intentional cultivation of international visitors, but in this case it more seems to suggest opportunity (both to teach history and earn profits) rather than misuse (Kurash, 2008). Perhaps following in the footsteps of Senegal, Ghana, and Benin, all of which have used government resources to cultivate a tourist industry around slave trade histories, the Rwandan Tourism Board suggests that a typical itinerary will include both mountain gorillas and churches full of skeletons (Sojourner Dispatch, 2007).

In all three of these cases, there is an understanding of trauma tourism as a global practice, and a sense that the same tourists will visit more than one of these sites. This practice is not limited to visitors from privileged countries who “gawk” at the misfortune of others. In fact, Fraser Thompson used the term “trauma tourist” in an article about South Africans traveling

to Phnom Penh in search of stimulation that could match their own life experiences (Thompson, 2005).

In her introduction to *Traumascapes*, Maria Tumarkin uses the term “trauma tourism” (also in quotation marks without citation) when referring to the popularity of the former penal colony at Port Arthur, Tasmania (Tumarkin, 2005: 6). In reviewing *Traumascapes* Betsy Fysh uses the term “trauma tourism” as though it were already part of popular culture:

Media attention to places of trauma has been seen as the catalyst for the phenomenon known as “trauma tourism”, but Tumarkin claims that this can’t fully explain what it is about sites of violence and suffering that resonates with so many people. When you consider Auschwitz and Gallipoli and the numbers of visitors they attract annually you’d have to agree with her. (Fysh, 2005)

A parallel (and not completely unrelated) deployment of the term “trauma tourism” emerged in the field of psychology. The term refers to volunteer crisis counsellors who flock to the sites of trauma (WTC, Katrina, school shootings) to work with victims, survivors, and families, sometimes against prevailing professional recommendations. The term is also used to criticise psychological professionals capitalising on grief, making an industry of it. This term is not used by the practitioners (debriefing companies and humanitarian agencies), but by critics who argue that therapeutic professionals may be ‘overhelping’ when they intervene, citing research that suggests that PTSD may be exacerbated by immediate intervention (Gilbert & Silvera, 1996 in Gist, 1999: 213).

Unfortunately, this has not prevented some therapists from descending on disaster scenes with well-intentioned but misguided efforts. Among them are those who seek to make money by selling their patented trauma counseling models, whether or not they are appropriate to the particular circumstances of the disaster. Such unfortunate practice in recent times has led to what is now called “Trauma Tourism.” (Deville in University of Melbourne, 2001)

Terms: Trauma

In choosing the term “trauma” to refer to political atrocity, I am acknowledging both the damage to individual bodies and psyches, and to the social body and psyche as well. There are both costs and benefits to deploying theories of the individual psyche for an analysis of the social psyche. Not all the psychoanalytic discourse on individual traumatic memory applies to the functioning of these sites, but two dimensions of repetition compulsion are particularly relevant to theorising our impulse to visit these locations and venues.

One dimension is the return to the actual site of trauma by survivors of that particular atrocity in search of some form of healing. This fits a conventional model of trauma therapy where the survivor orchestrates a structured visit to the site of the trauma in order to put to

the pain to rest. In this model, we find industries built around healing in Europe, Vietnam, and Africa. But the visits to such sites by tourists who have no direct personal experience there far exceeds the visits by survivors, or at least this true for the better-known sites. Still, I think that we might productively engage a different dimension of repetition compulsion, one along more Freudian lines, that as a culture we will endlessly be drawn back, again and again, to the sites of trauma until the underlying issue is resolved. These two different psychoanalytic approaches, one of which desires closure, and the other, disclosure, are at the internally contradictory core of the practice of trauma tourism.

Throughout the trauma literature, there seems to be an effort to differentiate the extraordinary nature of trauma from ordinary wounds, stress, or distress. In one example that is typical of the attitude throughout the trauma literature, Babette Rothchild, whose web reference defines twenty different types of trauma, says:

“Trauma” is often used erroneously to refer to stressful events of any kind. It is important to differentiate between stress that results from threat to life and bodily integrity, and stress that results from less dramatic incidents. (Rothschild, 1998)

Maria Tumarkin brings this point home in defending her choice of the term for her book *Traumascapes*:

“trauma” . . . is not another word for tragedy or disaster. No matter how many times we hear the idea of trauma conjured up . . . the truth is that trauma is not an endlessly stretchable cliché. It has a distinct meaning, which comes to us from the fields of medicine and, more recently, psychiatry and, for all its present-day ubiquity, it entered popular speech in the West in only the 1970s. The word’s continuous misuse obscures the fact that “traumatic” is in no way a synonym for “unpleasant” or “emotionally taxing” or even “intensely painful”. (Tumarkin, 2005: 11)

The difference that Tumarkin, Phelan (1997), Caruth (1995) and others articulate, is that trauma is ‘world shattering’, ‘overwhelming’ or ‘unrepresentable’. Tumarkin continues:

One word that perhaps most closely comes to expressing its meaning is “overwhelming”. A traumatised person cannot fully take in or comprehend what has happened to them or what they have happened to witness. They are overwhelmed by a traumatic event. So much so that the ways in which they usually experience the world and make sense of their own place in it are effectively shattered. (Tumarkin, 2005, 11)

In *Mourning Sex*, Peggy Phelan uses the term ‘unrepresentable’ for this paradigmatic quality of trauma, i.e. that its meaning cannot be fully expressed. She says:

Psychoanalysis gives us the idea that trauma is simultaneously untouchable and remarkably attached to, untouching of, what surrounds it. Often trauma is not recognized until well after it has happened, in part because it is a complete, contained event. Trauma's potency comes in part from how well it is contained. When I say trauma is untouchable, I mean that it cannot be represented. The symbolic cannot carry it: trauma makes a tear in the symbolic network itself. (Phelan, 1997: 5)

Because of its special status, trauma is treated with a kind of reverence, and trauma sites are often sacralised. Thus, the needs of "trauma tourists" at places of memory are often assigned hierarchies according to their proximity of each group to the trauma: first victims, then families, then members of the victim's identities (which might be political, religious, or ethnic), then those that share the same ideologies, and finally those with other motives for their visits.

Terms: Tourism

In a remark often quoted in tourism studies, Levi-Strauss expresses his fear of becoming a tourist (rather than a scholar, researcher or traveler) (MacCannell, 1999: 9). Tourists are derided for "superficial experiences with other peoples and places" (10). Against this, Dean MacCannell argues that "all tourists desire ... [a] deeper involvement with society and culture to some degree; it is a basic component of their motivation to travel" (10). Similarly, Foley and Lennon (2000) track tourism's educational underpinnings throughout modernity. Yet there remains much discomfort at the pairing of the perceived frivolity of tourism with any discussion of trauma.

In spite of (or perhaps because of) this discomfort, there are a number of emerging tourist industries that pair good work with travel. "Voluntourism," "ecotourism," and "impact tourism" are all socially active purposeful engagements with sites around the world. Not only is trauma tourism another example of these emerging industries, it is also frequently practiced in tandem with or by the same constituency of tourists.

Just as there is a question of how far the term trauma can be stretched, so too is there an issue regarding the pliability of the term tourism. While the memorial at Oklahoma City is a fully crafted tourist destination where the local community has carefully framed the story they want to tell the world about themselves, pilgrimage might be a better word for the journeys of mourning and redemption that African Americans make to the West African slave forts. And we really have no proper terms for "accidental tourism": the folks attending an open air concert who happen upon the Columbine Memorial in Denver, children who jump from stelae to stelae at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in downtown Berlin, or the skateboarders who use the memorial at Nagasaki as a terrain park.

Is tourism really the right word for kinds of activities that take place at the sites of trauma memorials? I believe that it is. Whenever we leave home in search of the unfamiliar, whenever we encounter the unfamiliar inadvertently, and even when home itself is

defamiliarised, we are operating as tourists. Rather than a debased or trivial engagement, tourism names a performance of alterity. Tourism is one of the ways we make sense out of the parts of the world not previously known to us, and of the experiences in our own world that are “inconceivable”. Tourism is as “reasonable” a response to traumatic histories as it is to sublime landscapes or to pleasurable curiosities.

Terms: Never Again

Lucy Lippard questions why tourists include trauma sites in their itineraries:

What are we to make of the popularity of such tourist targets as celebrity murder sites, concentration camps, massacre sites, places where thousands have been shot down, swept away in floods, inundated by lava, herded off to slavery, crushed by earthquakes, starved to death, tortured, murdered, hung or otherwise suffered excesses the rest of us hope we will never experience?

She asks, ‘Are we drawn to such places by prurience, fear, curiosity, mortality, or delusion?’ (Lippard, 2000: 118).

Most proponents of memory culture believe that tourists visit memory sites in order to come to terms with history – a far cry from the “untrustworthy” motivations that Lippard enumerates. Historical documentation within each of the sites attempts to communicate to the public the horror and the injustice, and often the unprecedented nature, of the events recalled by the memorial. Whether through storytelling, the amassing of artifacts, commemorative architecture, or participant interaction, the sites all argue the wrongness of a particular turn of events.

The sites share a conviction that we must remain vigilant so as not to repeat past atrocities. For example, at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, where the declared mission of both peace parks is to put an end to the proliferation of nuclear weapons, the museum displays provide a critique of nuclear weaponry and both the city government and the museum administration participate in an ongoing nuclear disarmament effort. [7]

Particularly since World War II, there has been a proliferation of trauma sites developed for tourism that proclaim the project of “never again” as their primary mission. Signs that explicitly proclaim “never again” can be found at almost every trauma memorial and (as mentioned above) “never again” is one of the most frequent entries in the books of visitor responses. While not all are as explicit in their mission statements as Buenos Aires’ Parque de la Memoria (which states that “upon facing the horrors committed during the last Argentine military dictatorship, society becomes aware of the fact that Never Again can there be violations of human rights”), most memorials make some claim that studying the past has preventative value.

And yet, all of these sites are created in the full knowledge of the failure of “never again”, created rather in the context of “always already” again”. For, if World War I was ubiquitously named “the war to end all wars” then post-World War II memorial culture was built in full knowledge of the impossibility of the project of “never again”. In fact, if we consider chronologically each of the case studies in this project, we can observe that the construction of a memorial has been invariably followed (not causally but temporally) by a subsequent instance of atrocity.

Moreover, as Paul Williams points out, the project of “never again” is hopelessly vague:

The variety of political, social, and cultural contexts in which atrocious events have occurred might have us ask just what, as a general human populace, we should “never again” do. Should we never again be victims, or never again act as perpetrators? Should we never again succumb to an invading army? Never again support an undemocratic government? Never again allow ourselves to be unarmed and defenseless? Never again watch tragedy unfold from afar? Never again allow ourselves to act on negative human emotions? (Williams, 2008: 155)

Williams raises a set of questions, not only about the ways that “never again” underwrites the project of trauma tourism, but also the apparent ingenuousness of relying on such an “alibi”: ‘all manner of post-Holocaust events . . . were not prevented by the formative memory practices associated with that event. What is it that now encourages us to surmise that a slew of new institutions might overturn this inauspicious legacy of repeating the past?’ (Williams, 2008: 155). Williams is certainly right that memorial museums do not in and of themselves prevent the recurrence of atrocities. Nor do we have any evidence that the strategies used therein, from logical appeals to emotional manipulation, change beliefs or motivate activism.

While I appreciate Williams’ critique, I prefer to think of the project of “never again” in more optimistic terms. I want to argue that “never again” is a particular kind of speech act which J.L. Austin characterises as a promise (1961). [9] Unlike the better known performatives such as “I do” which are enacted by their utterance, a promise (like a prayer, which Austin puts in the same class) is ‘an exemplary performative’ that admits that ‘the thing itself is forever deferred’ (Phelan, 1997: 16). The promise of “never again” is performed through the ritual of “trauma tourism”.

For Austin, the convention governing the institution of promise-making is verbally honoured even in the case of a promise that no one intends to fulfill. Austin’s view is that the illocutionary speech act, whether felicitous or infelicitous (that is, well intentioned or not, likely to occur or not), is conditioned by its conventional (that is “ritual” or “ceremonial”) dimension. In other words, the promise of “never again” does not need to be “believed” or even noticed by the tourist, even in the moment of its assertion. Or that assertion may be so formulaic as to be barely visible.

The Austinian promise does not require a pre-existing mental state to perform. Rather, the subject invokes a formula and this may be done with little or no reflection on the conventional character or what is being said. The ritual dimension of convention implies that the moment of utterance is informed by the prior and, indeed, future utterances (Butler, 1997: 24). For example, in a sign describing the importance of the diaries to the inmates at Robben Island, the Anne Frank House reaches into the future to use remarks made years later by Nelson Mandela to secure its promise.

Interestingly, for Austin, performatives fail when they are not properly backed by institutions, and so we may understand that the individual promise of “never again” performed through the instance of trauma tourism fails because we lack the social institutions to secure it (Butler, 1997: 151). Vaclav Havel wrote that ‘hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out’ (quoted in Young, 2007: vii). Trauma tourism, then, I will argue, is not about prurience, but about hope.

Endnotes

[1] “Baraing” is a term used by Cambodians for (European) foreigners. I began using the term trauma tourism in 2002 to discuss the presence of surprisingly conventional tourist behaviours, such as posing for photographs, at sites of atrocity (Clark, 2002 and 2005). I subsequently learned that the phrase was also used by psychologists to criticize an emerging industry of rapid interventions at disaster sites (Gist, 1999). There are other terms in use for tourist interest in violent histories including thanatourism (Seaton, 1996), dark tourism (Foley and Lennon, 2000) and tragic tourism (Lippard, 2000). See the terminology section in this article for a more extended discussion of “trauma tourism”.

[2] This is the Vietnamese name for the historical events referred to by the United States as the “Vietnam War”. The memorials that I have explored are ones whose positioning on “desecrated” grounds means that governments and foundations face profound curatorial challenges. But equally compelling are those memorials enacted performatively, poetically, peripatetically, cinematically, virtually, and orally. Off-site memorials may reflect dispersed or suppressed traumas, some recent and some ancient, and/or varied cultural practices. And, while I initially believed one could distinguish natural from social trauma, the Indonesian tsunami and Hurricane Katrina both demonstrated that natural disasters impact differentially along social fault lines.

[3] Holocaust memorials exist in many other parts of the world as well. The best known are Jerusalem’s Yad Vashem, Washington D.C.’s Holocaust Museum, and Berlin’s Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, but there are smaller museums in many communities with and without surviving Jewish populations.

[4] I thank Michael Peterson for suggesting the term “proceduralism”, adapted from the genre of detective fiction and television to refer to other aspects of culture that focus on the practical details. In the case of trauma memorials, procedural details might include information about the day-to-day life of prisoners, explicit discussions of torture techniques or the mechanics of murder, or careful historical documentation of the administration of genocide.

[5] In Soweto and Alexandra (Johannesburg) and in Khayelitsha, Langa, and Guguleto (Cape Town) entrepreneurs provide meals, walking tours, and overnight stays in the racially segregated districts that were created under apartheid. It would be possible to argue that these are also a form of trauma tourism.

[6] For a more extended discussion of trauma tourism in Latin America see my forthcoming article 'Trauma Tourism in Latin America' co-written with Leigh Payne, in Ksenija Bilbija and Leigh Payne (eds) *The Memory Market in Latin America*. (Durham: Duke, forthcoming 2010).

[7] A delegation was sent from Hiroshima to New York in 2001 to pay their respects after the World Trade Center attacks. The letter begins with an expression of empathy for the pain of the people of New York, but transitions quickly into a harsh indictment of the US for perpetuating the armsrace.

[8] I would like to thank Mario Ortiz-Robles for directing me towards Austin's work on promises.

List of Illustrations

Photographs taken by the author).

Figure 1 Extermination Camp, Treblinka, Poland Figure 2 Peace Park, Nagasaki, Japan

Figure 3 Memorial, Kibeho, Rwanda

Figure 4 Apartheid Museum, Johannesburg, South Africa Figure 5 Villa Grimaldi, Santiago, Chile

Works Cited

- Austin, J.L. 'Performative Utterances' in *Philosophical Papers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 220-239.
- Benjamin, Ross. 'Collective Memory and the Holocaust' *The Nation* 31 May (2005), <http://www.thenation.com/doc/20050613/benjamin>
- Boy, Wolf E. 'The Polish Stag Experience' posting to *Wolf-e-boy's Global Travel bites page (29-09-'02 to 19-02-'04)*, www.wolf-e-boy.com/The-Polish-stag-experience
- Butler, Judith. *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997)
- Caruth, Cathy (ed.). *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1995)
- Clark, Laurie Beth. 'Peripatetic Memory' for the Conference of the International Federation of Theatre Research (IFTR), Amsterdam (2002).
- . 'Placed and Displaced Trauma Memorials' in Leslie Hill & Helen Paris (eds.) *Place and Performance* (London: Palgrave, 2005), 129-138.
- DC-CAM (2009). Documentation Centre of Cambodia, <http://www.dccam.org/>
- Doyle, Kevin. 'The Revenue Fields' *Time Magazine* April 11 (2005), <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,501050418-1047552,00.html>
- Foley, Malcolm and Lennon, John. *Dark Tourism* (London: Continuum, 2000).
- Fysh, Betsy. 'Book Review: Scenes of Trauma are Powerful Places', *On Line Opinion* (29 September, 2005), <http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=135>
- Gist, Richard and Lubin, Bernard. *Response to Disaster: Psychosocial, Community, and Ecological Approaches* (London: Routledge, 1999).

- Hirsch, Marianne & Leo Spitzer. *Ghosts of Home: The Afterlife of Czernowitz in Jewish Memory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, forthcoming 2010).
- . “‘There Was Never a Camp Here’”: Searching for Vapniarka’, in Annette Kuhn and Kirsten Emiko McAllister (eds.) *Locating Memory: Photographic Acts* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2006), 135-153.
- Kurash, Jody. ‘Tourists Visit Genocide Memorials in Rwanda’ *MSNBC* July 2 (2008), <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/25479490/>
- Leys, Ruth. *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).
- Lippard, Lucy. *On the Beaten Track: Tourism, Art, and Place* (New York: New Press, 2000).
- MacCannell, Dean. *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).
- Payne, Leigh and Clark, Laurie Beth. ‘Trauma Tourism in Latin America’ in (Ksenija Bilbija and Leigh Paine eds.) *The Memory Market in Latin America* (forthcoming).
- Phelan, Peggy. *Umarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
- . *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories* (New York: Routledge, 1997).
- Rothschild, Babette. ‘A Trauma Glossary’ *Babette Rothschild MSW, LCSW* (1998), <http://home.webuniverse.net/babette/Trauma.html>
- Schwenkel, Christina. *The American War in Contemporary Vietnam: Transnational Remembrance and Representation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).
- Seaton, A.V. ‘Guided by the Dark: From Thanatopsis to Thanatourism’, *International Journal of Heritage Studies* (Winter 1996): 234-244.
- Sion, Brigitte. ‘Absent Bodies, Uncertain Memorials: Performing Memory in Berlin and Buenos Aires’, PhD Thesis, New York University (2008).
- Sojourner Dispatch. ‘Rwanda: Genocide Tourism’, *Sojourner Dispatch* (2007). <http://sojournerdispatch.com/2007/06/18/rwanda-genocide-tourism/>. (Page accessed 17 June 2008, this page is no longer available).
- Sturken, Marita. *Tourists of History: Memory, Kitsch, and Consumerism from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero* (Chapel Hill: Duke University Press, 2007).
- Thompson, Fraser. ‘Trauma Tourism’ *iafrica* 3 October (2005), <http://travel.iafrica.com/destin/asia/304859.htm>
- Tours of Peace. Vietnam Veterans’ Tours of Peace, <http://topvietnamveterans.org/>
- Tumarkin, Maria. *Traumascapes: The Power and Fate of Places Transformed by Tragedy* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2005).
- Turner, Victor and Turner, Edith. ‘Introduction: Pilgrimage as a Liminoid Phenomenon’, in *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978).
- University of Melbourne. Media Release ‘Concerns About Inappropriate Trauma Counselling After US terrorist Attacks’ 21 September (2001) <http://uninews.unimelb.edu.au/view.php?articleID=202>
- Williams, Paul. *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities* (Oxford: Berg, 2008).
- Yoneyama, Lisa. *Hiroshima Traces: Time, Space, and the Dialectics of Memory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).
- Young, Eric. ‘Foreword’ in *Getting to Maybe: How the World Is Changed* by Frances Westley, Brenda Zimmerman & Michael Patton (Canada: Vintage, 2007), vii-xiv.

Laurie Beth Clark is a professor in the Art Department at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. She teaches studio classes in time-based media including Performance, Video, and Installations as well as academic courses on topics in Visual Culture. This year, she is in the midst of travelling on five continents to complete her research for a book on Trauma Tourism. Extensive documentation of her creative work can be found at www.lbclark.net and her web-based project on trauma tourism can be downloaded at www.traumatourism.net.

Editorial Note

Performance Paradigm issues 1 to 9 were reformatted and repaginated as part of the journal's upgrade in 2018. Earlier versions are viewable via Wayback Machine:
http://web.archive.org/web/*/performanceparadigm.net

© 2009 Laurie Beth Clark



Except where otherwise noted, this work is licensed under a Creative Commons AttributionNonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-ncsa/4.0/>