



# MEMORY CONNECTION

Volume 1, Number 1, December 2011  
Contained Memory



# MEMORY CONNECTION

Volume 1, Number 1, December 2011  
Contained Memory

Massey University | ISSN 2253-1823

*Memory Connection* is an international, peer-reviewed journal project of The Memory Waka Research Group (Massey University, NZ). *Memory Connection* provides a meeting place for multidisciplinary perspectives, discourses, and expressions of memory. The journal aims to facilitate interdisciplinary dialogue that may lead to different ways of "seeing" and the creation of new knowledge.

Articles are subjected to a double, blind peer review process.

*Memory Connection* is only available electronically at <http://www.memoryconnection.org>

First published 2011  
By The Memory Waka  
School of Visual and Material Culture  
College of Creative Arts  
Massey University  
Museum Building Block 10  
Buckle Street  
Wellington  
New Zealand  
Enquiries to: [K.W.Baird@massey.ac.nz](mailto:K.W.Baird@massey.ac.nz)

© 2011 The Memory Waka

ISSN 2253-1823

Citation example:  
Donna West Brett and Ann Shelton, "The Event Horizon: Returning 'After the Fact'," *Memory Connection* 1(1): 335-47, accessed at <http://www.memoryconnection.org>

General Editors  
Kingsley Baird (Massey University, NZ)  
Kendall R. Phillips (Syracuse University, U.S.)

General Editors, "Contained Memory"  
(*Memory Connection*, Volume 1, Number 1)  
Kingsley Baird (Massey University, NZ)  
Kendall Phillips (Syracuse University, U.S.)

Project Editor, "Contained Memory" (*Memory Connection*, Volume 1, Number 1)  
Helen Greatrex

The Memory Waka Board

Chair: Associate Professor Kingsley Baird, Massey University (NZ);  
Board members: Dr Paul Broks, University of Plymouth (UK);  
Professor Sir Mason Durie KNZM CNZM, Massey University (NZ);  
Associate Professor Ross Hemera, Massey University (NZ); Professor  
Sally J. Morgan, Massey University (NZ); Dame Claudia Orange  
DNZM OBE, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (NZ);  
Professor Kendall Phillips, Syracuse University (U.S.); Associate  
Professor Tony Whincup, Massey University (NZ).

The Memory Waka

As a means of conveyance a waka is a Māori canoe. Waka has other meanings such as a receptacle or a chief's carved treasure box (waka huia) containing valuable possessions including prized feathers. Waka also refers to a body of people such as a kinship group. Metaphorically, The Memory Waka is a vessel of humanity, ideas, and culture. It is also (literally) a means of travel for people allied in a common cause (paddling in the same direction!). The Waka initiates and supports projects concerned with memory including the *Contained Memory Conference 2010 Pupuri Pohewa* and publishing the *Memory Connection* online journal.

Contained Memory

*Memory Connection* Volume 1, Number 1 is called *Contained Memory*. Published in association with Syracuse University, in the U.S., it comprises 30 selected articles developed from papers presented at the *Contained Memory Conference 2010 Pupuri Pohewa* (9-11 December 2010, Wellington, NZ). The *Contained Memory Conference* was presented in partnership by Massey University (NZ), Syracuse University (U.S.), and Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (NZ). <http://www.containedmemory.org.nz>

Cover image: Tony Whincup *Mary's Grave* (2008).

Journal design: Open Lab (Catherine Adam, Jeremy Bank, Julie Jeon, Kieran Stowers), Institute of Communication Design, College of Creative Arts, Massey University, Wellington, NZ.  
Special thanks to Mark Bradford for continuing his style.  
The Memory Waka logo design: Ross Hemera with Open Lab.  
Web coding: Cameron Askin.

The Memory Waka makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information contained in its publications. Any views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and are not the views of the editors or The Memory Waka Research Group. In the interests of sharing knowledge and disseminating research the complete journal or individual articles may be downloaded for free. Copyright for articles published in this journal is held jointly by the authors and *Memory Connection*. All rights reserved.

# Contained Memory

General Editors  
Kingsley Baird  
Kendall R. Phillips

Project Editor  
Helen Greatrex

The Memory Waka  
Massey University  
Wellington



# Contents

## Introduction

Kingsley Baird and Kendall R. Phillips

### 1. MEMORY FORMS

- 17 **Materialising Memory: The Public Lives of Roadside Crash Shrines**  
*Robert M. Bednar*
- 34 Lest We Forget: Military Myths, Memory, and Canberra's Aboriginal  
and Torres Strait Islander Memorial  
*Anne Brennan*
- 45 Where We Come From: The Role of Place in Family Memory  
*Belinda Castles*
- 58 **Bridging the Gap**  
*Tony Whincup*

### 2. MIGRATORY MEMORY

- 76 "Noli Me Condemnare"—Migrant Memories Set in Stone: The  
Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century Scottish Memorials in Poland  
*Peter Bajer*
- 99 "To Fill This Void Land": Acclimatisation as Mnemonic Device in  
Victorian New Zealand  
*Sally J. Morgan*
- 114 Settler Dreaming  
*Stephen Turner*
- 127 Bedouin Memory Between City and Desert  
*Alan Weber*

### 3. REMEMBERING SPACES

- 143 Re-enacting Traces: The Historical Building as Container of Memory  
*Sarah Bennett*
- 157 Thinking Inside the Box: Objects of Mental Space in the  
Psychoanalytic Consulting Room  
*Julie Leavitt*
- 167 The Museum Junkerhaus: Monument to an Unhappy Love  
*Anne-Kathrin Wielgosz*

#### 4. NATIONAL IDENTITY

- 182 Whiteout: An Examination of the Material Culture of Remembrance and Identity Generated Between New Zealand and Antarctica  
*Peter Wood*
- 196 Remembering Katyn: Mourning, Memory, and National Identity  
*Vanessa Fredericks*
- 211 Memory, Myth, and Monuments: The Commemoration of a Contested Past in Western Ukraine  
*John Lehr and Natalia Aponiuk*

#### 5. SITING MEMORY

- 230 Hazard Figures: Heritage, Memorial, and Wasting in Appalachia  
*Maria McVarish*
- 251 Containing Marginal Memories: The Melancholy Landscapes of Hart Island (New York), Cockatoo Island (Sydney), and Ripapa Island (Christchurch)  
*Jacky Bowring*
- 271 Between Remembrance and Recreation: Containing Memory in Urban Landscapes  
*Russell Rodrigo*
- 283 Re-making Memory on Matiu and Other “Settlement” Sites  
*Rachel Buchanan*

#### 6. PERFORMING MEMORY

- 302 Battlefield Pilgrimage and Performative Memory: Contained Souls of Soldiers in Sites, Ashes, and Buddha Statues  
*Akira Nishimura*
- 312 Pupuri Pohewa: Collective Memory  
*Ross Hemera*
- 324 Memory as a Sense of Place: Migration and Narration in Whanganui, New Zealand  
*Suzanne MacAuley*
- 335 The Event Horizon: Returning “After the Fact”  
*Donna West Brett and Ann Shelton*



## 7. MEDIATED MEMORY

- 349 *De Architectura* as Architectural Time Capsule: On Inventing a New Classical Memory  
*Daniel M. Millette*
- 376 Connecting with Tragedy Through Landscapes of Memory: Memorial Design, Tourism, and the Post-Genocide Memoryscapes of Cambodia, Rwanda, and Germany  
*Shannon Davis and Jacky Bowring*
- 392 Marcel Duchamp: “Twisting Memory for the Fun of It” or a Form of Retroactive Interference? — Recalling the Impacts of Leaving Home on the Readymade  
*Marcus Moore*
- 404 Lost and Found Within New Media Design  
*Tanya Marriott*

## 8. RECOVERED MEMORY

- 419 When Mad Men Pitches Feminism: Popular Education and Historical Witnessing Through DVD Special Features  
*Mary Celeste Kearney*
- 436 Ngā Tohu o ngā Kairaranga: The Signs of the Weavers  
*Hokimate Pamela Harwood*
- 451 Contained Memories or Catalysts?: Some Aboriginal Memorials in Australia  
*Catherine De Lorenzo and Vivien Chow*
- 475 The Māori Fish Hook: Traditional Materials, Innovative Design  
*Chris Paulin*

---

## Introduction

Kingsley Baird and Kendall R. Phillips

General Editors, Memory Connection Journal  
Volume 1, Number 1, "Contained Memory"

---

## Introduction

Kingsley Baird and Kendall R. Phillips

“Contained Memory”, the first volume of the *Memory Connection Journal*, takes its title from a conference held in Wellington, New Zealand, in 2010.<sup>1</sup> At the inception of the idea for the conference the question was asked: What is contained memory? Although there are distinct forms of memory containment, from the outset we acknowledged their capacity for porosity, enabling encounters between different expressions of memory. We proposed an (extensive) list of “knowledge sources” from where papers might originate, and listed broad themes to which presenters could respond. In doing so, we did not seek to delimit the possibilities of how contained memory could be understood by attempting to define the term we had coined; rather, our intention was to signal our aspiration for an expansive interpretation. We wanted potential participants to respond to contained memory from their own perspectives. In the end, it was the contributors to both the conference and the publication who have defined contained memory in these contexts.

The inspiration for the multidisciplinary nature of the conference came from two sources: the *Visible Memories* conference held at Syracuse University in the U.S. in 2008; and *Memory: An Anthology*, a collection of writings about memory edited by A.S. Byatt and Harriet Harvey Wood (2009). What was striking about both the event and the book was their markedly multidisciplinary nature, emphasising that memory is explored across a wide range of practices, branches of knowledge, and modes of expression. One of our fundamental aims was that the *Contained Memory Conference* should embody this characteristic. With this in mind we cast our net wide. Putting out a call for papers to conference listings across the disciplinary spectrum, we waited to see what would be the nature of our catch. Would there be interest in a non-discipline specific—or rather multidisciplinary—conference on contained memory? Could we entice, inspire, or provoke potential contributors by providing the opportunity to intellectually “rub shoulders” with different ways of thinking?

The abstracts came flooding in—enough for three conferences. What was more important was the authors represented our aspiration to encompass a wide variety of ways of conceiving memory through different cultural and theoretical orientations and disciplinary backgrounds. We were confident that the *Contained Memory Conference* could provide a nexus for multidisciplinary perspectives,

discourses, and expressions of memory. Another aim was more ambitious and its success will take a longer time to measure: to facilitate interdisciplinary dialogue that might lead to different ways of “seeing” and the creation of new knowledge around memory.

The participation of key people—along with key words—can engage interest in a conference. The leading memory thinkers, writers, and practitioners (representing a diversity of fields) who agreed to participate in the conference were equally inspired by the concept of contained memory. Their presence helped to define how the theme might be expressed, as well as attract conference participants to experience their scholarly and creative contributions. James E. Young, Dame Claudia Orange, Sir Mason Durie, Paul Broks, Dr Hans-Michael Herzog, Humberto Vélez, and Jenny Bornholdt would bring to the conference their expertise across many fields: memorialisation; cultural and national histories; psychiatry, health, and social policy; neuropsychology, film, and theatre; art practice; exhibition curation; and poetry.

Establishing a partnership with institutions which have a pedigree in memory work was also essential in defining the nature of the conference: Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa—possibly the foremost repository of the nation’s memory—and Syracuse University both collaborated with Massey University on the *Contained Memory Conference*. Syracuse has been heavily involved in the study of public memory and visual culture for the past 10 years. It has hosted three major interdisciplinary conferences devoted to the themes of *Framing Public Memory* (2001), *Contesting Public Memories* (2005), and *Visible Memories* (2008). Syracuse has also established the “Public Memory Project”, a hub for collaboration among scholars supporting specific memory-related projects within the university’s community.

The 30 peer-reviewed articles in this publication developed from *Contained Memory Conference* papers originate from a variety of disciplines and perspectives including: anthropology; architecture and architectural history, theory and criticism; art history and criticism; communication studies; cultural studies; customary knowledge; design; digital media; ethnic studies; ethnography; feminist media studies; film and television studies; geography; history; landscape architecture; literature and literary theory; marine biology; Mātauranga Māori; material culture studies; memory studies; museum studies; performance; philosophy; photography; psychiatry; religious studies; rhetorical studies; visual art; and visual culture studies.

One of the defining characteristics of our current academic era may be its focus, almost obsession, with the question of memory. At least since the mid-1990s and the publication of James E. Young’s seminal *The Texture of Memory*, notions of public and/or collective memory have become central to a staggering number of studies in a remarkable number of disciplines. In addition to its wide transdisciplinary reach, memory studies has also expanded geographically to become central for scholars working in almost every corner of the world. The

countries represented at the *Contained Memory Conference*, both in terms of scholars and their objects of scholarship, provide ample evidence of the global reach of contemporary memory studies.

The proliferation of memory studies appearing in academic communities around the world adds some impetus to the theme of this volume as the prospect of containing memory becomes increasingly difficult. Thought of in terms of studies of public memory, the efforts to contain memory are not so much about limiting its prospects as a topic for scholarly and artistic inquiry, but seeking to create a network through which these various scholarly endeavours can be connected. The efforts of Massey University, and the organisers of the *Contained Memory Conference* and this volume, have taken an important step in facilitating this type of network and laying the foundation for the kinds of connections that might move the study of memory forward on a truly international scale.

Thought of in terms of the concept of memory itself, the desire to contain memory seems to not only precede the formal reflections on memory, but perhaps to date back as far as the earliest experiences of collective remembrance. Evidence of this desire to contain memory, to confine it to a location and in some kind of form, appears in ancient objects like burial mounds, sculptures, and epic poems. The essays collected in this volume suggest that this primordial urge is retained in the contemporary age and, in some ways, may be even more pronounced. In artefacts ranging from car crash memorials—hastily constructed on the sides of roads—to formal national memorials to the dead, and from photographs to literary works, we continue to seek to contain memories. The scholars whose work appears in this volume provide us with insightful ways of thinking about not only these remembrances, but also the containers into which they are infused.

Reflecting on remembrance in terms of the ways we seek to contain memory provides a useful framework for memory studies, and the essays in this journal recommend some of the parameters of this approach. Throughout the pages of the journal we are urged to reflect on the forms through which memories are contained; to think about the ways these forms both shape our representations of the past and guide our experience of the acts of remembrance. Further, given the increasingly globalised world, it should not surprise us that these forms of remembrance and the memories they contain are ever more mobile. These “migratory memories” trouble our traditional notion of localised remembrance not only in the ways that the migrating forms of remembrance introduce new practices, but also in how we seek to carry our local forms of remembrance as we move into new locations and then encounter unfamiliar forms of indigenous memory.

Recognising the mobility of memories, and their containers, also asks us to attend to the spaces where memories reside. In what might be thought of as a haunting, we know that the memories contained in a particular space linger. Thus, we are called to see the relation between space and remembrance through the ways we remember in space and the ways that our recollections are also acts of “remembering spaces”. Taken to a broader level, the nation-state provides another

spatial frame for memory, and the connection between remembrance and “national identity” has been the object of numerous studies including several important works here. This geographic line of inquiry moves to another level in the studies attending to landscapes, such as the scarred mining country of the Appalachian Mountains or small islands off the shores of major cities. The scholars in this section ask us to consider the practices of “siting memory”.

The spatial logic pursued in the sections considered above provide useful ways of thinking about public memories, but taken too far we might begin to imagine remembrance as settled, contained, and stagnant. While the essays in these preceding sections avoid this mistake, those that follow in the remaining three add impetus for seeing the dynamic and fluid nature of memory. The memories that linger in spaces and objects require us to activate them. This sometimes occurs through ritualised and formal practices, and at other times through informal and vernacular activities. In this way, the containers of memory invite (indeed at times demand) that we engage in the complex actions of “performing memory”. This intersection between spatial/material containers, and the human performances called upon to enact them, points our attention to the careful work done to design these memorial interfaces. Whether through artistic media, architectural design, or technology, our encounters with remembrances are guided by the designs of our “mediated memories”.

The study of memory suggested thus far asks us to reflect on the formal, spatial, cultural, performative, and mediated dimensions of remembrance, but such an effort would be remiss without recognising the crucial interrelated dimension of forgetting. Thought of in relation to the preceding, forgetting can be conceived of through the ways that the spaces, objects, and technologies of memory are obscured by new spaces, objects, technologies, and memories. The processes of these occlusions are familiar to us as every locality has seen its memorial to the war dead become a place of teenage skateboarders to gather, or the sacred burial ground is forgotten and becomes the site for a new suburban development. The final section of the journal asks us to reflect on this aspect of contained memory; to think about the ways that memories are covered over and also how they can be excavated, and the important lessons we can learn from the inquiry into “recovered memory”.

Taken together, the essays in this issue of *Memory Connection* draw our attention to the complex ways in which memories are contained and the complications entailed in every effort to confine ephemeral, fluid, and dynamic memories within concrete and cultural containers. In the end, these containers will fail; the objects will decay, the people will move on, the spaces will be repurposed, the performances will change, and the technologies become obsolete. This does not suggest the futility of containing memory, or the inevitability of oblivion. Rather, the work of containing memory is ongoing, as too must be the careful efforts to reflect on the forms of its containment.

<sup>1</sup>The *Contained Memory Conference 2010 Pupuri Pohewa* was presented by Massey University, School of Visual and Material Culture, College of Creative Arts, NZ in partnership with Syracuse University, College of Visual and Performing Arts, New York, U.S., and the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. It was located in a number of venues including: Te Papa; City Gallery, Wellington; and Massey University. See <http://www.containedmemory.org.nz>

### Biographical notes

Kingsley Baird is a visual artist and the Director of Research in the School of Visual and Material Culture in Massey University's College of Creative Arts. His artwork—concerned with memory and memorialisation—includes the design of commissioned public memorials and making artefacts that investigate new conceptual, aesthetic, and material ways of creating memory forms. Examples of his work in this field include: New Zealand Memorial (Australia, 2001, with Studio Pacific Architecture); Tomb of the Unknown Warrior (New Zealand, 2004); *The Cloak of Peace*, Japan, 2006; *Diary Dagboek* (Belgium, 2007); and *Serve: A New Recipe for Sacrifice* (New Zealand, 2010-2011). He was the co-convenor of the *Contained Memory Conference 2010* (NZ), and General Editor of the *Memory Connection* Journal, both roles shared with Kendall Phillips.

K.W.Baird@massey.ac.nz

Kendall Phillips is the Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Studies in the College of Visual and Performing Arts and Professor in the Department of Communication and Rhetorical Studies at Syracuse University in the U.S. His research attends to the intersections between citizenship, rhetoric, and culture with particular interest in issues of memory, film, and controversy. He has published several books including *Global Memoryscapes: Contesting Remembrance in a Transnational Age* (2011), *Framing Public Memory* (2008), *Dark Directions: Romero, Craven, Carpenter and the Modern Horror Film* (2012), and *Projected Fears: Horror Films and American Culture* (2005). His essays have appeared in journals such as *Literature/Film Quarterly*, *Communication Monographs*, and *Philosophy and Rhetoric*. Kendall holds a PhD from the Pennsylvania State University and has taught at Syracuse for the past 12 years where he has received several awards including the University Scholar/Teacher of the Year (2008) and the Judith Greenberg Seinfeld Distinguished Faculty Fellowship (2009).

kphillip@syr.edu

1.

---

## MEMORY FORMS



---

# Materialising Memory: The Public Lives of Roadside Crash Shrines

Robert M. Bednar

---

## Materialising Memory: The Public Lives of Roadside Crash Shrines

Robert M. Bednar

---

### Abstract

This is a study in two parts. First I explore the containment and effervescence of traumatic memory in roadside crash shrines, vernacular memorial assemblages built by private individuals at sites where family or friends have died in automobile accidents. Secondly I suggest that the ongoing production of spaces of mourning not only materialises memory, but the limits of memory. This article enters into the vigorous critical and theoretical dialogues within visual and material culture and memory studies surrounding contemporary discourses of trauma, memory, and space. It also analyses a set of shrines I have recursively photographed for the past eight years in the US. Each of these shrines has grown and contracted over time, not only because of changes made by those who maintain them, but also because of the specific climate and weather phenomena they encounter on the roadside. Some objects disperse. Others are replaced. Others fade. Others decay. I argue that these shrines transfer the life lost in an automobile crash to the life lived by the memory objects and spaces contained within them. These spaces and objects then act as a proxy for the absent victim as the shrine takes on a life of its own, alternately reinforcing and eliding discontinuities of time in the production of memory/space. Especially when shrine objects decay, that first transference of body to object is further materialised. This reveals that the shrine as memory/space is not only living, but also *dying* all over again, there on the roadside.

Keywords: public memory, transference, material culture, trauma, automobility

Roadside crash shrines are vernacular memorial assemblages built at sites where people have died in automobile accidents, either while driving cars or motorcycles, or being hit by cars or motorcycles as pedestrians, cyclists, or motorcyclists. Prevalent for decades in Latin America and the south-western U.S., they are now seen throughout the country and around the world. Because crash shrines are produced by multiple people at multiple moments in time, they can bring together an extraordinary juxtaposition of signifying objects, images, and practices. Yet somehow they seem to cohere materially, visually, and spatially not only into powerfully sanctified spaces central to processes of working through road trauma, but also as a distinctive form of public memory. This is because they are immediately recognisable, even to strangers who witness them while driving by at highway speeds.

As scholars from a number of different disciplines studying roadside crash shrines have established, their primary function is to create a performative space for *mourning* and a potential *warning* to other drivers who encounter them.<sup>1</sup> What is not established, however, is an understanding of the processes by which these mourning and warning functions work for both strangers and intimates at particular sites.

It is also not clear how these functions are embedded within the larger dynamics between individual and collective memories of trauma currently observed in the U.S. For the last eight years, I have been traveling the roads of the south-western U.S. doing mobile fieldwork at the sites of roadside crash shrines. I am working on a book project that addresses this gap by situating crash shrines within a dynamic of interlocking contemporary discourses—trauma, memory, and automobility. I have found that individual acts of road trauma, memorialising road trauma, *and* experiencing other people's acts of memorialising road trauma all mirror each other as they intersect on the road.

In this article I explore the key concepts of memory, space, temporality, materiality, and transference to analyse the containment and effervescence of traumatic memory in roadside crash shrines. I then suggest that the ongoing production of spaces of mourning not only materialises memory, but also the limits of memory. I argue that these shrines materialise memory by transferring the life lost in an automobile crash to the life lived by the shrine itself on the roadside.

These memory/spaces then act as a proxy for the absent victim as the shrine takes on a life of its own in the public right-of-way. When shrine objects eventually decay, that first transference of absent body to present object is further materialised, revealing that the shrine as memory/space is not only living, but also *dying* all over again, in public. How that living and dying works, and what it means for contemporary public memory and culture in the U.S., is the subject of this article.

## Roadside crash shrines as contained memory

These shrines take shape within a particular memory culture present today. Likewise, their study is located at the convergence of strong movements within contemporary academic discourse. In *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz argue that “although the contemporary ‘presentness’ of memory is evident” in media, politics, and the academy, there are “many divergent currents” articulated in attempts to understand the prevalence of memory in public discourse today.<sup>2</sup>

Shrines, in particular, demand a theoretical framework and methodology that reaches beyond any one discipline to encompass ways of seeing and doing scholarship that can account for their complex shapes. My work in this area is thus located at the convergence of many interdisciplinary “turns” in contemporary scholarship—visual, spatial, material, and affective—that engage non-representational and extra-linguistic cultural forms with what Victor Buchli calls a multi-sensory approach to “the phenomenological and somatic effects” of visual, material, and spatial culture “beyond textuality”.<sup>3</sup>

Memory works at multiple scales of individual and social life and is simultaneously a thing and a process. Making sense of memory is extraordinarily complex; making sense of the interrelationship between individual and group memory is therefore even more difficult. Theorists in the interdisciplinary field of memory studies have generated multiple taxonomies of group memory, each with its own set of definitions and commitments: collective memory, cultural memory, social memory, public memory, post-memory, and prosthetic memory.

All seek to describe and theorise intersubjective, extrasomatic forms of memory located outside of any one individual where social relations, cultural discourses, and material constraints intervene even more strongly than they do within individual memories. At stake is not only understanding that individual memories are different from group memories, but also how they interrelate. As Barbara Misztal puts it, “while it is an individual who remembers, his or her memory exists, and is shaped by ... what has been shared with others”. Moreover, collective memory is also “always memory of an intersubjective past, of a past lived in relation to other people” within a particular social and cultural context.<sup>4</sup>

How these memories are shared and that process is materialised within the spaces where memory is performed is a question that needs to be answered. It is best asked not in the abstract but, as Radstone and Schwarz also advocate, while “working close to the ground”, where we can analyse “historically specific formations of remembering and forgetting” where we find them, situated within their historical, cultural, and material contexts.<sup>5</sup> Thus my goal here is to theorise while staying close to the ground. Within the space of this article, the words and photographs play off each other as I enter into critical and theoretical dialogues within memory studies surrounding contemporary discourses of trauma, memory, and space. This is to show how shrines work as material and spatial forms to produce a particular kind of public memory.<sup>6</sup>

Roadside crash shrines are part of a wider worldwide phenomenon: something that Jack Santino calls “spontaneous shrines”.<sup>7</sup> With roots reaching deeply and widely through many different cultural traditions, these shrines aim to “make sense of senseless deaths”, where the deaths are “unanticipated violent deaths of people who do not fit into categories of those we expect to die, who may be engaging in routine activities in which there is a reasonable expectation of safety”.<sup>8</sup> The fact that these shrines are located not in cemeteries where accident victims are ultimately buried or cremated but within those spaces of everyday life where the unexpected deaths occurred—on roadsides, sidewalks, fences, buildings etc—is critical to their functioning. Santino argues that spontaneous shrines “insert and insist upon the presence of absent people”; they “place deceased individuals back into the fabric of society”.<sup>9</sup>

Because they occur in public spaces, these shrines are both commemorative (dedicated to sustaining the memory of individuals and events) and performative (meant to “make something happen”—to materially transform the space of the event, the significance of event, and anyone who interacts with the site).<sup>10</sup> Moreover, as Erika Doss argues, spontaneous shrines “are often aggressively physical entities”—creating assemblages of objects that seem to reach out from the site to demand public recognition and negotiation by passers-by.<sup>11</sup> These shrines are also memory spaces made of material objects brought into relation with each other and with those who encounter them while being located in a unique space: at the site of a particular automobile crash, which is usually in the liminal space of the public right-of-way.

This last point is critical to understanding roadside shrines because they contain memory in three main ways—emplacement, enclosure, and management—and all of these take shape only within a particular spatial location. First, crash shrines *emplace* memory in a certain unique spatial location, the site of the crash itself (see Figure 1). Here, contained means *located* “here” versus “there”. Because these crash shrines are located in public spaces, they are usually set off from their surroundings in some way. Thus they also carve out a space for themselves to *enclose* memory into an “inside” separated from an “outside” (see Figure 2). Here, contained means *inside* a container. Finally, once enclosed and emplaced, memory spaces and objects allow shrine builders and visitors to *manage* memory over time by adding, moving, removing, or replacing things within the site, and even revising its overall design (see Figures 3-4). Here contained means *maintained, extended, revised, or contested* as the site is negotiated over time.

The first two of these processes are spatial and the third is temporal. How these three processes interact at particular sites is what gives each one its distinct identity. In the following analysis, there is evidence of all three of these processes. Here I am focused primarily on the latter temporal dimension of managing sites once they have been established.

Figure 1. Shrines emplace memory. Avenue M, near the Sierra Highway, south of Lancaster, California, U.S., 2006. Photo by author.



Figure 2. Shrines enclose memory. U.S. Highway 285/84, south of Española, New Mexico, U.S., 2010. Photo by author.

Figures 3, 4. Shrines manage memory. U.S. Highway 285/84, north of Santa Fe, New Mexico, U.S., 2006 and 2010. Photos by author.



## Presenting absence

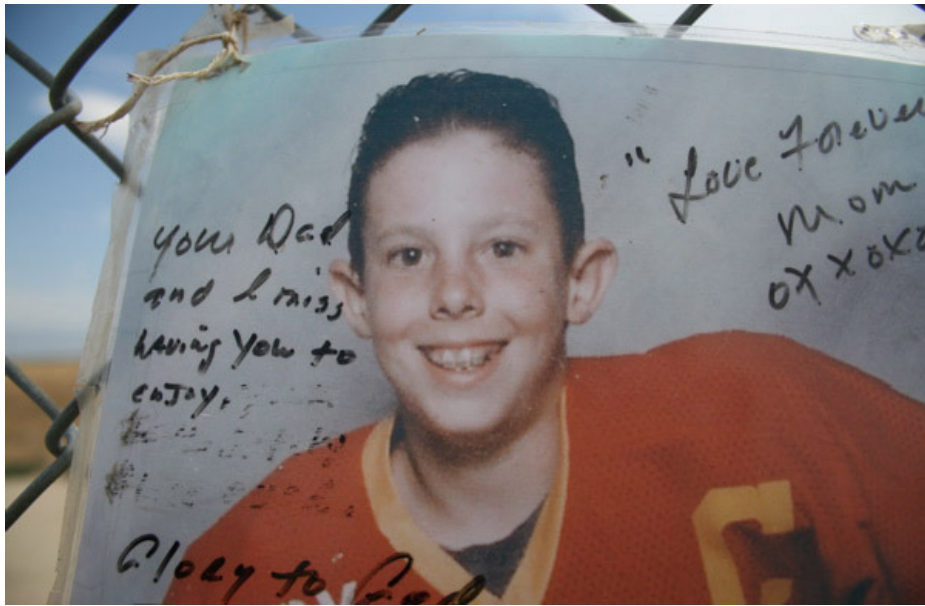
While roadside shrines sometimes include debris from the crash in their form, very few contain any explicit mention of the crash itself. This suggests that they are not about remembering a concretely-located event or time contained in the past, but rather about performing a continuing memory in the present. These shrines assert and actually materialise an ongoing social presence for the person who is “no longer with us” in body, but is very much present in proxy form in the shrine. Clearly, there is a spiritual and theological dimension to this, and different shrines perform different conceptions of the afterlife. However all seem to materialise a belief that it is a portal through which the living can communicate with the dead as if they are still present.

Indeed, a shrine is a technology for making sure that this presence is maintained publicly. Photographs and objects are central to this mediation, and sometimes the “speaking” to the dead is represented in writing inscribed onto

photographs and objects. When people leave messages at shrines they often speak directly to the dead from first-person (“I” or “we”) to second-person (“you”). They do so using the present tense and future tense (“I miss you”, “I will miss you”, “We will never forget you”), but hardly ever using the past tense (see Figure 5).

These speech acts project an ongoing presence for the victim, materialising a continuing relationship between mourners and mourned through the shrine. However in serving this very function for the people who use the shrines this way in full view of strangers—by asserting the continued presence of the dead through actively performing commemoration—roadside crash shrines ensure that those who suddenly die biologically do not also suddenly die socially.

Figure 5. Close-up, Avenue M near the Sierra Highway, Lancaster, California, U.S., 2006. Photo by author.



Crash shrines share this with other vernacular sites of memory in contemporary culture, where the cultural line between life and death is becoming increasingly blurred. In *Death, Memory, & Material Culture*, Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey argue that material memory objects, sites, and practices are not only commemorations of loss but “attempts to counter loss caused by death, making connections with the absent individuals and bringing them into the present”.<sup>12</sup> Analysing elaborately built and maintained gravesites that are similar in some respects to roadside shrines, they argue that actively maintained memorial sites work to “sustain the dead as socially living persons”. Such sites also provide “a means to maintain a physical proximity with the deceased—a sense of ‘being with’ a particular person now, rather than simply recalling what has passed”.<sup>13</sup>

The many objects contained within shrines play a central role in this process of keeping absent people present. As Margaret Gibson argues, “people grieve with and through objects”, where the “transitional nature of corporeal existence is both compensated for and replaced by representations and objects” that are used to help people mourn.<sup>14</sup> This sense of a memory/space as a location for ongoing “being with” the dead is particularly pronounced at roadside shrines, which augment the

gravesite with a separate site in the public roadscape that commemorates the place where the deceased not only died, but was *last alive*.<sup>15</sup>

### Transferred lives

As Jay Winter has written about war memorials, public commemoration at sites of memory satisfies and materialises a need to remember, but even sites with the power of the state mobilised behind them tend towards dissolution: “When that need (to commemorate a certain event important to a public) vanishes, so does the glue that holds together the social practice of commemoration. Then collective memories diminish and sites of memory decompose or simply fade into the landscape”.<sup>16</sup> Like other memorial spaces and structures, roadside shrines have a life-cycle: they are created, they live, and eventually they will die. However they do not do so symmetrically. Most shrines disappear shortly after they appear, either because they are removed to comply with legal restrictions or because they are simply no longer used.

A shrine with staying power prolongs its existence because it is continually renewed—actively maintained by friends and family members. They visit the sites and re-decorate them on holidays, as well as the victim’s birthday and significant days in their familial lives such as wedding anniversaries. Some sites sustain central elements across these revisions while removing the older objects, while others simply add to the existing objects, sometimes re-arranging them. At some sites there is a coherent and clean revision, while at others, the collection grows and contracts from the centre, often spilling out of the defined space of the shrine.

Figure 6. U.S. Highway 1, Pacific Coast Highway, Malibu, California, U.S., 2006. Photo by author.





At these long-standing shrines, the ongoing temporal production of space-bound memory asserts a certain kind of indefinitely accumulating time, where the shrine takes on a life of its own through the continually unfolding production of space. This indicates that the evolving life of the shrine is predicated on a kind of transference between the life of the victim and the life of the shrine. At some shrines, the transference of life to a material object is made even more literal when a plant is grown at the site. If it is cared for long enough to be established, it will develop over time, taking the place of the person whose life is now separated from time.

Figures 7, 8. New Mexico State Highway 76, west of Chimayo, New Mexico, U.S., 2003 and 2010. Photos by author.



Figure 9. New Mexico State Highway 518, west of Sipapu, New Mexico, U.S., 2010. Photo by author.



Each crash shrine materialises not only the memory of crash victims, but also its own history as a site of memory.<sup>17</sup> Its location on the roadside contributes to its specific spatio-temporal constraints within these histories. Crash shrines are vernacular cultural productions inserted into a space officially produced by the state on behalf of the public. Unlike domestic in-home shrines, they are not only subject to regulation by the state and to vandalism, but are also literally “outside”. They are therefore subject to the specific climate and weather phenomena encountered on the roadside. Some shrines will accumulate objects for years and

then suddenly disappear. Sometimes there is also material evidence of the crash itself left behind in the form of tree scars and bent guardrails and crash debris, but no evidence of the shrine’s mediation of the crash, as it no longer exists. Other sites materialise signs of slow dispersal and decay.

Figure 10. California State Highway 67, south of Ramona, California, U.S., 2006. Photo by author.



Figure 11. Interstate Highway 35 at MLK Boulevard, Austin, Texas, U.S., 2008. Photo by author.



My first response to such decay—a material reminder of the physical and social death of the persons commemorated at these sites—was to feel melancholy at the evident loss. Indeed, it is hard to describe these sites in neutral terms in a way that does not put a value on the change. The words that come to mind are decayed, abandoned, neglected, incoherent, dispersed, messy, toppled, dirty, broken, faded. Certainly the mirroring of a body’s dissolution in the decay of objects at a shrine is poignant. However what exactly is lost when a roadside shrine dies in public? If such a process of dissolution were invisible, or located in private space, it would have no claim on a public. Because it happens in a public space, however, the death of a long-standing shrine does something else.

If a shrine transfers the life of the victim to itself, ensuring that it will live past the victim, it not only literally *re-replaces* them in social space, but also *compensates* for their lost future as a social entity. While the victim will no longer celebrate new birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays, the shrine does. As living memory/ space, the shrine is a means of replacing the interrupted life with a new life that is allowed to take its course as the victim’s life was expected to before it was cut short by the crash. This applies not only to the shrine’s life, but also to its death. While the victim’s life was ended prematurely, without the possibility of living until the “natural” processes of bodily decay prevail, the shrine is allowed that privilege too. It spends its everyday life standing there in the wind and the sun and the rain, doing its job, like a person, living its life instead of having its life ended by a tragic and untimely death.

Figures 12, 13. Interstate Highway 25, north of Albuquerque, New Mexico, U.S., 2006 and 2010. Photos by author.



Thus, one of the things shrines do as memory forms is to re-create the lost body's ability to live long enough to die of natural causes. Sometimes this fact is so evident that it is uncanny, as in the case of a shrine north of Albuquerque, New Mexico (see Figures 12-13). The site has featured a stuffed cartoon Tasmanian devil at least since I took the first picture in 2006, where he appears new. In 2010, I photographed the site again and 'TAZ' has a new friend and graying eyebrows.<sup>18</sup> Clearly, the iconic and anthropomorphic aspects of these objects contribute to the uncanny feeling. It is even more pronounced when, as in another shrine from New Mexico, the central figure at the site takes on human form (see Figures 14-15).

Figures 14, 15. North-east corner of Rodeo and Yucca, Santa Fe, New Mexico, U.S., 2003 and 2006. Photos by author.



## Making memory public

A shrine is not only a living memory of someone lost—an active attempt to keep the memory of the past loss present and alive in the public sphere—but also a talking-back to that death itself through material means. This is an assertion not of the memory of absence but of presence: *they are still here, included socially in the motoring public that lives on and is driving past every day*. In short, roadside crash shrines open up collective spaces for remembering individual road traumas that assert an ongoing social presence of lost drivers, passengers, and others killed in automobile accidents.

However scholars working on roadside shrines have focused more on the producers and direct users of crash shrines and have not adequately theorised or explained their wider collectivising functions. For instance, Catherine Collins and Alexandra Opie argue that they provide a space for working-through the violent deaths that occur. This creates an orderly inversion of “the chaos of traumatic memory and grief”, giving the people who build and maintain shrines a sense of agency in the face of traumatic loss.<sup>19</sup>

This is also a central claim of Jennifer Clark and Majella Franzmann, who see roadside shrines as a way for mourners to claim an “authority from grief” in the public sphere.<sup>20</sup> This is certainly a primary function of any roadside shrine. However while these other scholars have shown how shrines give the people who build them agency, I contend that they have their own agency once they are built and this has everything to do with how they work as collective memory forms. Simply put, shrines can be said to have agency because they seem to be alive there on the roadside while they have all sorts of things “done to them”. They are built, maintained, revised, contested and removed, but they also *do something* in the public sphere as they live their lives on the roadside.

That “doing something” is what I explore by way of conclusion. In *Stuff*, Daniel Miller argues that material culture is not simply a system of “stuff” but one where people and stuff “mutually constitute each other” within a dialectic between subject and object: where “objects make us, as part of the very same process by which we make them”.<sup>21</sup> I hope it has become clear that I share Miller’s conception of material objects and formations as *locations* for cultural work and not only *containers* of cultural work. The question then is: precisely how does this mutually constitutive cultural work *work* at crash shrines?

I have been arguing that a shrine transfers the life of the lost victim onto itself and I would like to be more precise about that claim. Thus far, my use of the term “transference” has implied a simple act of transferring something from one thing or state of being into another, but it also has a much more specific meaning within psychoanalytic theory, particularly within what is called object relations theory. Recently, scholars in the humanities and social sciences have been applying this psychoanalytic concept to a more literal kind of “object relations” between people and objects within material culture.

Within object-relations and relational psychoanalytic theoretical models, transference describes a particular therapeutic situation. When a patient's memory or experience is revived in a therapeutic session, an earlier experience is experienced as "in process" in the present, and the earlier person is replaced by the therapist who is projected upon as a therapeutic "object". In transference, the subject treats the object as if the object is equivalent to the subject's image of the object, erasing difference through what is called "projective identification". However transference refers to more than projection. It is, as Peter Redman argues, "a process of unconscious communication firmly located in the present and within a relational field", where transference dynamics "are simultaneously internal and shared, felt as belonging inside a particular individual while having no clear home in any single person".<sup>22</sup>

The dynamic is radically uncontained—"a flow rather than a location" where "the 'inner' always has the 'outer' present within it (and vice versa) such that the boundaries between inside and outside are fundamentally blurred and unstable".<sup>23</sup> This aligns the concept squarely with current theories of intersubjectivity within material culture, which emphasise not only the agency and "excessiveness" of objects, but also the kind of interpenetration of self and object contained by the dynamic of transference.<sup>24</sup> Thus transference is a crucial process to engage in explaining how individual and collective memories interplay at particular memory/spaces.

Roadside shrines clearly *are* transference objects, but they are also comprised of transference objects. As Margaret Gibson argues, "Through death, the most mundane objects can rise in symbolic, emotional and mnemonic value, sometimes outweighing all other measures of value—particularly the economic".<sup>25</sup> By engaging in transference and investing in things, shrine builders transform everyday mass-produced objects (such as teddy bears, plastic flowers, and balloons) into magical objects capable of affect. It is exactly this micro-process of transference that gives shrines their agency within the larger public sphere as well, where both the victim and the shrine builders are generally unknown to drive-by witnesses. If it were not for the initial transference of affect accomplished by shrine builders a shrine would be inert—a dead collection of stuff on the side of the road with no claim on the rest of us—but it is anything but inert.

A crash shrine materialises the process of investment in things, but it also renders them affective to those who witness the shrines as strangers. When you drive by one and notice it, you are brought into its web of transference. It can "trigger" your own memories of road trauma. It can "remind" you of other shrines you have seen. It can "make" you slow down. It can "cause" you to feel empathy. Literally, the shrine "does nothing", but nonetheless, things happen.

This is what I mean by saying that crash shrines "do something". What they do is *create a public that knows trauma*. They depend on the agency of others to give them their agency. By performing a specific, very local, site of memory in a public space—by living and dying on the roadside at the same place where the person they commemorate was lost—they materialise a wider memory/space as well. This

is a space for secondary witnessing of the everyday traumas embedded within a culture that lives in and through automobiles.

Created as transference objects for the bereaved, crash shrines live and die also as transference objects for anonymous drivers as well. They encounter shrines without knowing the people memorialised, without being “inside” the micro-public who maintain a social presence for the victim by commemorating a specific life lost, but being contained inside a different public: a motoring public made aware of lost fellow drivers. Seen this way, the mourning and warning functions of shrines converge: crash shrines do important work not only for the individuals who mourn the loss of *their* loved ones, but also for the larger collective. This is not only as a warning, but as an implicit assertion of affiliation—an assertion that *their* memory is *our* memory.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>See especially Rudolfo Anaya, Denise Chavez and Juan Estevan Arellano, *Descansos: An Interrupted Journey* (Albuquerque: El Norte Publications, 1995); Jennifer Clark, “Challenging Motoring Functionalism: Roadside Memorials, Heritage and History in Australia and New Zealand,” *The Journal of Transport History* 29 (2008): 23-43; Jennifer Clark and Majella Franzmann, “Authority From Grief: Presence and Place in the Making of Roadside Memorials,” *Death Studies* 30 (2006): 579-99; Charles Collins and Charles Rhine, “Roadside Memorials,” *Omega* 47 (2003): 221-44; Holly Everett, *Roadside Crosses in Contemporary Memorial Culture* (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 2002).

<sup>2</sup>Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz, “Introduction: Mapping Memory,” in eds. Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz, *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 1.

<sup>3</sup>Victor Buchli, “Introduction,” in ed. Victor Buchli, *The Material Culture Reader* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 1-22: 9. See especially Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma and Contemporary Art* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2005); Elizabeth Edwards, Chris Gosden and Ruth Phillips, *Sensible Objects: Colonialism, Museums and Material Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 2006); Carl Knappett, *Thinking Through Material Culture: An Interdisciplinary Perspective* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); W.J.T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials* (2nd edn), (London: Sage, 2007).

<sup>4</sup>Barbara Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2003), 6.

<sup>5</sup>Radstone and Schwarz, “Mapping Memory,” 2.

<sup>6</sup>Throughout, I am committed to creating what W.J.T. Mitchell calls an “image-text” where my words and photographs carry the argument through different

registers within a productive tension. See W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

<sup>7</sup>Jack Santino, “Performative Commemoratives: Spontaneous Shrines and the

<sup>8</sup>Public Memorialization of Death,” in *Spontaneous Shrines and the Public Memorialization of Death* (Ed.) Jack Santino (New York: Palgrave, 2006).

<sup>9</sup>Diane E. Goldstein and Diane Tye, “‘The Call of the Ice’: Tragedy and Vernacular Responses of Resistance, Heroic Reconstruction, and Reclamation,” in ed. Jack Santino *Spontaneous Shrines and the Public Memorialization of Death* (New York: Palgrave, 2006), 243; C. Allen Haney, Christina Leimer and Juliann Lowery, “Spontaneous Memorialization: Violent Death and Emerging Mourning Ritual,” *Omega* 35 (1997): 161.

<sup>10</sup>Jack Santino, “Performative Commemoratives,” 13.

<sup>11</sup>Jack Santino, “Performative Commemoratives,” 5, 10.

<sup>12</sup>Erika Doss, “Spontaneous Memorials and Contemporary Modes of Mourning in America,” *Material Religion* 2 (2006): 300.

<sup>13</sup>Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey, *Death, Memory & Material Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 181.

<sup>14</sup>Hallam and Hockey, *Death, Memory & Material Culture*, 152.

<sup>15</sup>Margaret Gibson, “Melancholy Objects,” *Mortality* 9 (2004): 297, 291.

<sup>16</sup>See Collins and Rhine, “Roadside Memorials,” 234; and Everett, *Roadside Crosses in Contemporary Memorial Culture*, 95-96.

<sup>17</sup>Jay Winter, “Sites of Memory,” in Radstone and Swartz, *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, 324. See also Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>18</sup>Here I am referring to a more general sense of ‘site of memory’ than Pierre Nora’s, which is too entangled with the nation as public to apply to radically localised roadside shrines. Cf. Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*,” *Representations* 26 (1989).

<sup>19</sup>In both pictures, the photo in the frame above ‘TAZ’ is faded beyond recognition, indicating a site history even longer than I picture here.

<sup>20</sup>Catherine Collins and Alexandra Opie, “When Places Have Agency: Roadside Shrines as Traumascesapes,” *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 24 (2009): 110.

<sup>21</sup>Jennifer Clark and Majella Franzmann, “Authority From Grief.”

<sup>22</sup>Daniel Miller, *Stuff* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2010), 80, 108, 60.

<sup>23</sup>Peter Redman, “Affect Revisited: Transference-Countertransference and the

<sup>24</sup>Unconscious Dimensions of Affective, Felt, and Emotional Experience,” *Subjectivity* 26 (2009): 61-62.

<sup>25</sup>Redman, “Affect Revisited,” 63.

<sup>26</sup>See especially Knappett, *Thinking Through Material Culture*.

<sup>27</sup>Gibson, “Melancholy Objects,” 292.

## Bibliography

- Anaya, Rudolfo, Denise Chavez and Juan Estevan Arellano, *Descansos: An Interrupted Journey* (Albuquerque: El Norte Publications, 1995).
- Buchli, Victor, "Introduction," in ed. Victor Buchli, *The Material Culture Reader* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 1-22.
- Bennett, Jill, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma and Contemporary Art* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2005).
- Clark, Jennifer, "Challenging Motoring Functionalism: Roadside Memorials, Heritage and History in Australia and New Zealand," *Journal of Transport History* 29 (2008): 23-43.
- Clark, Jennifer and Majella Franzmann, "Authority From Grief: Presence and Place in the Making of Roadside Memorials," *Death Studies* 30 (2006): 579-99.
- Collins, Catherine and Opie, Alexandra, "When Places Have Agency: Roadside Shrines as Traumascesapes," *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 24 (2009): 107-18.
- Collins, Charles and Charles Rhine, "Roadside Memorials." *Omega* 47 (2003): 221-44.
- Doss, Erika, "Spontaneous Memorials and Contemporary Modes of Mourning in America," *Material Religion* 2 (2006): 94-319.
- Edwards, Elizabeth, Chris Gosden and Ruth Phillips eds., *Sensible Objects: Colonialism, Museums and Material Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 2006).
- Everett, Holly, *Roadside Crosses in Contemporary Memorial Culture* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2002).
- Gibson, Margaret, "Melancholy Objects," *Mortality* 9 (2004): 285-99.
- Goldstein, Diane E. and Diane Tye, "'The Call of the Ice': Tragedy and Vernacular Responses of Resistance, Heroic Reconstruction, and Reclamation," in ed. Jack Santino, *Spontaneous Shrines and the Public Memorialization of Death* (New York: Palgrave, 2006), 233-54.
- Hallam, Elizabeth and Hockey, Jenny, *Death, Memory & Material Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 2001).
- Haney, C. Allen, Christina Leimer and Juliann Lowery, "Spontaneous Memorialization: Violent Death and Emerging Mourning Ritual," *Omega* 35 (1997): 159-71.
- Knappett, Carl, *Thinking Through Material Culture: An Interdisciplinary Perspective* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).



- Miller, Daniel, *Stuff* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010).
- Misztal, Barbara A., *Theories of Social Remembering* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2003).
- Mitchell, W.J.T., *Picture Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
- Mitchell, W.J.T., *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
- Nora, Pierre, “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*,” *Representations* 26 (1989): 7-24.
- Radstone, Susannah and Schwarz, Bill, “Introduction: Mapping Memory,” in eds. Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz, *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 1-12.
- Redman, Peter, “Affect Revisited: Transference-Countertransference and the Unconscious Dimensions of Affective, Felt, and Emotional Experience,” *Subjectivity* 26 (2009): 51-68.
- Rose, Gillian, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials* (2nd edn), (London: Sage, 2007).
- Santino, Jack, “Performative Commemoratives: Spontaneous Shrines and the Public Memorialization of Death,” in *Spontaneous Shrines and the Public Memorialization of Death* (Ed.) Jack Santino (New York: Palgrave, 2006), 5-16.
- Winter, Jay, “Sites of Memory,” in eds. Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 312-24.
- Winter, Jay. *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

### Biographical note

Robert M. Bednar is Associate Professor and Chair of Communication Studies at Southwestern University in Georgetown, Texas, where he teaches media studies, visual communication, and cultural studies. His work as an analyst, photographer, and theorist of critical visual communication focuses on the ways that people perform identities visually, materially, and spatially in public landscapes. The paper included here is part of his current book project titled *Road Scars: Trauma, Memory, and Automobility* which explores the visual, material, and spatial dimensions of roadside crash shrines as they are situated in the roadscape and within the discourse of automobility in the contemporary U.S.

Email: [bednarb@southwestern.edu](mailto:bednarb@southwestern.edu)

---

## Lest We Forget: Military Myths, Memory, and Canberra's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Memorial

Anne Brennan

---

## Lest We Forget: Military Myths, Memory, and Canberra's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Memorial

Anne Brennan

---

### Abstract

The precinct surrounding the Australian War Memorial is saturated in official commemorative narratives of Australian military history, from which the contribution of indigenous servicemen and women is completely absent. Those wishing to remember them must turn to a modest unofficial memorial on the southern slopes of Mt Ainslie, behind the Australian War Memorial. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Memorial is essentially nothing more than a plaque on a rock set in bushland, but over time it has assumed the status of a quasi-official memorial used strategically by different stakeholders for different purposes. Originally erected in 1988 by a concerned white citizen of Canberra, the original story of the memorial has become hidden beneath a palimpsest of different stories, each of which shapes the memorial to the different purposes of its stakeholders.

Keywords: war memory, war memorials, indigenous war service (Australia)

On the southern slopes of Mt Ainslie behind the Australian War Memorial (AWM) in Canberra is a small monument. It consists of nothing more elaborate than a brass plaque fixed to a boulder. The words on the plaque read: “Remembering the Aboriginal people who served in the Australian Armed Services”. They belong to Honor Thwaites, a prominent white citizen of Canberra, who funded and erected the memorial herself in 1988, the two hundredth anniversary of white settlement in Australia.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Memorial, as it has come to be known, is an unofficial memorial whose time has come. When I first encountered it in 1992, it was difficult to find, concealed as it was in the bushland that covers the flank of Mt Ainslie. In more recent years, shifts in Australian identity politics have given it greater visibility, and it has acquired the status of a quasi-official memorial. Yet the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Memorial has remained singularly flexible in its commemorative function. On the one hand, it is amenable to the different purposes of a multitude of stakeholders, and on the other resists any authoritative commemorative narrative. This is in marked contrast to the over-determined nature of the memorials within Canberra's official commemorative precinct.

In 1977, Honor Thwaites had campaigned successfully to have the southern slope of Mt Ainslie gazetted as a park. Her suggestion that it be called “Remembrance Nature Park” was designed to both acknowledge the proximity of the Australian War Memorial to the mountain, and to mark the sixtieth anniversary of the signing of the Armistice. From the beginning of her association with the site, she had been interested in the idea of involving the local indigenous community in some way with the development of the park.

However, it was not until 1988 that this idea crystallised into a decision to erect a memorial to indigenous servicemen and women within the park's precincts. Honor Thwaites had been successful in applying for a Bicentennial Authority grant to regenerate the bushland in the park area. She had been concerned about the divisions between indigenous and white Australians over the way in which the Bicentennial should be marked. In particular, she had noticed an article in the press detailing the unsuccessful attempt on the part of a group of Victorian Aborigines to obtain funding from the Bicentennial Authority to build a memorial to honour Aboriginal war dead.<sup>1</sup> As an adjunct to the regeneration project, and with the encouragement of Lyall Gillespie (a local historian), and Warwick Dix (the Director of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies), she arranged for the installation of the plaque as a gesture of reconciliation.<sup>2</sup>

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Memorial is located slightly to the eastern side of the AWM, almost but not quite on the Land Axis. This is the principal axis of Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin's original plan for the ceremonial centre of Canberra, known today as the Parliamentary Triangle. The Land Axis extends from Mt Ainslie to Capital Hill, where Parliament House now stands.

The great authority on nationalism, Anthony Smith, has observed that “... nations need homelands ... historic territories in which ‘our ancestors’ lived and which we carry in our hearts”.<sup>3</sup> The Griffins understood this in 1911, when they placed the topography of the city’s site at the centre of their plan for Canberra. James Weirick, an expert on Walter Burley Griffin, comments that the city’s plan is arranged in such a way as to express a “timeless universal statement on the meaning of the democratic experience”. This has been made specifically Australian through the alignment of the city’s ceremonial centre within the landscape and, in particular, the bushland preserves of Mt Ainslie and Black Mountain.<sup>4</sup> Built into the plans for the new capital of a new nation, therefore, was an inseparable connection between land, landscape, and the functions of the state.

This connection has come to have specific and complex relevance in contemporary Australia, as white Australians ask themselves how it is possible to feel an uncomplicated sense of belonging to places which we know are “ours” by virtue of their having been forcibly taken from their original inhabitants. At the same time, for indigenous people, the idea of belonging within their own land has had to be negotiated against and between European beliefs and institutions. Until comparatively recently, their complex relationships with land (rooted in cosmology and tribal law) have been discounted by the white legal processes in which power over land in Australia is invested.

Over the years, the Griffins’ original conceptual framework for the ceremonial centre of Canberra has been overlaid by the military nature of Anzac Parade, which forms a large section of the Land Axis. With the AWM at its head, Anzac Parade is home to 11 memorials to various branches of the armed services and to the conflicts in which Australia has been involved. It could be argued that this precinct is a spatial and commemorative embodiment of Australia’s most cherished myth about itself; that we are a nation born on the shores of Gallipoli, and shaped by our roles in subsequent conflicts.

Like all national myths, this narrative, a story of military heroism and martyrdom, cannot tolerate ambivalence or contradiction. It is particularly useful because it bypasses the more vexed account of Australia’s nationhood—anchored in the unpalatable truth that its white inhabitants wrested the land from its indigenous inhabitants—in favour of a story of a nation born vigorous and innocent on an alien shore. This national myth is figuratively “whitened” by the way in which its narration privileges the concept of military brotherhood over any other form of allegiance such as race, gender, or religious belief.

The years 1988-2000 marked a period in which Australia’s historical consciousness was being re-shaped. During this time, new indigenous historiographies were being developed. This, along with the growth of popular interest in family and local history, began to give rise to what Australian academic, Chilla Bulbeck, has described as “the reorientation of Australian history from the deeds that won the empire or nation to the activities of ordinary men and women and the history of local communities”.<sup>5</sup> Sustained published scholarship on the service of indigenous people in Australia’s armed forces began to appear in the

early 1990s. However, early press articles on the subject, such as those collected by Honor Thwaites in 1988, provided the first corrective to an image of the purely white Australian soldier.

Indeed, the idea of indigenous Australian soldiers was something of an anomaly for some Aboriginal people as well. The story of indigenous servicemen and women was not always central to the interests of many Aboriginal activists, for whom the concept of an indigenous warrior was more compellingly instated in debates about the so-called colonial wars, the struggles between indigenous people, and white settlers for control of land. The indigenous warrior as a symbol of resistance to colonial authority was important at this time when Aboriginal prior claim to territory formed an important part of the struggle for land rights. Moreover, the overtly military commemorative function of conventional war memorials, linked as they were to mainstream white settler values, was problematic for many indigenous commentators and activists.

For example, during the Bicentennial, Djon Mundine, Aboriginal curator and activist, organised an iconic memorial to those Aboriginal men and women who had died defending their country over the period of white settlement. The memorial, consisting of 200 traditional burial poles (one for each year of European occupation) was made by artists from Ramingining in the Northern Territory. The memorial was immediately assumed into the collection of the National Gallery of Australia. When he was asked in 1994 whether this memorial might have been more powerful if it had been located in the AWM, Mundine replied that the AWM was in itself “abhorrent to Aboriginal people”.<sup>6</sup>

However, in the years immediately following the Bicentennial, a renewed interest in the events of World War I, especially Gallipoli as a framing myth of national identity, began to reassert itself in public consciousness. This was after several decades, during which time these ideas seemed to lose their power over the public imagination in Australia. This shift found expression in the interment of the remains of an unknown soldier from the Western Front in the Hall of Memory in the AWM in 1993. Later in the decade, Gallipoli was to be reinstated even more firmly in the national consciousness through the conservative re-inscriptions of Australian history under the Howard Government.

These factors have created a new conservative middle ground in which both indigenous and white Australian people seek to see themselves reflected. The families of indigenous people who served in the Australian forces understandably want to see their relatives honoured as visibly and as fully as white Australian servicemen and women are. At the same time, the stories of indigenous servicemen and women have too often been shaped by racism and oppression, creating disruptions in the seamless narrative of comradeship and sacrifice at the heart of Australia's military mythology.

Neither Honor Thwaites nor her husband, Michael, publicised their role in the making of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Memorial.<sup>7</sup> Their intentions appear to have been to sow a kind of commemorative seed, which they hoped might take root amongst the indigenous community for whom it was intended.

Their reticence has allowed the memorial's many stakeholders to rewrite its history in ways that allow them to inscribe a range of sometimes contradictory commemorative impulses upon it. In this next section four such engagements with the memorial will be described, focusing on the way in which its bushland setting is co-opted in a variety of ways to construct multiple meanings.

The first such engagement dates from as early as 1992, when Robert Hall, the author of several books on indigenous service in the Australian military, invoked the memorial as a symbol of the silence that surrounded the contribution of Aboriginal servicemen and women in mainstream histories. He wrote: *Each year about one million visitors walk through the imposing entrance to the Australian War Memorial to pay homage at the shrine to the digger legend ... Far fewer people visit the nearby memorial to those black Australians who helped defend their country. In sharp contrast to the Australian War Memorial, this modest memorial consists of a simple plaque affixed to a boulder in a piece of untouched bushland. And where is it? If one were to imagine the Australian War Memorial as a north Australian homestead, this memorial to black servicemen and women would be the woodheap – 200 metres out the back door towards Mt Ainslie.*<sup>8</sup>

Here Hall speaks of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Memorial and the AWM as though they were equivalent, that is, as if they were both official memorials. In discussing their political relationship with each other, he re-configures the “untouched bushland” of Mt Ainslie as a colonised landscape in which white settlers co-opt the land. On the other hand, black inhabitants take up their makeshift camp behind the homestead, where permission to stay is always contingent on the whim of the coloniser.

Hall's position is given extra piquancy by the fact that custodianship of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Memorial is in the hands of ACT Parks and Conservation Department. In 2004, the refurbishment of the site of the memorial both provided an occasion to “rewrite” the history of the memorial and expose the ambiguous attitude of the management of the AWM towards it.

By this time, word of mouth had given the memorial increased visibility within the Canberra community. The refurbishment established signs and a walking trail to the site to reduce the impact of increased foot traffic to the memorial on the surrounding bushland. It also levelled the ground around it to allow for more formal ceremonies to take place there. To best represent the needs of the various stakeholders in the memorial, the Department convened a consultative committee that included, amongst others, representatives of the AWM.

For quite some time, the management of the AWM had turned a blind eye to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Memorial. However, as Aboriginal activists began to agitate for more recognition of indigenous servicemen and women in official commemorative events like Anzac Day, the memorial proved to be increasingly useful to them. For the last few years, for example, it has publicised a commemorative service there immediately after the Dawn Service on Anzac Day. This has allowed the AWM to appear to be responding to the needs of the

indigenous community, whilst avoiding the pressure to incorporate references to indigenous servicemen and women into the Dawn Service itself.

The cost of the refurbishment of the site was entirely met by the ACT Parks and Conservation Department. However, in the small pamphlet produced by the consultative committee to mark the refurbishment, the central location of the AWM's logo appears to give it some kind of official custodial relationship with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Memorial, and this is reinforced by the phrase on the front: "Their service and sacrifice is remembered in the Australian War Memorial". This is particularly ironic, given that in the entire permanent display of the AWM, there is only one explicit allusion to indigenous service, in a reference to home guard militias in the gallery that explores the experiences of the home front in World War II.

In the minutes of the consultative committee, frequent reference is made to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Memorial's "profound significance" and its "national importance". When at one meeting it was mentioned that visitors were clambering on and damaging the rock face to which the plaque is fixed, one member of the AWM staff even referred to the "sacredness" of the site, suggesting that it had another resonance as a traditional indigenous sacred site.<sup>9</sup>

The pamphlet also rewrites the history of the site. Honor Thwaites and her husband Michael are mentioned, but the year of its installation is given as 1993, and the reason for its establishment is connected with the Year of the Indigenous People. Given that Michael Thwaites was on the consultative committee, this is a puzzling mistake. By then he was quite frail and did not attend many of the meetings, and this might in part explain it.

Whatever the reason, the re-dating of the memorial from the bicentennial year to the Year of the Indigenous People does perform the convenient job of detaching its history from the contentious debates between white and indigenous Australians about national identity that characterised the bicentennial year. This, along with the references to the site's "sacredness", could be seen to essentialise the indigeneity of the servicemen and women commemorated by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Memorial, constructing an identity that is part of timeless tradition, outside the forces of history and politics. Such a construction suggests that its bush location is the natural site for the memorial, a site perhaps more appropriate than Canberra's formal commemorative precinct.

Two further engagements with the meaning of the site occur through the two anniversaries that attract the most visitors to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Memorial: the National Aboriginal and Islander Day of Observance Committee (NAIDOC) Week, held each year in July to celebrate the achievements of indigenous communities; and Anzac Day (25 April). These two anniversaries provide an interesting insight into the way in which the memorial's meaning remains in flux. It can be utilised as a military memorial, whilst at the same time allowing another, more ambivalent, register of meaning to remain legible.

The NAIDOC Week ceremony draws indigenous members of the armed services to the site and is invariably attended by senior military staff as well as elders of



the local Aboriginal community. The ceremony is configured along formal military lines, with a flagstaff flying the ensigns of the various branches of the armed services, and a formal wreath-laying ceremony. The local indigenous community also performs a “welcome to country”, the ceremony performed by elders of local indigenous communities signifying that they give their blessing to the event taking place on their land. In the NAIDOC Week ceremony, the bush landscape of the memorial is temporarily converted into the official space of a military parade ground, sanctioned by the indigenous community's own protocols.

By contrast, the Anzac Day service is much more informal: there are none of the trappings of a military ceremony, and people gather at the site in an ad hoc manner. Some lay bouquets and candles at the foot of the rock face, and others simply look on and pay their respects. Usually the service consists of a short address by an indigenous officer, and informal prayers conducted by an armed forces chaplain.

In 2007, a large congregation of visitors made their way to the site, to be welcomed by Dr Margo Weir (a retired, indigenous naval officer), and Tom Slockee (an indigenous army chaplain). Dr Weir welcomed visitors to “our memorial”, proudly pointing out its bush setting, declaring that this was the only place in Australia where a Dawn Service was held for indigenous service people. “We in Canberra,” she said, “we just love this spot.” She, too, had her own version of the story of the memorial, telling her audience that it had been erected in 1979, and that it had been a “cooperative action” between the local Ngunnawal people and other Aboriginal people who had lived in Canberra at the time. Tom Slockee then went on to give a blessing, which is transcribed in part:

*Oh Lord, bless this place, a place of remembrance. Thank you for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women who volunteered to fight for and defend country ... We remember with love, reverence, and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, including ... Maoris too, who have laid down their lives ... We also pray and bless those aboriginal men and women before the boats came, and when they came, as they became the freedom fighters for their own country. We remember those people too, Lord, and we know that in one way the fight continues. So we dedicate this particular site, a site that is symbolic in many ways, in the bush amongst the trees, the rocks and the animals in natural surroundings, a bit out of the way, out of sight, maybe a symbol of the way in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been treated ... we honour and pay tribute to all people who've paid the price for what they believe in.<sup>10</sup>*

James Young, in his work on the function of memorials in contemporary society, has pointed out that the real work of a memorial is to return the burden of remembering to the community. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Memorial is one which articulates the fractures, the silences, and the inconsistencies that surround the memory of contentious events.

Robert Hall is able to re-make the memorial as a symbol of the silence that surrounded the story of indigenous servicemen by casting its location as a broader metaphor for the displacement of indigenous people in their own land. The AWM

has adroitly co-opted it as a quasi-official adjunct to their own activities, which also relieves them of the responsibility for incorporating indigenous experience into its own commemorative role. For them, the bush site of the memorial essentialises its indigenous stakeholders in ways that identify them with notions of timelessness and tradition, outside the histories commemorated within Anzac Parade's official precinct.

The two indigenous officers, Weir and Slockee, invoke the memorial not only as a site of co-operation between indigenous communities, but as one that transcends the divided politics of indigenous land rights to encompass it as a site of commemoration of all indigenous warriors, both colonial freedom fighters and contemporary servicemen and women. This is articulated most tellingly in the particularly indigenous inflection of Slockee's phrase "to fight for and defend country", with its emphasis on custodial tradition rather than ownership. At the same time, there is an ambivalent register to his prayer, in which he notes that "the fight continues", and that the memorial's natural site also means that it is out of sight, a potential metaphor for the treatment of indigenous people at European hands.

Slockee's ambivalence might stand for the complexity of commemorating the indigenous contribution to Australia's armed services. Indigenous soldiers can be seen as forgotten heroes, complicit collaborators in a coloniser's agendas, or those whose commemoration transcends race and whose contribution to the defence of Australia is implicit in the many official memorials that line Anzac Parade. Similarly, there is no real consensus amongst indigenous service men and women about the necessity for a dedicated memorial within Canberra's official commemorative precinct. Many do not see themselves as distinct from the military fellowship of which they were a part, whilst others would like to see the indigenous contribution to Australia's armed forces specifically acknowledged on Anzac Parade.

The question that remains, however, is what might be remembered, and what forgotten, by such a memorial? If an official memorial might make the story of indigenous service men and women more visible, that story would inevitably have to be "ironed out" to conform to the agendas of national myth-making that lie at the heart of Anzac Parade. If this is the case, who is to say that their memory may not be more authentically, if contentiously, honoured by the modest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Memorial, and by all those who visit it in its bush setting on the flank of Mt Ainslie?

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>John Lahey, "Two Veterans Raise a Memorial to Honor Aboriginal War Dead," *The Age*, 16 March 1987, 5. Honor Thwaites also clipped an article detailing the role of indigenous servicemen in World War 1: John Janke, "Aborigines for King and Country," *The Canberra Times*, 4 May 1988, 21.

<sup>2</sup>Minutes of the meeting of the Friends of Remembrance Nature Park, 14 February 1987, uncatalogued papers of Honor Thwaites, National Library of Australia.

<sup>3</sup>Cited in Julia Martinez, "Problematising Aboriginal Nationalism," *Aboriginal History* 21 (1997), 143.

<sup>4</sup>Cited in Paul Reid, *Canberra Following Griffin: A Design History of Australia's National Capital* (Canberra: National Archives of Australia, 2002), 48.

<sup>5</sup>Chilla Bulbeck, "Australian History Set in Concrete? The Influence of the New Histories on Australian Memorial Construction," *Journal of Australian Studies* 28 (1991), 4.

<sup>6</sup>Quoted in Terry Smith, "Public Art Between Cultures: The Aboriginal Memorial, Aboriginality and Nationality in Australia," *Critical Inquiry* 27(4), (2001), 659.

<sup>7</sup>Michael Thwaites did in fact mention Honor's role in the memorial in a tribute published in the local press after her death.

<sup>8</sup>Robert Hall, "Finding the Black Parts of the Digger Legend: A Guide to Archival Sources on the Aboriginal and Islander Contribution to the Second World War," *Aboriginal History* 16(2), (1992), 58

<sup>9</sup>Minutes of the Consultative Committee for the Refurbishment of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Memorial, October 2004. Uncatalogued papers of Honor Thwaites, National Library of Australia.

<sup>10</sup>I am indebted to video material shot by Ivo Lovric at the Anzac Day ceremony (2007) for the words of Tom Slockee and Dr Margo Weir's account of the history of the memorial.

## Bibliography

Bulbeck, Chilla, "Australian History Set in Concrete," *Journal of Australian Studies* 28 (1991): 3-16.

Hall, Robert, "Finding the Black Parts of the Digger Legend: A Guide to Archival Sources on the Aboriginal and Islander Contribution to the Second World War," *Aboriginal History* 16(2), (1992), 58-72.

Martinez, Julia, "Problematising Aboriginal Nationalism," *Aboriginal History* 21 (1997), 133-147.

Reid, Paul, *Canberra Following Griffin: A Design History of Australia's National Capital* (Canberra: National Archives of Australia, 2002).

Smith, Terry, "Public Art Between Cultures: The Aboriginal Memorial, Aboriginality and Nationality in Australia," *Critical Inquiry*, 27(4), (2001), 629-61.

### Biographical note

Anne Brennan is a writer and artist. She is Head of the Art Theory Workshop at the Australian National University School of Art. Her research interests address the way in which memory is configured in public institutions such as the memorial, the museum, and the archive.

Email: [anne.brennan@anu.edu.au](mailto:anne.brennan@anu.edu.au)

---

# Where We Come From: The Role of Place in Family Memory

Belinda Castles

---

## Where We Come From: The Role of Place in Family Memory

Belinda Castles

---

### Abstract

In the cellar of the Duisburg metalworkers' union on 2 May 1933, four trade unionists, one of them my great-grandfather, were beaten and shot by Nazis. Outside the cellar is a row of square iron chairs, a memorial. For me, this is a place of ghostly presence, a threshold between the violent past and the present. It is a place that contains memory: family memory and collective memory. It contains my history, and that of my children. This article, centred on personal experiences, will explore the role of place and memory in informing my creative work, a novel based on my grandparents' lives. It will draw on Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer's memoir of Czernowitz, *Ghosts of Home*, in particular a visit to the crossroads at which Hirsch's parents made a decision that saved them from transportation to the Nazi death camps. For those who come after, who inhabit the complexities of what Hirsch has called "postmemory", being in such places can be at once disturbing and enriching, infused as they are with the contingency of survival or death. What do these sites contain? How do they inform what Hirsch and Spitzer call our "myths of origin"? Via Georges Perec's notion of "fictive memory", I will suggest that place engenders "potential memory", a kind of memory linked to memorial, fuelled by imagination and solidarity.

Keywords: postmemory, memorial, fictive memory, points of memory, potential memory, family history, Marianne Hirsch, Nazi Germany, Georges Perec, Duisburg, stolpersteine

## Points of memory

In March 2008, I travelled from my home in Australia to Duisburg in the Ruhr region of Germany to research a piece of family history, the murder by the Nazis of my great-grandfather, union secretary, Johann Schlösser, in the cellar of his offices. I was researching a novel based on my grandparents' lives: my grandfather and Johann's son, anti-Nazi activist Heinz Schlösser, was forced to flee Germany on the day of his father's murder. I was interested in uncovering information that the family might not previously have known. I also wanted, like so many others descended from Europeans of that era, to be in the place where this event had happened, and in doing so, to somehow draw closer to the source of my own history.

A German cousin and I had arranged to meet a union secretary who had written about the history of trade unionism in the town. He had covered, in particular, the 1933 murder by the SchutzStaffel (SS) and Sturm Abteilung (SA) group now known as die Maiverbrecher, or the May Criminals. As we talked in the meeting room of the metalworkers' union, he spoke of the murdered men in a familiar, affectionate tone, although he was too young to have known them. He then showed us various plaques and memorials in the building, and we went out into the rain to begin a walk to some more places he felt would be of interest.

Before I describe these places I will refer to a phrase Hirsch and Spitzer use in *Ghosts of Home*: "points of memory". The phrase, used they explain instead of Pierre Nora's *lieux de memoire*, describes those "remnants that we think of as testimonial objects", saying that they serve as "'points of memory" opening small windows to the past.<sup>1</sup> I find this term apposite, in its emphasis on the idea of opening, although it is used here in relation to archives, photographs, and objects rather than place. The places we visited in Duisburg provided openings through which to see out of the present into the past, and through which the past might enter the present. They were windows into my family's history and the city into the former life of a place. Being in them brought us closer to a sense of connection with family memory.

Hirsch and Spitzer emphasise the fragmentary nature of our access to the past. This image of "small windows" captures for me the idea of glimpses, flashes, something vivid but partial, a story whose beginnings and endings are not known. We cannot therefore understand what we see without imagining its contingent details, its context.

Some of these places were already memorialised. Outside the contemporary union building, our guide showed us the first of the public memorials, a group of coffin-like sculptures, representing the bodies of the murdered unionists. They were constructed partly of copper, made to degrade in weather, and to identify the work of the men with metal. Their shape, huge metal containers for murdered men, was unnerving and poignant.

Figure 1. Coffins.



We walked along the river to a bridge. Our guide stopped us at its middle point. It had begun to rain heavily. My cousin and I huddled under his umbrella while the union secretary stood, talking in the rain. This was a modern bridge, he told us, but the old one had been in the same place. He pointed to the road beneath our feet. Our great-grandfather, Johann, had stood here. Then he pointed out a street on the other side of the river, to a building a little way along it. That was where the metalworkers' union used to be. He told us that Johann stood here and saw that the SS and SA were going into his office and made the decision to go to the police. That was the day, the secretary said, that the police had gone over to the Nazis.

"This," he said, "is where your family left your home. Now you have all gone around the world." He asked my cousin for a word in English and it turned out to be the same as the German: "diaspora". He pointed to the road. "Your diaspora begins." Then he walked us along to where the original union building of my great-grandfather's days had stood, under which the men had been murdered in the cellar. On the pavement outside was a memorial, a row of four square metal chairs, each of them facing a concrete wall.

Figure 2. Chairs.





He explained the symbolism to my German cousin, who translated for me. The place of work, where the chairs sit, is also a prison. The chairs symbolise the men too, and their square shape represents the strength of the union. Then he said a word that I could not understand, but which they both spent some time making sure I grasped. This sculpture was meant as a *stolperstein*, a stumbling block, something that is literally placed in your path, so that you stumble over it, so that you do not forget.

As they explained this to me, a cyclist dismounted his bicycle, as he could not ride past us and the memorial without going onto the road. He watched us as he passed, and when he was clear of the chairs, he mounted and went on his way.

Figure 3. Close-up: chairs.



I did not at that time understand the more specific use since the 1990s of the word “*stolperstein*”. It is the name for the little copper-coated plaques, the size of a cobblestone, laid in the streets of European towns to memorialise a single deported and murdered victim of the Nazis, showing where they lived or worked. It usually

gives the name and birthday of the person taken, and the dates of their deportation and murder.

Figure 4. Stolpersteine.



There are thousands of these little objects throughout the countries from which people were taken, and they resemble the Duisburg memorials in their appeal to imagine. Cultural historian, Joseph Pearson, writes in his blog, *The Berlin Memory: It is not what is written [on the stolpersteine] which intrigues, because the inscription is insufficient to conjure a person. It is the emptiness, void, lack of information, the maw of the forgotten, which gives the monuments their power and lifts them from the banality of a statistic. And yet from the inscription, the stumbler can infer the horror.*<sup>2</sup>

There is more representative information in my great-grandfather's memorial than in these little plaques. However, Pearson's reflections on "void" and "lack" and the power they generate suggests for me the role of imagination in the impact of these *in situ* memorials. We would walk past these places, where the murdered people lived and worked, but someone is asking us to stop, to stumble, to mark the place from which they have vanished, to *imagine* we remember them. The effect of these places has a creative source. They are a communication, a point in space that marks a point in time, the break between before and after death and exile. What I felt in that place was not a haunting created by a supernatural presence. Someone had cut out a little window, a point of memory, and I had travelled there to peer through it. They were showing me something, and I was seeing, even if I was not seeing the thing as it was.

We looked at the chairs, as we jostled under the umbrella. My phone was vibrating in my bag. My husband was calling, over and over again. As my phone slipped around in my bag it had been dialling numbers in Australia; he was ringing

to ask me to make it stop. Beneath our feet was the cellar where the men were beaten and shot. I knew from my grandmother's memoirs that my grandfather, Heinz, was in a building across the street from his father's office when the SS and SA entered, that he saw his father go in, and that he himself fled. I looked behind me. It was not these buildings in which he had hidden, as they had all been constructed after the war. The previous night my grandfather's cousin had dropped us at our hotel, at the edge of a vast, empty square, saying, "I walked along here as a child in 1945 with your great-grandmother, my Tante Auguste. The destruction was terrible. Everything was gone."

Nothing here was as it had been in 1933. Almost all of the buildings in Duisburg have been replaced in the years since the bombings. Yet my eye was drawn to the gap at ground level, the airway to the space beneath the building, the space, although probably reconfigured, in which he was killed. What was it like to live in those flats? Was this not an ill-favoured, haunted place? Perhaps not, perhaps it was just a block of flats. However, here was this reminder, the stumbling block. It would take long familiarity or concerted effort to avoid the history of this place. People like this union secretary watching us in the rain had made sure of it.

I wondered: if there was a way to go into that cellar, would I? It was right there—I would only be here once. Yet I could barely look at even the wall of the flats that stand in the place of the union building, and there was a weighted feeling being there. The cellar, so close by, although changed physically from the day of the murders, seemed to emit its darkness. The memorials had done their work, had fuelled the imagination in a way that elicited a disturbed awe for this site of death and departure.

### Contained memory

What did I find by going to that place outside the cellar? What did it give me, for the memorial I was making, my novel? What is in such a place, for someone who goes looking? The word that comes most readily about the effect of that place is "haunted". It was to do with the layers of time, the psychic presence of a number of different events, happening in their own temporal space and yet colliding, clashing, happening now. I felt the moment of Johann being taken from his family and colleagues, I imagined as much of the struggle as I could bear. His son waiting in the building across the street. At the same time, my phone was ringing, calling me insistently back to the present, to the needs of my own daily existence. The cyclist dismounting as he moved through this space, the evidence of residents in the flat above the cellar: their lace curtains, a huge vase of flowers.

Another temporal reality made itself felt: the day-to-day existence of my ancestral family, my grandfather, my great-grandparents, the siblings, the children, walking up and down these streets, going about their ordinary lives, my walk among the memorials and special places intersecting and tracing their daily footsteps.

In Sigmund Freud's terms, here is the place where the homely or *heimlich*—my great-grandfather's place of work, my ancestral hometown in which the most ordinary of actions were carried out—becomes unhomely or *unheimlich*, uncanny, haunting. It is as our guide described the chairs and the walls in front of them: the place of work has become a place of imprisonment. And the chairs are empty.

### Ghosts of home

Marianne Hirsch's work on what she terms "postmemory" situates the responses of those who come after to the fragments of our ancestors' lives. She uses the term largely in reference to the form of memory carried by the children of Holocaust survivors. She writes:

*... the power of mourning and memory, and the depth of the rift dividing their parents' lives, impart to them something that is akin to memory. Searching for a term that would convey its temporal and qualitative difference from survivor memory, I have chosen to call this secondary, or second-generation, memory 'postmemory'.<sup>3</sup>*

She writes too that this is:

*... a powerful form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation.<sup>4</sup>*

This "imaginative investment and creation" describes my own encounters with the places, papers, and objects of my grandparents' lives. That familial connection that stokes the longing to know what life was like feeds the imagination, makes the mind run on beyond what can be told, seen, or known.

In *Ghosts of Home*, Hirsch has explored with her husband, Leo Spitzer, the role of "imaginative investment" in her own visits with her parents to their hometown, Czernowitz, as it was known before World War II. She describes a moment in which they stand literally at a crossroads, the place at which her parents made a decision to go back to the ghetto, rather than to the transports, a decision to which Hirsch and her parents owe their lives:

*Suddenly, as we talked and listened, the barricades and rows of soldiers became visible. And as we walked about this landscape of memory, the streets became animated with the presence of people from that past: long-lost relatives, friends, neighbors ... ghosts emerging from the shadows between the buildings, conjured up by recall and narration, by our being here, by our presence and witness.<sup>5</sup>*

Here are "ghosts", but also the clear sense of the authors' own presence imaginatively populating this "landscape of memory". Her guides were her parents; mine were the union secretary (keeper of the union's memory) and my grandmother's writings. There were also the artists and officials whose work placed the chairs on the street. Ghosts are those people our guides have encouraged us to imagine, who they have introduced us to by bringing us here.

They are the people seen through the little windows opened up at the “points of memory”, who have come through into our space now and walked among us. They crowd the pavement, all those present in one place as the layers of the city’s time collapse.

There is much missing when we look through the small windows. For me, writing fiction is the way to remember what I never knew. Hirsch writes of her journey into her parents’ past: “Glimpses, snapshots, innuendos—maps to nowhere. These are the legacies of their flight, and it is no surprise that their paucity leads to some amount of mythification.”<sup>6</sup> She goes on to talk about two anecdotes of luck and survival, calling them “myths of origin”.

In my own case absence leads me to fill in the gaps with fictive remembrance. Mysteries, the blood of fiction, are created in such loaded places. The cellar that we did not enter is a void at the centre of the novel I am writing, a chasm from which the surviving characters keep their distance in case they are pulled towards it and inside. It is a place the narrator must return to, knowing she cannot look away forever, that she is compelled to remember. This cellar has generated its own myths of origin.

### Fictive memory

To be haunted by a place is an active relationship—I have animated this piece of pavement with my family memories. This relationship is productive and generative. It is reciprocal too. I have animated this place and it has animated the present, for me at least, through my creative work. The experience of reading fiction is for me at its richest when the prose appears to be the revelation of a memory. Sometimes, for a moment, I forget that the fiction I am reading is an artifice. The process of writing fiction can feel like this too. When I write fluently it feels as though I am writing something I remember. The imaginary streets of my ancestors’ Duisburg have become absorbed into something like a memory.

The term “fictive memory”, used by Georges Perec, might describe some of the qualities of such a memory. He used this term in relation to a film he planned to make with Robert Bober about Ellis Island where immigrants, many Jewish, were processed until 1940.<sup>7</sup> He says that fictive memory is “a memory that might have belonged to me”.<sup>8</sup> Because Perec and Bober were Jews who lived through World War II, the history of the place might have been their history. Perec told an interviewer “it’s a work about memory and a memory that concerns us, although it’s not ours, but is ... adjacent to ours”.<sup>9</sup> He wrote that Ellis Island, as “the very place of exile, that is, the place of the absence of place, the place of dispersal”, fascinated him “as if it were inscribed somewhere in a life story that might have been mine, formed part of a probable autobiography, a potential memory”.<sup>10</sup>

Writers who imagine potential memories and possible journeys, who make a symbolic return to the point of no actual return, carry the sense that “it might have

been me”. These potential memories are concentrated around place, which might as Pécic says be imagined as negative space: “a place of dispersal”, or a place from which people disappear. In my family history the place that emits a charge is the place where my great-grandfather was murdered and my grandfather fled, the streets of the family’s home turned into points of exile.

Duisburg is not only a point of disappearance. To imagine that moment I had also to see it as the place where my ancestors lived and worked. My fictive memory, in the shape of my novel, is generated in part by the energy at that point, but it also remembers the place of home, that might have been my hometown but for the disaster of Nazism. So I imagine my grandfather, later banished, walking these streets through childhood, returning from World War I, carrying his son on his shoulders, visiting his father at work.

Figure 5. Warehouse.



When I came back to my photos of my visit to Duisburg I found that there was a place that had spoken to my imagination that was not the point of disappearance, a place seemingly unrelated. It was a surprise to see this factory, or warehouse, again. It was a striking building I photographed as we walked around Duisburg, perhaps because it suggested a vibrant industrial past for the town. I had forgotten about it, and yet in the novel it is an important place. Without remembering the real place as I wrote, a whole narrative strand came into being, of a childhood spent watching a factory being built towards the sky, of its role as a meeting place for anti-Nazis, and its dock as a smuggling point for weapons of resistance. Going to Duisburg provided the source, the imaginative connection, for me to a town that has been reduced to rubble and built over since my grandfather left.

What was missing, out of sight beyond the little window frames, has pushed itself into my fictive imaginings to form new myths of origin, of daily life, not just disappearances.

### Memorial, place, and solidarity

These resonances of place, the places one returns to in order to imagine family memory, stem from a family's need for memorial. Eva Hoffman writes: *Perhaps remembering the dead is the very opposite of gratuitous violence ... a gratuitous act of retrieval of meaning from oblivion ... the meaning of being human would be diminished if we could not hold those who have died in our minds, if we could not sustain a symbolic relationship to them.*<sup>11</sup>

Returning to family places, to points of exile, is a stage in this symbolic relationship, a family ritual that may or may not precede the making of more tangible memorials. It is its own form of “retrieval of meaning”.

To return to Perec, his fictive memory, made from the place of exile of thousands, Ellis Island, is an act of reaching towards kin. He writes of his sense, rooted in exile, of: *... being different ... from 'my own kin'. I don't speak the language that my parents spoke, I don't share any of the memories they may have had. Something that was theirs, which made them who they were, their history, their culture, their creed, their hope, was not handed down to me.*<sup>12</sup>

Perec projects a memory, he reaches towards his “kin” from whom he is exiled. He makes an inheritance out of loss, retrieving meaning from place. The continuities of family have been broken irreparably. His act of memory, of affiliation with the migrant Jews of America, is fuelled by loss of language, history, and culture. In Ellis Island he seeks “the actual image of this point of no return, the consciousness of this radical fracture”.<sup>13</sup> He searches for roots that have been ripped out. His familial past has been obliterated and yet he makes his own kind of memory.

In his fictive memory, Perec makes a figurative voyage to the point that marks the separation from past and kin. A writer who creates potential memories and possible journeys, who makes a symbolic return to the point of no actual return, works in part from the sense that “it might have been me”. This is writing against erasure, knowing recovery is not possible. The impossibility of recovery, one might read in Perec's fictive memory, is the fuel of memory. In absence he seeks meaning. He ends his essay: *... by coming close to this abandoned island ... I fancy that at moments I have succeeded in giving resonance to some of the words that are for me inexorably attached to the very name of Jew: journey, expectation, hope, uncertainty, difference, memory, and to those two weak, unlocatable, unstable, fugitive concepts whose fitful light reflects from one on to the other: Native Land and Promised Land.*<sup>14</sup>

Like Perec's efforts to “give resonance” to the haunting lexicon of a ruptured past by “coming close” to that island, a return to the point of dispersal is in itself an act of memorial, a family ritual of imaginative memory and solidarity.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer, *Ghosts of Home: The Afterlife of Czernowitz in Jewish Memory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), xix.

<sup>2</sup>Joseph Pearson, “Nazi Victims and Stumbling Blocks to Memory,” accessed June 28, 2011, <http://needleberlin.com/2010/08/23/nazi-victims-and-stumbling-blocks-to-memory/>

<sup>3</sup>Marianne Hirsch, “Past Lives: Postmemories in Exile,” *Poetics Today* 17 (1996), 662.

<sup>4</sup>Hirsch, “Past Lives,” 659.

<sup>5</sup>Hirsch and Spitzer, *Ghosts*, 138.

<sup>6</sup>Hirsch and Spitzer, *Ghosts*, 154.

<sup>7</sup>Robert Bober and Georges Perec, *Recit's d'Ellis Island* (Paris: Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication, 1980).

<sup>8</sup>Georges Perec, *Species of Spaces and Other Places* (London: Penguin, 1999), 129.

<sup>9</sup>Perec, *Species of Spaces*, 129.

<sup>10</sup>Perec, *Species of Spaces*, 136.

<sup>11</sup>Eva Hoffman, *After Such Knowledge* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 160-61.

<sup>12</sup>Perec, *Species of Spaces*, 136.

<sup>13</sup>Perec, *Species of Spaces*, 136.

<sup>14</sup>Perec, *Species of Spaces*, 137-38.

## Bibliography

Bober, Robert and Perec, Georges, *Recit's d'Ellis Island* (Paris: Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication, 1980).

Hirsch, Marianne, “Past Lives: Postmemories in Exile,” *Poetics Today* 17 (1996).

Hirsch, Marianne and Spitzer, Leo, *Ghosts of Home: The Afterlife of Czernowitz in Jewish Memory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

Hoffman, Eva, *After Such Knowledge* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

Pearson, Joseph, “Nazi Victims and Stumbling Blocks to Memory,” accessed June 28, 2011, <http://needleberlin.com/2010/08/23/nazi-victims-and-stumbling-blocks-to-memory/>

Perec, Georges, *Species of Spaces and Other Places* (London: Penguin, 1999).



### Biographical note

Belinda Castles is a doctoral candidate in Creative Writing with the Writing and Society Research Group at the University of Western Sydney. Her thesis is a novel about the lives of her grandparents and an exegesis exploring fiction as a form of memory. She has completed an MA in Novel Writing at the University of Manchester and previously published two novels, the most recent of which, *The River Baptists*, won the *Australian/Vogel Literary Award*. In 2008 she was named one of the *Sydney Morning Herald's* Best Young Novelists. Her latest novel will be published by Allen and Unwin in 2012.

Email: [bcastles@inet.net.au](mailto:bcastles@inet.net.au)

---

# Bridging the Gap

Tony Whincup

---

## Bridging the Gap

Tony Whincup

---

### Abstract

The title of this article, “Bridging the Gap”, is intended to suggest the inevitable gulf between the living and the dead. The disjunction, imposed by death on an established and significant relationship, is discussed as a threat to an individual’s sense of self-definition and recognition. The article is illustrated with original photo-ethnographic material that draws on the little-documented practices of memorialisation on the remote islands of Kiribati, as well other examples from around the world. Underpinning this article is the belief that being able to remember lies at the heart of our survival, our humanity, and our individual identity. It is argued that self-definition is closely tied to memory and the maintenance of memories is of vital concern to social groups and individuals. The fear of losing the memory of significant events and people gives rise to strategies implicating enduring tangible materials in their maintenance. It is proposed that the extent to which strategies are developed to maintain a connection with the dead is in direct relationship to the significance of the deceased to a personal or public sense of self. Mnemonics of memorialisation hold a profound and significant role in the development and execution of these strategies.

Keywords: self-definition, mnemonics, memorialisation, burial

## Bridging the gap

This article begins and ends on the remote islands in the Republic of Kiribati, a chain of coral atolls straddling the equator approximately half-way between Hawaii and Australia.

Figures 1, 2. On the atoll of Tabiteua North is the mwaneaba (meeting house) of Atanikarawa in the village of Buota.



Inside this meeting house is a small cask hung from the roof beams, which holds the bones of Kourabi, reputed to have been a great warrior and a “giant”. Approximately every seven years, his bones are washed. The time to wash these bones is signalled through a dream of a *unimwane* (an old man or elder) of the village. Preparations begin, new mats are made for the *mwaneaba*, food is collected for feasting, and practising for the dancing begins. Finally, in the early hours of morning, the bones are carried to the ocean side and washed. During the following day the bones are dried, oiled, and re-hung in the *mwaneaba* until the next time a dream brings the village together for this ritual.

Figure 3. Cask containing Kourabi's bones.



The washing of Kourabi's bones is an important event for the whole community; the remote village is known for the significance of this event. The village and the individuals involved enjoy a status and sense of self-definition from the ritual. The washing of the bones establishes a point of difference and, therefore, of self-recognition and self-definition.

Through an association with the bones of Kourabi, the villagers consciously or unconsciously, inevitably and unavoidably, map out their orientation towards their existence. Wilhelm Dilthey suggested, "Thus we learn to comprehend the mind-constructed world as a system of interactions or as an inter-relationship contained in its enduring creations."<sup>1</sup> It could be argued that a development of an awareness of self is revealed and maintained in the concrete expressions of our experiences.

The social differentiation established through the ritual practice of washing Kourabi's bones provides a sense of individual difference and social recognition for those involved. Generating a point of socially acceptable difference is not easy in Kiribati. Just as the atolls are physically similar, so are the patterns of social life that are maintained on each island. Traditional skills, practices, and values are common to all living generations. There are no dramatic changes in

buildings, dress, or forms of social behaviour, and the I-Kiribati language is spoken throughout the islands with only minor differences.

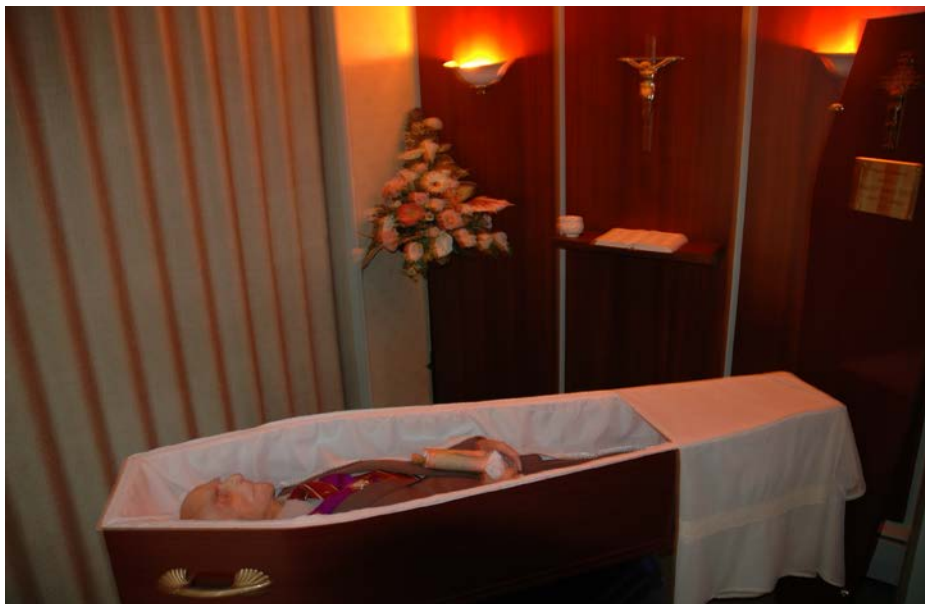
The dynamics and structure of village life ensure transparency of activities and behaviour. Traditional knowledge systems and strategies for maintaining cultural patterns promote a homogenous and stable culture. The ritual associated with Kourabi assumes great significance, dynamically affecting the day-to-day existence of life on the atoll with its rarity and intensity.

Although Kourabi's bones were hung in the *mwaneaba* to honour and show respect for his role in life and to mourn his death, I suggest that the sustained attendance to the preservation of his memory has now shifted, and the enthusiasm of its maintenance is in direct relation to the sense of identity the village derives from it. To lose the memories of this chief, Kourabi, would be to lose an essential and vital aspect of community. In embracing the mnemonic potential of the bones and establishing the ritual practice of their cleaning, an inter-generational continuity of Kourabi's story and his relation to the village is ensured, as is a special sense of community.

The utilitarian aspect of the ritual also preserves the casket. The oiling and cleaning of the bones preserves the skeleton and, to an extent, the meeting-house itself as it is refurbished before hosting visitors for the associated celebrations. These activities also encourage the maintenance of traditional skills such as string and thatch-making and the aural histories embedded in the ancient chants that accompany the dances.

Turning our attention from Kiribati. When my father died in the United Kingdom, I was in New Zealand. I flew back to pack up his house and "things" and to attend the funeral. "Things" were much more to do with my mother, who had died some years earlier. I had never strongly associated my father with any particular object. Was there a mnemonic that would connect me to a lifetime of memories?

Figures 4, 5. Father's funeral.





When I went to the funeral home to see him laid out in a cask it seemed natural for me, as a photographer, to reach for my camera and make one last image of him. I was sad for him not being a part of life anymore, but he was approaching 90, with the accompanying ailments of age. I realised the devastation I was feeling was for me—not him. His death had dramatically changed an aspect of my sense of self. All my life I had been a “son”—a significant definition—now I felt orphaned.

I interred his ashes in a beautiful field near the crematorium—a place that I may or may not ever re-visit. I also made a photograph of this site. The part of me that was his son is sustained, as much as it can be, by the pictures I have. As long as his memory remains, so too does that of belonging as a son.

Pierre Bourdieu has noted that a search for “self” is a primary function in human life. It is logical then to see as important the protection of those elements that constitute a preferred sense of self. The loss associated with the death of a person of significance in our lives is closely aligned to a change in self-definition. I argue that the protection of the memory after death is also a protection against a loss of self. The more significant the individual or group was in life, then logically, the greater the attendance to the protection of their memory in death.

It is in the special function of being able to remember, to note consistencies, and to recall them that lies at the core of our survival and our humanity, as well as our individual identity. It is not surprising that the nature of memory is of vital concern to individual and group alike. Memory, no more than a trace of our experiences, a little understood pulse across the synapses of the brain, is a slippery and fragile thing, constantly open to deduction and addition, but on which rests the whole constructed edifice of human social life.

Graves and shrines, and their associated rituals, are significant globally and historically in establishing and maintaining connections that bridge the gap between the living and the dead.

South of Coober Pedy in Australia, a roadside “shrine” reflects an individualised mourning for the family who died in a car crash at this site.

Figure 6. 7. Roadside shrines.



On the other side of the world in a quiet rural Wiltshire lane, the memory of Michelle Bryne is maintained with flowers and a valentine card.





Objects are a central agency in any interaction between experience, social structure, and individual agency. When the selection of objects is considered in this way, groups and individuals consciously or unconsciously reveal the interplay of experiences with their social structure which orientates the very nature of what can be considered of value.

Figure 8. This image is of a cemetery in Wairarapa, and those buried in this part are predominantly of European descent.



Figure 9. In another area the graves are mainly of Māori and Pacific Island families.



Figure 10. Yet another section of the graveyard is devoted to local people who died in World War II.



The involvement with objects, their spatial organisation and social coherence, may be a part of self-conscious strategies or as un-self-conscious accretions, but will inevitably make concrete and visible the synthesis of experience and social background. The view of self, gained in these expressions, is at once both personal and social.

“It is not fanciful to consider that as my objects have a reality through me, I am then the voice of my objects. As I constitute my objects, so too do they constitute me. If these objects are considered to arise in part from the historical relationship of all other people and things, then I am as much a product of the world’s history as it is of me. ... Expressions of experience equally well ‘direct’ who we are as ‘represent’ who we are. There is a circularity in the way in which we think the thoughts we think and the nature of those thoughts.”<sup>2</sup>

### To return to Kiribati

In Kiribati graves are traditionally functional markers made from the readily available coral. The perimeter is marked with slabs, while the central area is covered with small sharp pieces of coral stone.

Figures 11, 12. Traditional Kiribati graves.



The graves are on family land and often close to the living area. Although the population is virtually one hundred percent Christian (divided between the Catholic and Protestant faiths) the spirit of the ancestors is still strongly felt—the separation between the living and the dead is not clear-cut. June Knox-Mawer writes:

*... as night falls, the old beliefs take hold. The darkness is full of the spirits of the dead, no longer the ... familiar inhabitants of ancestral skulls that were derided*

*and destroyed by nineteenth century Europeans ... but vindictive beings with a grudge to avenge against the living.*<sup>3</sup>

*Te anti* whisper, create drafts, touch you, leave their smell behind, and in the extreme lay hands on you; their presence is tangible and commonly accepted.

Knox-Mawer concludes:

*A respect of the unseen is perhaps not surprising in islands so bare, so remote, so close to the elementals of life. It is this isolation that has kept change at bay to a degree found in few other places.*<sup>4</sup>

Ancient practices (such as the use of specific materials, style, and construction of the graves and their sites) prevail on the outer islands of Kiribati. These long-established patterns reflect the traditional cultural hegemony of consistency in approach to social existence—each grave, site, and material used is accepted symbolically and socially. No family or individual “stands above” another and self-definition is defined in terms of community belonging rather than an individual identity. The objects themselves are the means through which cultural practices are handed from one generation to the other.

On urbanised and overcrowded South Tarawa, ancient practices of remembering the dead have not escaped the transformative power of new technologies. In particular, the availability of electricity on South Tarawa has led to dramatic changes in the expression of love for the deceased and the perpetuation of their memory. Small lockable shelters are now frequently built around the graves in order to provide security and protection for decorations of imported plastic flowers, toys, and photographs.

Figure 13. Mary's grave.



Figure 14. Mary died just before her first birthday. Her parents will often buy toys for her while out shopping and place them on her grave.



Figures 15, 16. William, a trainee pilot, died in a car crash. His parents built an extension to their house for the cask and will often spend time at night sitting on the couch talking to him.



Figures 17, 18. Electricity provides opportunities for decoration not previously available.



Figures 19, 20. Highly personalised graves of loved ones.



Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey suggest that:

*The highly personalised graves of loved ones have been transformed into spaces in which the “living” deceased reside and receive visitors and gifts ... (and are) ... animated as a body of a person in that it is washed, cared for, gazed at, dressed with flowers, offered drinks, and surrounded by household and garden ornaments.<sup>5</sup>*

On the anniversary of a death families gather together in ritual remembrance: ... by which the living are conjoined with the dead, and by which humans renew their historical connections to the past and present ...<sup>6</sup>

In Kiribati there is resistance to change, as voiced by the *unimwane* of one island:

*If we do use them (imported materials) then we will lose our customs, values, identity, and our way of life, particularly our upbringing as I-Kiribati. This will all be wiped away by these new materials.*<sup>7</sup>

On other atolls, I-Kiribati (the people of Kiribati) indicated their desire to demonstrate their love of departed family members by the construction of ornate graves but are constrained by social pressures for conformity. The contemporary memorials found on South Tarawa parallel aspects of the international movement to personalise sites of graves and fatal accidents. In a community of formality and strong tradition the “new” graves provide a liberating quality, an opportunity for the informal and personal.

Unlike the examples from the U.K., New Zealand, and Australia, the South Tarawa memorials are not at the sites of death but are built on family land and in close proximity to the house. One participant, who worked for a local radio station and lived in a very urbanised area in a house built from imported materials, asked if I would like to see his father’s bones. “Of course,” I replied. To my surprise he took me upstairs and pulled out an old leather case from a cupboard drawer. From the case he took a cloth bundle and carefully unwrapped it on the bed, revealing his father’s skeleton.

Figures 21, 22. Bones, particularly the skull, maintain strong connections with loved ones.





He announced, "... that when I feel lonely, I sit down with my father's skull and this big bone [femur] and have a long talk".<sup>8</sup> In a very direct and personal way, his father was still with him and this important sense of self was maintained.

Beyond the flashing lights and plastic glitter of recently imported materials reside ancient beliefs of ancestral spirits. Bones and plastic are drawn into function as mnemonic objects, bridging the gap to ensure ancestors are not lost and the spirit world maintains its hold on the living.

## Endnotes

All original recordings, transcriptions, and translations are held by the author.

<sup>1</sup>W. Dilthey (ed. Rickman H.P.), *Selected Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 176.

<sup>2</sup>T. Whincup, *Mirrors & Windows, Object Attachment Within the Site of the Domestic Living Room* (Massey University, NZ: Master of Arts Dissertation, 1994) 181.

<sup>3</sup>P. Carmichael and J. Knox-Mawer, *A World of Islands* (London: Collins, 1968), 40.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup>E. Hallam and J. Hockey, *Death, Memory and Material Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 88.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup>Original recording of *unimwane* (village elders) at Atanikarawa mwaneaba, Buota village, Tabiteuea North (2009).

<sup>8</sup>Original recording at Betio, South Tarawa (2009).



## Bibliography

- Carmichael P. and Knox-Mawer J., *A World of Islands* (London: Collins, 1968).
- Collective Authorship, *Kiribati, Aspects of History* (Kiribati: Institute of Pacific Studies and Extension Services of the South Pacific and the Ministry of Education Training and Culture, Kiribati Government, 1979).
- Collective Authorship (ed. Howard van Trease), *Atoll Politics: The Republic of Kiribati* (Christchurch: Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies and the Institute of Pacific Studies, University of Canterbury; and Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1993).
- Csikszentmihalyi M. and Rochberg-Halton E., *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
- Dilthey W (ed. Rickman H.P.), *Selected Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).
- Grimble A.F., *Tungaru Traditions: Writings on the Atoll Culture of the Gilbert Islands* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989).
- Grimble R., *Migrations, Myths and Magic from the Gilbert Islands: Early Writings of Sir Arthur Grimble* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972).
- Hallam E. and Hockey J., *Death, Memory and Material Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 2000).
- Maude H.E., *The Gilbertese Maneaba* (Suva: The Institute of Pacific Studies and the Kiribati Extension Centre of the University of the South Pacific, 1980).
- Salvo D, *Home Altars of Mexico* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977).
- Tilley C., Webb K., Susanne K., Rowlands M. and Spyer P, *Handbook of Material Culture* (London: Sage Publications, 2006).

## Biographical note

Associate Professor Tony Whincup is Head of the School of Visual and Material Culture in the College of Creative Arts, Massey University, New Zealand. He is a photographer whose research interests are primarily concerned with role of material culture in self-definition and inter-generational continuity. His work emerges at the interface of the disciplines of photography and anthropology. He uses galleries, publications, and conferences as sites to explore and communicate his ethnographies. The primary focus for his photo-ethnographic practice has been Kiribati where his research has examined the role of dance, canoes, daily artifacts and the meeting house. In 2008, he was awarded the Kiribati Order of

Merit for services to the country. His most recent book, *Bwai ni Kiribati, Artefacts of Experience*, focuses on an overview of the material culture of Kiribati. Currently his work has been concerned with the effects of climate change upon traditional I-Kiribati social practices.

Email: [A.N.Whincup@massey.ac.nz](mailto:A.N.Whincup@massey.ac.nz)

2.

---

## MIGRATORY MEMORY

---

# “Noli Me Condemnare”—Migrant Memories Set in Stone: The Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century Scottish Memorials in Poland

Peter Bajer

---

## “Noli Me Condemnare”—Migrant Memories Set in Stone: The Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century Scottish Memorials in Poland

Peter Bajer

---

### Abstract

In the early modern period a large number of Scots migrated to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Some stayed there for a short time, while others settled permanently and ran commercial business and practised crafts. The migration stopped in the late eighteenth century, and the Scots who remained seem to have lost their ethnic identity. Despite the fact that this once flourishing ethnic group is now long forgotten, we can reconstruct much about its past from external repositories of memory—memoirs, travel diaries, poll-tax records, parish registers, and council minutes. This article focuses on examining artefacts in the form of memories “set in stone”, namely seventeenth and eighteenth century monuments belonging to some of those immigrants. I pose the following questions: What type of memories do the monuments personify? What can we learn about the people for whom the memorials were raised and about those who erected them? To what degree can data extracted from such artefacts assist us in finding out who they were and what they did? Could the knowledge contained in the epitaphs reveal the extent to which the Scots remained a distinct ethnic group and how deeply they integrated into the Polish society? By examining the memories “set in stone” comparatively, I will attempt to assess the value of such “contained memories” in recreating the past, especially when cross-referenced with other primary documents.

Keywords: epitaphs, memorials, migration, Scots, Poland

Until recently the Scottish migration to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries has received only peripheral attention in the English-language academic works on migration from Britain. Apart from a handful of Polish and Scottish academics, the general public is oblivious to the fact that indeed during this period a large number of betterment migrants from Scotland immigrated to Poland-Lithuania. While some stayed there for a short time only, others settled permanently and ran commercial businesses and practised crafts.

The migration, part of a larger Scottish mercantile expansion to continental Europe, reached its peak in the 1640s. At that time the group consisted of 5,000-7,000 individuals. Some Scots (or people of Scottish descent) were still active in the Commonwealth as late as the 1710s. Nevertheless, assimilation processes and decline in the inflow of immigrants—a direct result of a changing economic situation in both Poland-Lithuania and Scotland and the opening of new destinations for migration in Ireland and in the New World—led to the subsequent halt of that migration. It also led eventually to the disappearance of the Scottish ethnic group in Poland-Lithuania; the past of this once vibrant and flourishing community is now long forgotten.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, much detail concerning the history of that migration can be reconstructed from external repositories of memory, a wide array of written documents such as state papers, parish registers or council minutes, and other artefacts. This article focuses on one particular kind of relic: migrant memories “set in stone”, the seventeenth and eighteenth century memorials and tombstones belonging to Scottish immigrants and their descendants.

The iconographic and linguistic analysis of such funereal monuments poses a series of important questions. What type of memories do the epitaphs personify? What can we learn about the people for whom the memorials were raised and about those who erected them? To what degree can this type of an external repository of memory assist us in finding the answer to who some of the migrants were and what they did? Could the knowledge contained in the epitaphs reveal the extent to which the Scots remained a distinct ethnic group and how deeply they integrated into Polish society? Can the memories “set in stone” help us broaden our understanding of what happened to this diaspora, to the descendants of those for whom the epitaphs were erected?

The most vibrant Scottish communities existed in Gdańsk, Elbląg, Warsaw, Cracow, and Lublin, and also smaller private towns belonging to Protestant nobility like Birże (Biržai), Kiejdany (Kėdainiai), and Węgrów. The principle of religious tolerance enshrined in the Confederation of Warsaw (1573) allowed the Scots of Poland-Lithuania not only to find common ground with the local Calvinists, but also locations where they were more readily accepted and could safely exercise their creed. Moreover, within the larger Reformed church, the Scots were allowed to worship in their own way.

Although they may have been well conversant in their second language, it seems that wherever they congregated the Scots still preferred to pray in their native tongue. Thus they attempted to separate themselves from the larger Protestant community by having their own preachers, communions, prayer meetings, and conventicles.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, they showed a preference to marry other Scots and to choose their compatriots to act as godparents. Due to this, they gravitated towards a select few Evangelical Reformed parishes, places where they were able to meet other expatriates and together form semi-autonomous congregations. There is no doubt that the creed was the one particular feature that distinguished this minority group from the others.<sup>3</sup>

The parish records reveal a dramatic decline of the expatriate community in the 1650s. When compared with other state and municipal documents, the records of the two Reformed parishes in Gdańsk suggest that one of the main reasons for the subsequent halt of that migration and eventual extinction of the Scottish ethnic group in Poland-Lithuania was the war with Sweden (1655–1660) and its aftermath. The documents show that many of the Scots sided with the invaders. As a result, a number of them were forced to depart with the enemy once hostilities were over.

Their disappearance as an ethnic group in Poland-Lithuania may have been also caused by: assimilation, re-migration, ageing of the community, and the changing political and economic situation in the Commonwealth. The church registers indicate that many of the Scots who died in the parishes were buried in the parish churches or graveyards.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, first the war with Sweden, and later numerous armed conflicts and disasters which besieged Poland-Lithuania for the next 300 years, meant that many of the churches and cemeteries were destroyed. Alongside them many of the Scottish monuments also vanished.

The findings in this article are based on an investigation of inscriptions from 34 tombstones and memorials representing 40 individual Polish Scots: 30 men and 10 women (among them five children). Of those, 13 monuments date back to the seventeenth century, while the other 18 were erected during the eighteenth century. Of the 34 monuments, 28 have survived until the present day and were examined *in situ*, while the inscriptions of the other seven have been investigated based on the seventeenth and nineteenth century inventories (see Figure 1).<sup>5</sup>

The largest number of stones under investigation come from two of Gdańsk parishes: St. Peter and St. Paul, and St. Elizabeth. The first of the churches housed one of the largest and most affluent Scottish Reformed congregations in Poland. Research into parish records indicates that at its peak, during the 1640s, the church may have attracted up to 1,000 Scots. Between 1650 and 1800, a minimum of 150 Scots and their descendants were buried there. Smaller in size, and thus possibly less prestigious than the former, was the St. Elizabeth church. Attended by the less affluent members of the Reformed community in the 1640s, the church attracted approximately 700 to 800 Scots.<sup>6</sup>

The monuments from Gdańsk share several similarities. First, apart from two epitaphs written in Latin, all other inscriptions are in German, the dominant

Figure 1. Inscription on the memorial of Patrick Ogilvie of Birze recorded by Starowolski – S. Starowolski ed., *Monumenta Sarmatarum, viam universae carnis ingressorum (Cracoviae: in Officina Viduae et Haeredum Francisci Caesarij, 1655)*, 309.

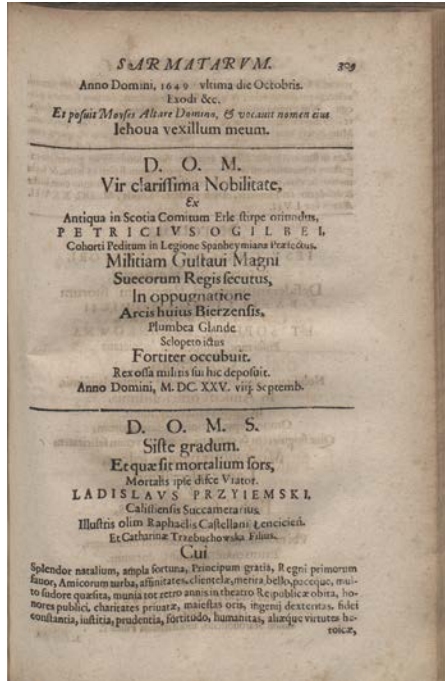


Figure 2. Wall memorial of George Moir and his wife Catherina Turner (1769), black marble, St. Peter and St. Paul Church, Gdańsk.



language in the city at that time. Second, apart from the richly decorated and inscribed memorial of George Moir and his wife, Catherina Turner, the inscriptions on the other stones are very brief (Figure 2). A typical monument consists of the name of its owner, a statement communicating that the stone is erected to them, the names of descendants (*Vor sich und seine Erben*), a date of erection, and a grave number.

Finally, more often than not, a coat-of-arms or a housemark (*housemarke*) dominates the composition. Such heraldic displays, placed as a rule in the middle of a stone, are the only decorative element of the whole design (Figure 3).<sup>7</sup> Similar observations can be made about several Scottish monuments from the churchyard of St. Mary's church in Elbląg, the second most significant port-city of Poland.

Figure 3. Gravestone of William Clark (1683), marble, St. Peter and St. Paul Church, Gdańsk.





The memorials of two second-generation Scots provide a better indication of the social rank and the affluence of those who erected them, than information about the personal identity of the deceased. They are those of Charles Ramsay the Elder (d. 1669) and Michael Auchinvol, (d. 1704) (Figure 4), as well as a memorial of his relative, Thomas Auchinvol (d. 1755) (Figure 5). Like the epitaphs from Gdańsk, the inscriptions in German give very basic information. Only occasionally do the more modest memorials incorporate passages from the Old Testament.<sup>8</sup>

However, some stones were clearly commissioned to impress a spectator with the social rank or the wealth of the deceased. An example of the latter, which no longer exists, was the wall memorial of Charles Ramsay, once a Lord Mayor of Elbląg (1656). His epitaph, destroyed during World War II, consisted of important biographical details engraved on a red marble slab, enclosed in a luxurious sandstone frame, made up of rocaille, and surmounted with his prestigious heraldic display.<sup>9</sup>

Figure 4. Memorial of Michael Auchinvol (c. 1704), red marble and sandstone, St. Mary's Church, Elbląg (photo by M. Karaś).



Figure 5. Tombstone of Thomas Auchinvol, (c.1755), marble, St. Mary's Church, Elbląg (photo by P. Grdeń).



The monuments erected by the Scottish members of the congregation are impressive in their austere simplicity, and closely resemble tombstones of the local parishioners. Apart from the Scottish coats-of-arms, nothing else distinguishes them from the other tombstones. It should be noted that all Scottish names have been transliterated into German or Latin: William became Wilhelm, while John was transcribed as Johann. While this practice may indicate the level of integration, the display of Scottish coats-of-arms could be interpreted as a sign of distinctive identity.

It should be noted that of all the discussed gravestones, there seems to be only one stone that does not reside within a Reformed church, which essentially confirms observations based on other sources. It demonstrates that the best part of

the diaspora gravitated towards the churches belonging to the followers of Calvin. However, among the immigrants there was also a sizable group of Roman Catholics whose monuments are scattered in different parts of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

One of the oldest artefacts belonging to a Catholic Scot resided in the St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist Church in Vilnius. Although it no longer exists, the memorial of James Arnott (d.1640), like most of other monuments found in the Catholic churches, contained an inscription in Latin. The epitaph gave much detail about Arnott’s career and it attempts to portray his virtues. According to the inscription he was a talented medical doctor, who at one stage was a councillor in Vilnius. This faithful subject of King Zygmunt III was also characterised as prudent, courteous, and a devout Catholic. The epitaph also contains a note on Arnott’s ethnic origins—*Natione Angli*.<sup>10</sup> However, this entry is slightly misleading—after the signing of the personal union between England and Scotland in 1603, few people in the Commonwealth recognised the difference between these two “nationalities”. It nevertheless signifies the importance placed on revealing such information.

The expression of the ethnic origins of the deceased by his or her descendants seems to be important to many patrons erecting monuments. Latin phrases such as *Natione Scotus, ex Scotia, Anglicoor* equivalents in Polish (*z Szkocji r[odem]* meaning originally from Scotland and *z Wielkicy Brytanii* from Great Britain) appear on epitaphs of not just Catholics, but also Protestant Scots buried in parishes dominated by ethnic Poles.<sup>11,12,13,14,15</sup> More often than not, such manifestations of the lineage were supplemented by heraldic displays.

A notable example of such monuments is an eighteenth century wall memorial of George Forbes of Chełmno (1704–1757). Its central component is a gold-plated inscription engraved on a tablet of black marble (Figure 6). A funeral portrait of the deceased has surmounted this plaque, decorated with a highly ornamental, wooden frame. Below the inscription and the frame is a cartouche displaying Forbes’s coat-of-arms. The inscription itself is no less ornate. It lays out Forbes’s genealogy, his Scottish predecessors, his siblings, and even his brothers-in-law.

The epitaph contains information about his wife, two of their surviving children (again the record is supplemented by information about their spouses), and the names of the most prominent families of Chełmno to whom he was related. The next section of the epitaph concentrates on a description of Forbes’s career. We learn that his wisdom, prudence, and righteousness attracted the attention of the Court by his appointment as a Royal Secretary and he was also active in the town council, first as its president, and later as mayor.<sup>16</sup>

Of all the intricate elements of this monument, its most interesting and telling aspect is Forbes’s funeral portrait, or more precisely a “coffin portrait” (Polish: *portret trumienny*). This distinctive feature of funerary art deserves more explanation, as it was a tradition virtually unknown outside the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The portrait executed in oil on a hexagon-shaped piece of tin was painted specifically for his funeral, most probably just after Forbes’s death.

Figure 6. Wall memorial of George Forbes of Chelmno (c. 1757), The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Roman Catholic Church, Chelmno.

Figure 7. Portrait from the wall memorial of George Smith of Chelmno (c. 1721), The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Roman Catholic Church, Chelmno (photo by M. Zieliński).



As the ritual required, the portrait would have been attached to the narrow side of the coffin, where the head of the deceased lay. It was removed before the burial and most likely hung on the wall of the church, before being finally incorporated into the present memorial. While this custom was particularly widespread among Polish noblemen, the most affluent members of the burgher estate also embraced it as they tried to emulate the gentry.<sup>17</sup>

A similar coffin portrait also features on a monument of Forbes's cousin, George Smith (1685–1721), a second-generation immigrant and likewise an active member of the town council (Figure 7). A highly realistic picture, similar to the other coffin portraits, was designed with the intention of creating an impression that the deceased is participating in his own funeral. This was reinforced by the depiction of Smith staring directly at the viewer. His strong features, alert gaze, and expensive wardrobe—heavily influenced by the style of clothing worn by the gentry—provides information not just about contemporary culture and Smith's relationship with the host community but also about the deceased himself. This is invaluable material as the painted inscription is now almost illegible.<sup>18</sup>

Another two impressive portraits are part of a richly decorated monument from Chelmno: a memorial to John Charters and his wife, Jadwiga née Smith, constructed about 1736 (Figure 8). The artistic programme of Charters's wall monument closely relates to its wordy eulogy, which concentrates on a description of the virtues of the deceased, while the description of his career and achievements takes a lesser role. This particular feature is characteristic of monuments found not just in Catholic churches, but also on a number of gravestones of Protestant Scots living under Polish cultural influence.<sup>19</sup>

Figure 8. Fragment of the wall memorial of John Charters and his wife Jadwiga née Smith (c. 1736), The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Roman Catholic Church, Chelmnó.



If Charters’s memorial is one of the most lavish when it comes to the formal qualities, the most pleonastic is an inscription appearing on a gravestone of Alexander Chalmers of Warsaw (1645–1703). His epitaph reads as a plethora of virtues. First, the inscription alludes to the illustrious lineage of the deceased. Second, it extols the piety of the departed and especially his conversion to Catholicism. Then the inscription eulogises his career, his double election as judge ordinary, and four-time election as mayor of Warsaw. Chalmers’s personal virtues were communicated as a set of metaphors based on classical literature.<sup>20</sup>

Chalmers was presented as an individual “endowed with prudence and skill in the conduct of affairs, a lover of public good [...] a defender of the ancient rights and privileges of the citizens”. As such, his life and deeds reflected the four classical cardinal virtues: temperance, prudence, fortitude, and justice. The former part of the epitaph suggests that he also exhibited highly sought after Catholic theological virtues of faith and charity. According to the inscription, his courage—a virtue highly regarded by the Polish gentry—and outstanding administration at the Treasury won him the commendation of the King and the post of Royal Secretary.<sup>21</sup> Whether all of his qualities were real or fictitious is secondary to the fact that the inscription helps to reveal what qualities and traits of character were generally valued in this particular period. It also shows which moral qualities were highly regarded by the expatriate community.<sup>22</sup>

The propagandist function of the funerary art can also be observed based on the monuments of the Scottish Protestants. One of the largest Protestant immigrant

communities existed in Cracow, then the capital of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The Scots were recorded there at least since the first decade of the sixteenth century.<sup>23</sup> In the 1630s the group have comprised about 170 individuals and possibly between 200 and 250 at its peak in the late 1640s.<sup>24</sup>

Only nine gravestones belonging to Cracow's Scots have survived until the present. These stones are distinctly different from those discussed earlier. Unlike the epitaphs from the German-dominated parishes, these stones and memorials contain extensive inscriptions. Moreover, unlike the lengthy eulogies of the Catholic Scots, eight out of the nine epitaphs have been inscribed in Polish, the dominant language of the larger congregation. What is more, six stones have been inscribed in verse. Such a convention indicates the acceptance of influences stemming from the culture of the gentry and the practices of the local Reformed church, keen to use the native tongue for evangelical reasons.

Figure 9. Fragment of the gravestone of John Taylor (c. 1716), marble, The Lapidarium, Evangelical-Reformed Church, Żychlin near Konin.



Conversely, apart from being written in verse and in Polish (Christian names were translated from Scottish or English), there is not much else that could distinguish the epitaphs of Wielkanoc from the inscriptions appearing on the tombstones of Scottish Catholics like Arnott, Charters, or Forbes. The inscriptions typically contain a brief biographical description of the deceased, a record of his or her virtues, an expression of sorrow and a heraldic display of the deceased. Other than the coat-of-arms, the Scottish descent was explicitly indicated in writing on several of the inscriptions. For example, the epitaph of John Taylor starts with a passage

that declares that he was born in Scotland and only later arrived in Cracow (Figure 9). An analogous description appears on a memorial of Elizabeth Taylor. Both examples indicate that, despite apparent integration, the Scots wanted to preserve the record of their ethnic origin.

Yet, integration was inescapable. Local customs and traditions had an effect on religious beliefs and practices of the Scottish expatriate community of Cracow. Just like the Polish Calvinists, the Scots (it seems) came to accept elements of the Roman Catholic theology. For example, contrary to the Calvinist doctrine, some Scots were offered prayers in suffrage for the dead. The inscription on the epitaph of Catherine Paterson that asks bystanders to plead to God on her behalf corroborates this.<sup>25</sup>

The monuments also provide information on the Scottish women. Gathered from their gravestones it allows us to form some generalisations about their lives, their duties, and the virtues and qualities that they embodied. One of the most interesting examples is the tombstone erected for the earlier mentioned Catherine Paterson who died and was buried in 1637. Her marble monument is composed of a full-length standing portrait of the deceased and an inscription.

Paterson is depicted dressed modestly in a traditional female Polish costume consisting of a long, plain skirt, and a cloak. Her head is covered with a bonnet and a *rańtuch*, a scarf falling onto her shoulders. Her piety is indicated by the Bible or some sort of a prayer book held in her right hand just over her heart. The inscription placed under the portrait revolves around domestic responsibilities performed during her short life as a wife and mother. We learn that during the 16 years of marriage, she and her husband had eight children, of whom five died before reaching adulthood.<sup>26</sup>

A similar message has been engraved on a monument of Anne Forbes who died in 1702. Married at 19, she had 14 children, before dying while delivering her fifteenth baby.<sup>27</sup> A comparable fate awaited 28-year-old Anna Henderson-Lidell, who died in 1696 while delivering her youngest daughter (Figure 10). All three inscriptions seem to epitomise the fate of many women of their times: early marriage followed by a premature death.<sup>28</sup>

Despite this, these monuments were presumably not simply formulaic statements about death and memory. As indicated earlier, the stones contain deliberately crafted messages intended both for contemporaries and for future generations. The epitaphs were used to propagate a certain model of virtuous life to create specific role models for women. The good wife was to be pious, prudent, dutiful, and modest. This would manifest itself in her clothing, rejection of luxury, and a willingness to look after the poor. Above all, a good wife was also to be a good mother, giving birth and raising offspring, fulfilling the basic role of a married woman.<sup>29</sup>

Finally, the monuments dedicated to the Scottish Protestants of Cracow, Gdańsk, and Elbląg, or the monuments belonging to the Catholic Scots of Chełmno or Vilnius, show that among the immigrant community there were a number of

wealthy individuals. The monuments were expensive to construct, and only the most affluent individuals could afford them.<sup>30</sup> While most of the prosperous Scots lived in large cities like Cracow and Gdańsk, funerary monuments suggest that some also resided in much smaller municipalities.

For example, four well-preserved, impressive gravestones can be found in Węgrów, a small town located in north-east Poland. They are inscribed in Polish, but their content is more like that found on the Scottish graves in Gdańsk. The epitaphs include almost no biographical information, containing instead passages from the Bible. The most elaborate of the four stones is the grave of the town's mayor, Archibald Campbell, who died in 1692. Apart from a brief inscription of the deceased, the stone also contains several quotes from the Old Testament and the Campbell coat-of-arms (Figure 11).<sup>31</sup>

Figure 10. Gravestone of Anna Henderson-Lidell (1696), sandstone, Evangelical-Reformed Cemetery, Węgrów.

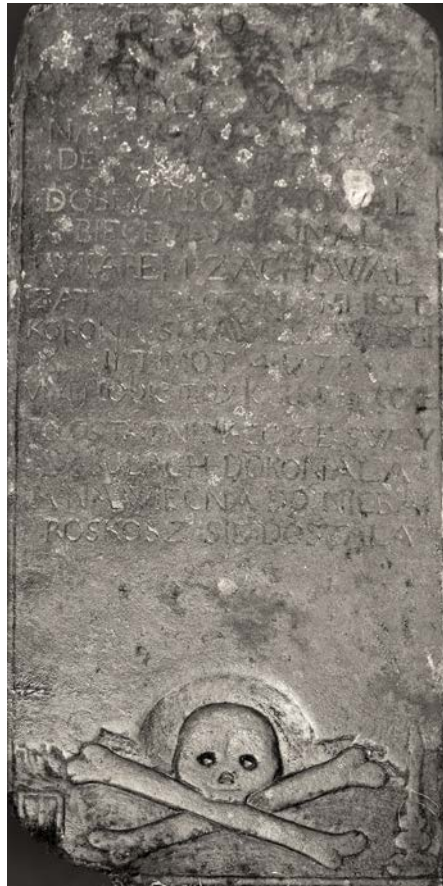
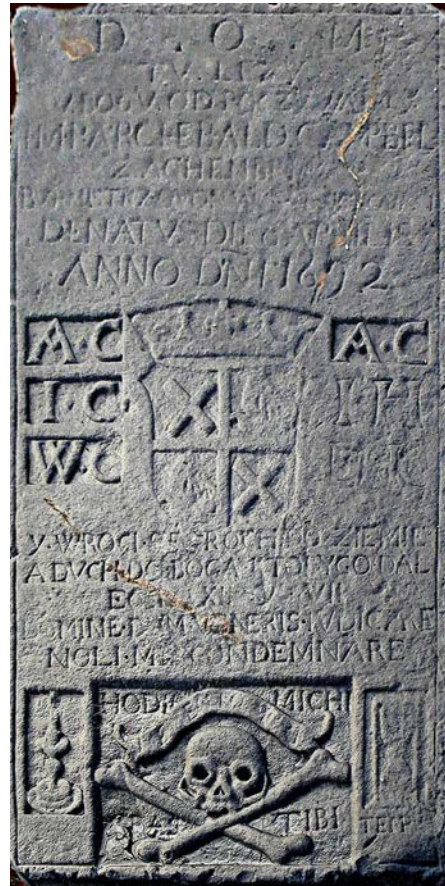


Figure 11. Gravestone of Archibald Campbell (1692), sandstone, Evangelical-Reformed Cemetery, Węgrów.



However, the most splendid and robust example of the funerary art is the chapel erected by Robert Porteous of Krosno (1601–1661), a wine trader, regarded as the chief importer of Hungarian wine into Poland-Lithuania in the middle of the seventeenth century. His vast fortune estimated then at over £9,000, and amassed during his lifetime, made him one of the most affluent Scots in seventeenth century Poland. He was also one of the most notable Scottish converts to Roman Catholicism, wholeheartedly embracing the new creed, and generously

contributing to the local parish. Not surprisingly, after his death in 1661, Porteous was buried in the church that he supported after his conversion. His remains were placed in the *Kaplica Porcjuszów* (Porteous's Chapel), which became a mausoleum for his family.<sup>32</sup>

Figure 12. Portrait of Robert Porteous (1661), oil on copper plate, Holy Trinity Catholic Church, Krosno (photo by J. Gancarski).



Porteous commissioned a portrait of himself to be hung in the chapel placed above a crypt in which he was later interred (Figure 12). The large oil painting depicts him as a distinguished, cultured, middle-aged man who gazes confidently at the viewer. As is characteristic of the portraits of the Polish gentry of this period, his pose, attire, and hairstyle demonstrate not only his extraordinary affluence and status, but create an impression that he considered himself an equal of a nobleman. Still, the portrait was not just about vanity. Porteous's piety is represented by the inclusion of a large crucifix sitting in front of him on the table.<sup>33</sup>

In conclusion, the monuments erected by the Scottish immigrants in Poland-Lithuania contain a vast array of "memories" that are particular to these specific artefacts. The inscriptions and imagery employed to identify and commemorate the deceased have been also used to immortalise the good name of his or her family, and to eulogise the virtues and/or deeds of predecessors. Apart from listing accomplishments, and providing genealogies and histories, the monuments offer a great deal of information about the social values and financial status of those for whom they were raised as well as those who erected them.



Second, the monuments reveal that the immigrants embraced many of the local stylistic devices and traditions. The ornaments appearing on the monuments, language and literary style of the inscriptions (or even distinct forms of the memorials themselves) reflect dominant, external influences. The memorials and stones found in parishes under German influence (Gdańsk, Elbląg) clearly display more ascetic forms and often contain little more than the name of the deceased. More wordy and elaborate epitaphs, frequently embellished with metaphors and references to antiquity, can be found on tombstones in parishes under Polish influence. Such epitaphs not only provide a record of the deceased but also often express the hope of the soul's happy destiny after death.

Taken as a whole, the information recorded on memorials allows us to enrich our understanding of this particular migratory movement. It not only helps us to advance our knowledge of particular individuals or families, but deepen our understanding of the relationship between the group and the host community. It adds human perspective to otherwise dry, detached entries in church or public documents and registers.

Appendix 1. Descriptors of virtues of the deceased as found in the epitaphs of Polish Scots

No.	Descriptors (English translations in parentheses):	Gender	Memorial/tombstone of:	
			XVII century	XVIII century
1.	Animo hilaris (cheerful)	F		C.A. Moir née Turner
2.	Benefaciens / dobroczynna / opiekun/-ka sierot (charitable)	F M		J. Chatten née Smith W. Ross
3.	Casta, castissima (chaste)	F		E. Taylor née Forbes
4.	Charissima (dearest)	F		J. Chatten née Smith
5.	Corpore debilior (of weak body)	F		C.A. Moir née Turner
6.	Dilectissimus / -ma, dilecta (beloved)	M F	R. Gordon	E. Taylor née Forbes
7.	Emerissimus / -ma (meritorious)	M F		J. Chatten J. Chatten née Smith
8.	Feocunditate (fecund)	F F	K. Paterson née Kin	A. Forbes née Carmichael
9.	Felicissimus (most happy)	M		G. Moir

10.	Fidelis (faithful)	M		J. Chatten
		M		A. Sommer
		M		W. Ross
11.	Honesta (honest)	F		C.A. Moir née Turner
12.	Humanissimus (educated)	M		G. Forbes
13.	Humanitate integerrimi (honourable)	M	J. Arnott	
14.	Illustris / sławny (illustrious)	M	R. Porteous	G. Forbes
		M		W. Ross
		M		
15.	Integer, integeritate (righteous)	M		G. Moir
		M		J. Chatten
		M		A. Sommer
16.	Lectissimus / -ima, ukochana (most beloved)	M		G. Ross
		M		A. Forbes née Carmichael
17.	Liberalitas (generous)	F		J. Chatten née Smith
18.	Magnifici ac excellentissimi (most excellent)	M	J. Arnott	
19.	Nobilissimus (noble)	M		A. Chalmers
20.	Pia, pietate, pietata, pobożny (pious)	M	J. Arnott	
		F		C.A. Moir née Turner G.
		M		Forbes
		M		A. Sommer
		M		W. Ross
		M		A. Chalmers
21.	Probitatis (upright)	M		G. Forbes
22.	Prudentissimi (prudent)	M	J. Arnott	
23.	Religiosa (religious)	F		J. Chatten née Smith
24.	Sedula (diligent)	F		C.A. Moir née Turner

25.	Suavissima (charming)	F		C.A. Moir née Turner
26.	Utilis omnibus (obliging to others)	F		C.A. Moir née Turner
27.	Vita moribus (impeccable character)	M	J. Arnott	
28.	Wspaniała matka (exceptional mother)	F		E. Taylor née Forbes
		F		S. Chambers née Sommer
29.	Wspaniała żona (exceptional wife)	F		E. Taylor née Forbes
		F		S. Chambers née Sommer
		F		S. Forbes
30.	Zelosissimi (zealous)	M	J. Arnott	

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>The Scottish migration to Poland has been a subject of several publications. The most comprehensive articles in English on the subject were written by Dr A. Biegańska and Professor W. Kowalski, an expert on the immigration and integration of a number of ethnic groups into the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. See A. Biegańska, "A Note on the Scots in Poland, 1550–1800," in ed. Thomas C. Smout, *Scotland and the Sea* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1992); A. Biegańska, "In Search of Tolerance: Scottish Catholics and Presbyterians in Poland," in *Scottish Slavonic Review*, XVII (1991): 37-59; W. Kowalski, "The Placement of Urbanised Scots in the Polish Crown During the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," in eds. A. Grosjean and S. Murdoch, *Scottish Communities Abroad in the Early Modern Period* (Leiden: Brill, 2005); A. Biegańska, "The Reasons for the Immigration of Scots to the Polish Commonwealth in the Early Modern Period as Outlined in Contemporary Opinions and Historiography," paper presented to the Scotland and Poland: A Historical Relationship, 1500–2009 Conference, School of History, Classics and Archaeology, The University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, 1-2 October 2009; A. Biegańska, "Kraków Citizenship and the Local Scots, 1509-1655," in ed. R. Unger, *Britain and Poland-Lithuania: Contact and Comparison from the Middle Ages to 1795* (Leiden: Brill, 2008); A. Biegańska, "Certificates of Legitimate Birth (Birth-Briefs) in the Practice of the City Councils of Aberdeen and Kraków at the Close of the Sixteenth Century and During the First Half of the Seventeenth Century," in eds. Z. Hojda and H. Pátková, *Pragmatické písemnosti v kontextu právním a správním* (Praha: Univerzita Karlova v Praze, 2008), 187-201. Cf. P.P. Bajer, *Scots in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries: The Formation and Disappearance of an Ethnic Group* (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming). A selection of works on the subject is also available in Polish. The most up-to-

date accounts have been composed recently by the earlier mentioned Professor Kowalski. See W. Kowalski, *Wielka imigracja. Szkoci w Krakowie i Małopolsce w XVI – pierwszej połowie XVII wieku* (Kielce: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Humanistyczno-Przyrodniczego im. Jana Kochanowskiego, 2010); W. Kowalski, "Robert Spens i szkocka gmina w Krakowie u schyłku XVI stulecia," in eds. B. Rok and J. Maroń, *Między Lwowem a Wrocławiem. Księga jubileuszowa Profesora Krystyna Matwijowskiego* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2006), 409-17.

<sup>2</sup>Quoting a bequest of Andrew Dunken ("pauperibus religionis suæ, utpote Scotiæ"), Professor Kowalski contended that the Scots were well aware of their brand of Calvinism. See W. Kowalski, "Scoti, cives Cracovienses: Their Ethnic and Social Identity, 1570–1660," in ed. D. Worthington, *British and Irish Emigrants and Exiles in Europe, 1603–1688* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2010), 84.

<sup>3</sup>Bajer, *Scots*, 183.

<sup>4</sup>A deaths register constructed in such a way was put together in the Cracow parish (1631-1656). See "Reiestr Umarłych w Panu y Pogrzebionych Ex Epitaph appens" ("Register of those who passed in the presence of the Lord and were buried, taken from the epitaphs"), in "Księga Wtóra," Archiwum Parafii Ewangelicko-Augsburgskiej, Cracow, fols. 141-49. Cf. "Collecta Zboru Kiejdańskiego: To jest rachunek wszystkich recept i expens zborowych zaczęty roku 1628 dnia 20 novembra," unpublished print, Wilno: 1939, Lietuvos Mokslų Akademijos Biblioteka, Vilnius, Rankrasciu skyrius, Fond. 9–3040, 126.

<sup>5</sup>Information about epitaphs of James Arnott of Vilnius and Patrick Ogilvie of Birże have been given in S. Starowolski, *Monumenta Sarmatarum, viam universae carnis ingressorum* (Cracoviae: in Officina Viduae et Haeredum Francisci Caesarij, 1655), 235, 309. Tombstones of Charles Ramsay and Michael Auchinvole of Elbag have been described by Kownatzky, see H. Kownatzky, *Elbing als ehemaliger englischer Handelsplatz; (Elbing) as a Former English Trading Centre*, trans. W. Baumfelder (Elbing: Wernich, 1930), 27, 31, 32. The inscription from the epitaph of Alexander Chalmers of Warsaw has been transcribed in ed. F.A. Steuart, *Papers Relating to the Scots in Poland 1576-1593* (Edinburgh: Scottish Historic Society, 1915), 124-25. Cf. W. Gomulicki, *Opowiadania o starej Warszawie* (Warszawa: Biblioteka Syrenki, 1960), 234-35. Finally, David Morrison's and Robert Reid's marbles have been copied down in "Stein-Buch oder Verzeichnis der Gräber und der darin beerdigten Leichen in der St. Elisabeths-Kirchen in Danzig," Archiwum Państwowe w Gdańsku, sig. 351/17, fols. 17-18, 59-60 (No. 27).

<sup>6</sup>Bajer, *Scots*, 182.

<sup>7</sup>The above-described design appears on stones of David Morrison, William Clark, unknown Leslie, Daniel Davidson, Robert Reid, John Braun, and unknown Davidson.

<sup>8</sup>The inscription on the tombstone of Thomas Auchinvole includes the following passage: ICH SCHLAFE, ABER MEIN HERTZ WACHET (I sleep, but my heart waketh – Song of Solomon 5:2). A passage from Isaiah appears on a stone of John Slocumbe (1621) DIE RICHTIG FVR SICH / GEWANDELTE HABEN, KOMEN / ZVM

FRIEDE VND RVGEN IN / IREN KAMERN IESAIA 56 – (Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death. Isaiah 57:2).

<sup>9</sup>A black and white photograph of the memorial was published in Kownatzki, *Elbing als ehemaliger englischer*, 27.

<sup>10</sup>This memorial from 1640 no longer exists. The original inscription was transcribed in Starowolski, *Monumenta Sarmatarum*, 235.

<sup>11</sup>"Gravestone of Robert Gordon (1663)," marble, St. Mary's of the Snows Catholic Church, Iłża.

<sup>12</sup>"Wall memorial of George Forbes of Chełmno (c. 1757)," The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Roman Catholic Church, Chełmno.

<sup>13</sup>"Gravestone of Elizabeth Taylor née Forbes (c. 1723)," sandstone, The Lapidarium, Evangelical-Reformed Church, żychlin near Konin.

<sup>14</sup>"Gravestone of John Taylor (c. 1716)," marble, The Lapidarium, Evangelical-Reformed Church, żychlin near Konin.

<sup>15</sup>"Gravestone of Alexander Sommer (c. 1706)," sandstone, The Lapidarium, Evangelical-Reformed Church, żychlin near Konin.

<sup>16</sup>"Wall memorial of George Forbes," see J. Kruszelnicka, *Portret na ziemi chełmińskiej*, 2 Vols. (Toruń: Muzeum Okręgowe w Toruniu, 1983), 77.

<sup>17</sup>J.K. Ostrowski, "Portret trumienny," in ed. A. Borowski, *Słownik Sarmatyzmu* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2001), 152-55. Cf. A. Borowski, *Land of the Winged Horsemen: Art in Poland, 1572-1764* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1999), 279; A. Ciechanowiecki, "Polish Art Treasures at the Royal Academy Source," *The Burlington Magazine* 112(803), (1970), 120-24; M. Karpowicz, *Baroque in Poland* (Warszawa: Arkady, 1991), 68.

<sup>18</sup>"Wall memorial of George Smith of Chełmno (c. 1721)," The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Roman Catholic Church, Chełmno. I am grateful to Dr Marek Zieliński for his kind assistance with my queries and providing me with the photos of this and the following memorial. Cf. Kruszelnicka, *Portret*, 77; J. Nierzwicki, *700 lat parafii chełmińskiej* (Grudziądz, 1933), 43-44.

<sup>19</sup>"Wall memorial of John Charters and his wife Jadwiga née Smith (c. 1736)," The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Roman Catholic Church, Chełmno. Cf. Kruszelnicka, *Portret*, 82-83.

<sup>20</sup>"Wall memorial of Alexander Chalmers of Warsaw (1703)." Until 1944 this monument was located in the St. John's Basilica in Warsaw. The inscription has been transcribed in Steuart, *Papers*, 124-25.

<sup>21</sup>Steuart, *Papers*, 124-25.

<sup>22</sup>The idea of virtues was first discussed by R. Lattimore, *Themes in Greek and Latin Epitaphs* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1962). More recently the topic was dealt with by I. Kajanto, *Classical and Christian: Studies in the Latin Epitaphs of Medieval and Renaissance* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1980), 82-136. Virtues relating to women in the context of sixteenth to seventeenth centuries epitaphs from Cracow have been discussed by K. Górecka, *Pobożne matrony i cnotliwe panny: Epitafia jako źródło wiedzy o kobiecie w epoce*

*nowożytniej pobożne matrony i cnotliwe panny* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, 2006).

<sup>23</sup>One of the first historians who looked at the Cracow's Scots was S. Tomkowicz, "Przyczynek do historii Szkotów w Krakowie i w Polsce," *Rocznik Krakowski* 2 (1899): 151-74. The most comprehensive and up-to-date accounts have been composed recently by Professor Kowalski. See W. Kowalski, "Scoti, cives Cracovienses," 67-85; W. Kowalski, "Robert Spens i szkocka gmina w Krakowie," 409-17; W. Kowalski, "Kraków Citizenship and the Local Scots"; W. Kowalski, "Certificates of Legitimate Birth," 187-201; W. Kowalski, "Szkoci na rynku krakowskim w połowie XVII wieku," *Zeszyty Wszechnicy św. tokrzyskiej. Filologia Angielska* 1(23), (2006): 15-38; Cf. W. Kowalski, "The Scots at the Cracow Customs House in the First Half of the 17th Century," enlarged and corrected version of the paper presented to the Polish-Scottish Relations 15th-18th Centuries Conference, Institute of History, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, 20-23 September 2000, 1. I am indebted to Professor Kowalski for providing an offprint of this paper.

<sup>24</sup>Bajer, *Scots*, 197. Cf. P.P. Bajer, "Scots in the Cracow Reformed Parish in the Seventeenth Century," in eds. T.M. Devine and D. Hesse, *Scotland and Poland: Historical Encounters, 1500-2010* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2011), 65-68.

<sup>25</sup>"Gravestone of Catherine Paterson née Kin (1637)," sandstone, The Lapidarium, Evangelical-Reformed Church, żychlin near Konin. Cf. Similar phrases have been found on gravestones of other Polish Calvinists of Lesser Poland, suggesting perhaps a wider acceptance of this particular doctrine among them – Górecka, *Pobożne matrony*, 74.

<sup>26</sup>The inscription on the epitaph of Catherine Kin reads "... przez lat 16 znym potomstwo miała / ośmioro dostalego pięć ich ziemy dawszy / troie iest frasobliwych po niey pozostawszy ..." ("... during the 16 years of marriage, together they had eight children of whom five have died, and the three living ones are now in sorrow...").

<sup>27</sup>"Gravestone of Anne Forbes née Carmichael (1702)," sandstone, St. Martin's Lutheran Church, Cracow.

<sup>28</sup>The inscription on the epitaph of Anna Henderson-Lidell reads "... Po ostatniey córce swey w bólach dokonała" ("After the birth of her latest daughter, she died in pain"). See "Gravestone of Anna Henderson-Lidell (1696)," sandstone, Evangelical-Reformed Cemetery, Węgrów.

<sup>29</sup>Górecka, *Pobożne matrony*, 123-26, 187-88, passim.

<sup>30</sup>Górecka, *Pobożne matrony*, 44-45.

<sup>31</sup>"Gravestone of Archibald Campbell (1692)," sandstone, Evangelical-Reformed Cemetery, Węgrów.

<sup>32</sup>W. Borowy, "Skąd w Krośnie ulica Portiusa," *Ziemia* 15 (1936): 238-40; Biegańska, "Wielka emigracja Szkotów," 111, 155-58; S. Cynarski, "Krosno w XVII i XVIII wieku," in ed. J. Garbacik, *Krosno: studia z dziejów miasta i regionu. Vol. 1 (Do roku 1918)*, (Kraków: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1972), 209-12; A. Kosiek, "Robert Wojciech Portius – krośnieński mieszczanin, kupiec, fundator," in ed. P. Łopatkiewicz, *Kościół farny w Krośnie – pomnik kultury artystycznej*

*miasta: Materiały z sesji naukowej Krosno, listopad 1996* (Krosno: Muzeum Rzemiosła, 1997), 193-219; W. Kowalski, "The Placement of Urbanised Scots," 73; F. Leśniak, *Krosno w czasach Odrodzenia. Studia nad społeczeństwem miasta* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe WSP, 1992), 123-24; T. Łopatkiewicz, "Kościół farny w Krośnie najstarsza nekropolia miasta," in T. Łopatkiewicz, *Kościół Farny w Krośnie*, 141-61. Large sections of Porteous's testament were transcribed by Sarna and subsequently translated into English by Fischer. See W. Sarna, *Opis powiatu krośnieńskiego pod względem geograficzno-historycznym* (Przemyśl, 1898), 494-505; T.A. Fischer, *The Scots in Eastern and Western Prussia* (Edinburgh: Otto Schulze, 1903), 101-08.

<sup>33</sup>"Portrait of Robert Porteous (1661)," oil on copper plate, Holy Trinity Catholic Church, Krosno.

## Bibliography

### *Manuscript sources*

"Collecta Zboru Kiejdańskiego: To jest rachunek wszystkich recept i expens zborowych zaczęty roku 1628 dnia 20 novembra," unpublished print, Wilno: 1939, Lietuvos Mokslų Akademijos Biblioteka, Vilnius, Rankraščiu skyrius, Fond. 9–3040.

"Reiestr Umarłych w Panu y Pogrzebionych Ex Epitaph appens." ("Register of those who passed in the presence of the Lord and were buried, taken from the epitaphs"), in "Księga Wtóra," Archiwum Parafii Ewangelicko-Augsburskiej, Cracow, fols. 141-49.

"Stein-Buch oder Verzeichnis der Gräber und der darin beerdigten Leichen in der St. Elisabeths-Kirchen in Danzig," Archiwum Państwowe w Gdańsku, sig. 351/17, fols. 17-18, 59-60 (No. 27).

### *Published primary sources*

Starowolski, Szymon ed., *Monumenta Sarmatarum, viam universae carnis ingressorum* (Cracoviae: in Officina Viduae et Haeredum Francisci Caesarij, 1655).

Steuart, Francis A. ed., *Papers Relating to the Scots in Poland 1576-1593* (Edinburgh: Scottish Historic Society, 1915).

### *Secondary sources*

Bajer, Peter Paul, *Scots in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries: The Formation and Disappearance of an Ethnic Group* (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

- Bajer, Peter Paul, "Scots in the Cracow Reformed Parish in the Seventeenth Century," in eds. T.M. Devine and D. Hesse, *Scotland and Poland: Historical Encounters, 1500-2010* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2011).
- Biegańska, Anna, "In Search of Tolerance: Scottish Catholics and Presbyterians in Poland," in *Scottish Slavonic Review*, XVII (1991): 37-59.
- Biegańska, Anna, "A Note on the Scots in Poland, 1550-1800," in ed. Thomas C. Smout, *Scotland and the Sea* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1992).
- Borowy, Waclaw, "Skąd w Krośnie ulica Portiusa," *Ziemia* 15 (1936): 238-40.
- Ciechanowiecki, Andrew, "Polish Art Treasures at the Royal Academy Source," *The Burlington Magazine* 112(803), (1970): 120-24.
- Cynarski, Stanisław, "Krosno w XVII i XVIII wieku," in ed. J. Garbacik, *Krosno: studia z dziejów miasta i regionu. Vol. 1 (Do roku 1918)*, (Kraków: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1972).
- Fischer, Thomas Alfred, *The Scots in Eastern and Western Prussia* (Edinburgh: Otto Schulze, 1903).
- Gomulicki, Witold, *Opowiadania o starej Warszawie* (Warszawa: Biblioteka Syrenki, 1960).
- Górecka, Katarzyna, *Pobożne matrony i cnotliwe panny: Epitafia jako źródło wiedzy o kobiecie w epoce nowożytnej pobożne matrony i cnotliwe panny* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, 2006).
- Kajanto, Iiro, *Classical and Christian: Studies in the Latin Epitaphs of Medieval and Renaissance* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1980).
- Karpowicz, Mariusz, *Baroque in Poland* (Warszawa: Arkady, 1991).
- Kosiek, Andrzej, "Robert Wojciech Portius – krośnieński mieszczanin, kupiec, fundator," in ed. P. Łopatkiewicz, *Kościół farny w Krośnie – pomnik kultury artystycznej miasta: Materiały z sesji naukowej Krosno, listopad 1996* (Krosno: Muzeum Rzemiosła, 1997).
- Kowalski, Waldemar, *Wielka imigracja. Szkoci w Krakowie i Małopolsce w XVI – pierwszej połowie XVII wieku* (Kielce: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Humanistyczno-Przyrodniczego im. Jana Kochanowskiego, 2010).
- Kowalski, Waldemar, "The Scots at the Cracow Customs House in the First Half of the 17th Century," enlarged and corrected version of the paper presented to the Polish-Scottish Relations 15th-18th Centuries Conference, Institute of History, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, 20-23 September 2000.
- Kowalski, Waldemar, "The Placement of Urbanised Scots in the Polish Crown During the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," in eds. A. Grosjean and S.



Murdoch, *Scottish Communities Abroad in the Early Modern Period* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

Kowalski, Waldemar, "Robert Spens i szkocka gmina w Krakowie u schyłku XVI stulecia," in eds. B. Rok and J. Maroń, *Między Lwowem a Wrocławiem. Księga jubileuszowa Profesora Krystyna Matwijowskiego* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2006).

Kowalski, Waldemar, "Szkoci na rynku krakowskim w połowie XVII wieku," *Zeszyty Wszechnicy Świętokrzyskiej. Filologia angielska* 1(23), (2006): 15-38.

Kowalski, Waldemar, "Certificates of Legitimate Birth (Birth-Briefs) in the Practice of the City Councils of Aberdeen and Kraków at the Close of the Sixteenth Century and During the First Half of the Seventeenth Century," in eds. Z. Hojda and H. Pátková, *Pragmatické písemnosti v kontextu právním a správním* (Praha: Univerzita Karlova v Praze, 2008).

Kowalski, Waldemar, "Kraków Citizenship and the Local Scots, 1509-1655," in ed. R. Unger, *Britain and Poland-Lithuania: Contact and Comparison from the Middle Ages to 1795* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

Kowalski, Waldemar, "The Reasons for the Immigration of Scots to the Polish Commonwealth in the Early Modern Period as Outlined in Contemporary Opinions and Historiography," paper presented to the Scotland and Poland: A Historical Relationship, 1500-2009 Conference, School of History, Classics and Archaeology, The University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, 1-2 October 2009.

Kowalski, Waldemar, "Scoti, cives Cracovienses: Their Ethnic and Social Identity, 1570-1660," in ed. D. Worthington, *British and Irish Emigrants and Exiles in Europe, 1603-1688* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2010), 67-85.

Kownatzki, Hermann, *Elbing als ehemaliger englischer Handelsplatz; (Elbing) as a Former English Trading Centre*, trans. W. Baumfelder (Elbing: Wernich, 1930).

Kruszelnicka, Joanna, *Portret na ziemi chełmińskiej*, 2 Vols. (Toruń: Muzeum Okręgowe w Toruniu, 1983).

Lattimore, Richard Alexander, *Themes in Greek and Latin Epitaphs* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1962).

Leśniak, Franciszek, *Krosno w czasach Odrodzenia. Studia nad społeczeństwem miasta* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe WSP, 1992).

Łopatkiewicz, Tadeusz, "Kościół farny w Krośnie najstarsza nekropolia miasta," in ed. P. Łopatkiewicz, *Kościół farny w Krośnie – pomnik kultury artystycznej miasta: Materiały z sesji naukowej Krosno, listopad 1996* (Krosno: Muzeum Rzemiosła, 1997).

Nierzwicki, Jan, *700 lat parafii chełmińskiej* (Grudziądz, 1933).

Ostrowski, Jan K., *Land of the Winged Horsemen: Art in Poland, 1572-1764* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1999).

Ostrowski, Jan K., "Portret Trumienny," in ed. A. Borowski, *Słownik Sarmatyzmu* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2001).

Sarna, Władysław, *Opis powiatu krośnieńskiego pod względem geograficzno-historycznym* (Przemyśl, 1898).

Tomkowicz, Stanisław, "Przyczynek do historii Szkotów w Krakowie i w Polsce," *Rocznik Krakowski* 2 (1899): 151-74.

### Biographical note

Dr Peter P. Bajer is a Polish scholar who currently lives and works in Australia. He is an Adjunct Research Associate at the School of Philosophical, Historical and International Studies, Monash University, Melbourne. His main areas of academic interest are: Scottish migration to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth; history of other ethnic groups (especially processes of naturalisation and ennoblement of foreigners) in Early Modern Poland; and accounts of contemporary British travellers to Central Europe.

Email: [peter.bajer@monash.edu](mailto:peter.bajer@monash.edu)

---

# “To Fill This Void Land”: Acclimatisation as Mnemonic Device in Victorian New Zealand

Sally J. Morgan

---

## “To Fill This Void Land”: Acclimatisation as Mnemonic Device in Victorian New Zealand

Sally J. Morgan

---

### Abstract

The New Zealand landscape has been irrevocably changed and shaped through the intervention of British colonisation. The same stubborn refusal of New Zealand’s nineteenth-century British settlers to wear clothes that suited the climate, to have anything other than a northern hemisphere Christmas, or to orient their houses towards the warm north rather than the cold south, produced, for a period in its history, a faux Britain at odds with the reality of Aotearoa and its established Māori occupation and culture. This construction of “home” was a tenuous facsimile, full of dishevelled chrysanthemums struggling to keep their composure in their overheated garden bed, next to the monstrously large lavender and the rampant nasturtiums. This was a consciously invented mimetic landscape, aspiring to Englishness but ultimately failing. In attempting to maintain the myth of the “Britain of the South”, these settlers created a fragile collection of embodied nostalgia in the form of introduced flora, fauna, landscapes, and practices. This article argues that in their attempt to “fill this void land”, the British ancestors of many modern New Zealanders created a landscape disrupted by the plaintive, domestic familiarity of another place, a distant, lost home. It also contends that these intrusions, that were originally wrought in the name of memory, of home, of patriotism, are largely invisible in those terms to their descendents, modern New Zealanders. The traces of memory of another home are still there, but can only be read as originally intended by those familiar with the original referents; recent immigrants from the British Isles, exiles who find the unexpected familiarity of elements this foreign landscape an unsettling and poignant “container of memory”.

Keywords: New Zealand, acclimatisation, memory, landscape, colonisation, migration, nostalgia

On 2 September 1860 an impressive, state-of-the-art, tall ship called the *Matoaka* is being towed carefully from Welsh Back Wharf, out of the City of Bristol, down the New Cut of the River Avon, and toward the mouth of the Severn. It is late summer, and on deck some of the passengers gaze quietly to their left at the small pear orchards, the hunched workers in the market gardens, and the scattering of new houses being built in the nascent suburb of Southville. Beyond these new developments, skirting Coronation Road, the cornfields have just been harvested. The light is soft and golden, and a blackbird makes a sudden bobbing flight across the water, landing on the rim of the ferryboat moored beneath the shadow of the New Gaol.

The land on the side of the river they gaze upon is not yet Bristol; it is the "Hundred of Hareclive and Bedminster", a division of the county of Somerset. The passengers observe it as a changing landscape: farmland is being turned to other uses. The new houses on the Bedminster side are part of a surge of speculative building that is occurring throughout Britain, fuelled by the steadily dropping value of agricultural land since the repeal of the Corn Laws.

However, even though the population of Bedminster is growing fast in this period (swelling from 7,979 in 1822 to 20,684 in 1851), in 1860 it is still a pastoral delight in contrast to Bristol. In the mid to late nineteenth century, the city was struggling to deal with the effect of an increasing population on what was still a largely medieval infrastructure. The inner city had become a stinking, cholera-ridden hellhole, with no clean water supply. In 1850, after a particularly bad outbreak of the disease, there had been a Public Health enquiry into the conditions of the city, and that had begun a process of sanitation reform that was yet to have impact.

Around this time, the Smyth family, Lords of the Manor of Bedminster, had become aware of the shifts in their fortunes and the decreasing value of their agricultural assets. The Bristol local historian, Arthur Bantock, tells us that in 1853 the Smyth's Estate Manager, Arthur Way, being aware that, "this was the last golden age of British agriculture", was "determined to extract the maximum profit from other sources of revenue". This meant, amongst other things, selling farmland off for other purposes.

The land alongside the river where this development is beginning to mark the landscape, now, or will soon, belong to a partnership which includes Jeremiah Osborne. He is one in a long line of Jeremiah Osbornes, a family of Bristol solicitors who have acted for the wealthiest and most influential families and institutions in the region since 1748, including the Smyths of Bedminster and the extremely powerful Society of Merchant Venturers. In the 1830s he had been negotiating between the Smyths and the Great Western Railway Company (an initiative funded by the Society), to procure this land for the proposed London to Bristol railroad. When the route was changed and diverted north, making the negotiated land surplus to requirement, it appears he took advantage of this and bought the land in partnership with Henry Seymour Wright and Margaret Trotman.

This partnership eventually began to build a few streets of terraced “villas” on what had once been market gardens, wheat fields, and orchards.

One of those villas, Number 15 on the eponymous Osborne Road, would come to belong to me in the 1990s. In the turn of the new century, I would leave it and travel along Coronation Road, by the New Cut of the Avon, to the airport to emigrate to New Zealand with my Kiwi partner. I glance back at its gabled roof, its neatly painted sage green exterior, and the small cabbage tree that has been planted in the tiny front garden to remind my partner of home.

Meanwhile, back in 1860, other emigrants watch the fragile landscape glide past them. Some are thinking about what was gone and changing, and what they are leaving behind. Here, and elsewhere in the British Isles, displaced agricultural workers have seen their livelihoods go, as land is sold off, and they are now forced to find other employment. Some are crowding into inadequate cities; some are accepting government aid and boarding boats for the colonies. These people have made the latter choice and are heading for the “Britain of the South” on the *Matoaka*.

The Captain, Alfred Stevens, is a kind-hearted and popular man. He will become so well liked by his passengers that at the end of the journey he will be presented with a testimonial signed by all the cabin class passengers along with a purse of 30 guineas. On this occasion he is taking the vessel to Port Lyttelton, and this is his second journey to New Zealand as master of this ship. As usual, his passenger list is neatly divided according to social class. He has on board about 60 “gentlefolk” in the first, second, and third class cabins, most of whom are paying their own way.

Most of his passengers, however, are assisted “immigrants” quartered in steerage. The New Zealand Province of Canterbury is paying half their fare, or more, and the rest is either being covered by sponsors or by themselves. The exception is for single women who have free passage. In steerage there are 46 families in one set of quarters, 48 single men in one dormitory, and 41 single women in another. These are mostly working class people who are on their way to become servants or labourers.

Although common mythology in New Zealand has us believe that Victorian British settlers were directly escaping the British class system and the factories of the industrialised cities, this does not seem to be the case. The Canterbury Association, in keeping with the approach of the New Zealand Company before it, actively sought application for assisted passage for female domestic servants and male farm workers. At least one of its posters calls for responses from a “Member of the Working Class” in the following terms:

*The Association will grant Assisted Passages to PORT LYTTELTON, in the Canterbury Settlement [to a] Member of the Working Classes, being Gardeners, Farm Servants, Labourers, and Country Merchants. The Emigrants must be of the highest Character in Society, Steadiness, and respectability, as certified by Clergyman of their Parish.*<sup>1</sup>

Hence, almost all the men on board have listed agricultural occupations, whilst the single women overwhelmingly describe themselves as domestic servants. It is highly likely, therefore, that these people would have had no first-hand experience of the privations of Britain's industrial cities. They are for the most part respectable, working class, country people with the financial means to contribute to their own passage, or else are in the employ of someone willing to sponsor them.

The ship's doctor, Dr Young, will be responsible for the supervision of steerage passengers on this journey. Unlike the cabin passengers, they will be strictly regulated throughout the voyage, and on arrival the cleanliness of their quarters will be scrutinised by inspectors before they are sent off to stay in barracks. Their journey, and the country they arrive in, has been formed with a strong class structure. In no sense is "Jack as good as his master" in this venture.

The diminishing need for farm workers is widespread across Britain and people are looking for other options. At least three families of farm workers have travelled from as far away as Aberdeenshire to join the ship, but some are more local. It is four days before Philip Marshall's twenty-third birthday, and the young farm worker has travelled a mere six miles from the ancient Somerset parish of Chew Magna. This is the country seat of Lord George Lyttelton who is, perhaps not coincidentally, the eponymous patron of the settlement that this ship is heading to.

The Port of Lyttelton is in the newly established New Zealand Province of Canterbury. Here the fastest growing industry is sheep farming and the port has been exporting wool to Britain for the past four years. Conversely, Chew Magna (the place our youthful farm labourer is leaving) is now in steady decline, having been a major centre for the English wool industry since the medieval period. It is destined to become a dormer suburb for Bristol. It has become static, and streets reflect the past periods of the village's greatest wealth. Some of the grandest houses once belonged to eighteenth-century wool merchants, but now economic power has shifted. The merchants have gone, and the economic dynamic of the nation has moved from the countryside to the city.

At the time that Philip Marshall decides to leave Chew Magna its population is declining, and it is gradually becoming a backwater that will remain so untouched that its quaint streets and buildings would still be recognisable to him were he able to return 150 years later. Marshall is leaving what he knows for what he imagines. He has not chosen to work in one of the new factories springing up around Bristol and Bedminster; he is going to a place where agriculture is still important, that is controlled by the lord of his local manor, and that has been socially ordered according to the old, rural values he understands. It could be argued that he is trying to find a place where the past continues. He has rejected industrialisation; he chooses what he knows, he chooses his past.

A key passenger on this ship is a Mr James Edward Fitzgerald, who is listed in the first cabin and is travelling with his wife and family. He is a founder member of the Canterbury Association and an associate of Lord Lyttelton. Until 1849 he had been an official in the Department of Antiquities in the British Museum,

but in that year he had met Edward Gibbon Wakefield and made the decision to become a colonist himself.<sup>2</sup> He is well liked in the colony, noted for his energy and enthusiasm, and for flying around the streets in his “wonderful contraption”. This was known by all as “Fitzgerald’s Circulating Median”, which was basically a dog cart with very big wheels. This gentleman is now the Association’s Emigration Agent, and it was he who has assessed young Philip Marshall’s suitability for the Province of Canterbury. Fitzgerald is returning home to Lyttelton after a two-year sojourn in London. He builds a high opinion of Captain Stevens on this trip, and at the end it is he who presents the captain with the signed testimonial from all the cabin passengers and the purse of 30 guineas, along with a fulsome speech.

As they turn the bend of the River Avon, above them to the left are the elegant Georgian rows of Clifton Village, and ahead are the temporarily abandoned piers of Isambard Kingdom Brunel’s Suspension Bridge. Work is about to restart on the bridge, which is to be completed as a memorial to its recently deceased designer. Passengers are milling on the deck, craning their heads up at the massive structure. The three-masted, full-rigged ship they occupy is one of the fastest on this route, but now it is towed sedately past the visitors on their way to take the medicinal waters at the spa of Hotwells to the right, and the half-built pillars of the bridge. The ancient oak forest of Leigh Woods to their left is full of birdsong, rabbits, wildflowers, and ripening blackberries.

They proceed down the Severn, past the Welsh coast, and out to Lundy Island, where the pilot and the towboat leave them. This island is their last sight of Britain, and there is a moment of poetry to be found in this fact. From Haverford West in Pembrokeshire, Lundy is only intermittently visible. Its elusiveness gave rise to an old Welsh story about magical islands called the “Green Isles of the Ocean”. The story goes that you can only find these pastoral and perfect islands if you take a piece of magical graveyard turf with you and stand on it as you navigate your boat. If you step off the grass then these utopian islets disappear. You can only see them again if you stand on the grass of the place from whence you came, the grass that covered the bones of your ancestors. So it was to be with New Zealand. It would turn out that these British settlers could only see their new “Green Isles of the Ocean” when their feet were firmly planted on the turf of home and their ears were filled with the birdsong of their childhood.

When they arrive in Lyttelton, some three months after leaving Welsh Back Wharf in Bristol, they do not, perhaps, find what they are expecting. As James Belich has observed, the New Zealand they found could not have been more different from the Britain they have left. It is far from a rural idyll. A slightly later arrival, Peter Thomson, who had also been a passenger with Captain Stevens on the *Matoaka*, found Lyttelton underwhelming and surprisingly expensive. He records in his diary of 1862:

*Found the town a queer little place, very unfinished looking houses all wood. Things very dear ... was asked seven pounds four shillings (for lodgings) ... Mrs T. very anxious and dismayed.*<sup>3</sup>



They had indeed arrived in an “unfinished” country”, and Mrs Thomson’s dismay is not an uncommon response. Many British immigrants to New Zealand had expected to find it a familiar and welcoming version of “home”, part of what commentators of the time (such as John Seeley and the popular historian, Arthur Temple, amongst others) had described as “Greater Britain”.<sup>4,5</sup> As Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson suggest in their introduction to “The Myths we Live By”,<sup>6</sup> nations live by the myths they create, and one of the founding myths of the European settler in New Zealand was that it was an exact parallel of England found on the other side of the world. Or rather, that it was a parallel of the idealised rural world of old England that existed in their imagination.

Both Michael A. Osborne and Thomas R. Dunlap have discussed, the role of nostalgia in the establishment of the acclimatisation societies that sprung up across the British Empire in the late nineteenth century to import familiar flora and fauna.<sup>7</sup> Dunlap, in particular, discusses the “Anglo” settler’s need to make his new land familiar: to “fill this void land” with meaning. In order to be at home here they first noted what was “missing”.<sup>8,9</sup>

Sarah Courage, who arrived in New Zealand in 1863 with her husband, Fred, commented on the lack of wild flowers. She noted that “we missed the birds terribly on coming out first: even the lively chirping of the inquisitive sparrow would have sounded like music to our ears, to say nothing of the robin’s warbling”.<sup>10</sup>

This sentiment is affirmed over and over again in immigrant journals and letters of the time. Although J. Drummond, in his 1905 Philosophical Society Paper, “On Introduced Birds”, insists that, although sentiment played a part in the introduction of British birds to New Zealand, it was outweighed by “necessity and utility”. As their letters and journals betray, the settler’s nostalgia, indeed their melancholy, provided an imperative that went beyond agricultural functionality. For many settlers the dearth of familiar plants, flowers, and birds was profoundly affecting. A later immigrant who is known only as ‘Hopeful’ laments that “in vain may you search for a sweet violet, primrose, cowslip, daisy, buttercup, bluebell, harebell [...] the dear companions of childhood are lacking”.<sup>11</sup>

Without these things she perceives herself to be cut off from her memories and, consequently, her very identity. For her every element of the natural environment of England was a mnemonic, a link to her past and her own history, and without that landscape and all its intricate elements she was bereft, pining for “sweet monotony where *every thing is known*, and loved *because it is known* ... these well-remembered bird-notes; [...] such things are the *mother-tongue* of our imagination, the language that is laden with all the subtle, inextricable associations the fleeting hours of our childhood left behind them”.<sup>12</sup>

Sarah Courage, more active and less given to melancholy than ‘Hopeful’, set about recreating those associations. Like most colonists, she made a garden and grew roses and lavender. Anticipating the musings of Gaston Bachelard on the “domestic and remembrance”, she noted that lavender always brought back memories of home; its “grey spikes were always hoarded carefully in muslin bags

for one’s own drawer. Average humanity has a liking for something familiar, and the sense of smell is the sense of memory”.<sup>13</sup>

Bachelard, writing in France in the mid-twentieth century, proposed that our notion of “home” is conditioned by our experience of the first house that we live in and that we unconsciously, ever after, imbue new spaces with the remembered spaces of this archetypal home.<sup>14</sup> He speaks about the smell of raisins in a drawer as producing in him an intense remembrance of home and of childhood and nostalgia. Home, then, is the place where one spent one’s childhood, and every subsequent home is an attempt to regain a link with long lost familiar and comforting tokens of security. To make a home is to create a simulation of familiarity; and it can only be a place we recognise.

Sarah Courage’s description of the place of lavender as a mnemonic of childhood in the lives of Victorian New Zealand settlers is revealing. Lavender is omnipresent in the remains of colonial gardens, growing up against the veranda, wafting its scent through the open doors. The need to remember and recognise, along with the desire to subdue the land for agriculture, began to produce a radically different New Zealand from the one that Māori had occupied prior to European colonisation. William Pember Reeves, a populist historian of the period, devotes four pages of his New Zealand history, *The Long White Cloud*,<sup>15</sup> to the ways that the British settler “set out to fill this void land with everything British which he could transport or transplant”.

The land was, of course, not void. For the tangata whenua, it was already full. However, for the British incomers it was empty. It was empty of resonance, of agriculture (and therefore of worth), and it was empty of memory (and therefore of meaning). As Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson noted in *De-scribing Empire: Post-colonialism and Textuality*, it was a characteristic of European episteme that colonial alterity often manifested as a failure “to comprehend the actual self-naming and articulate subject” as such.<sup>16</sup> In the case of Māori, this also applied to the environment that they had shaped. To the British settlers, the land was void of meaning because it was void of memory. It could not be “home” until they filled it, until the environment itself could be a mnemonic for their homeland. In this way they demanded a landscape that contained their memories by allusion.

For these reasons, of longing and nostalgia, as well those other imperatives described by Drummond in 1866, according to Joan Druett,<sup>17</sup> J.R. Hill travelled to England and bought 444 birds by ship to Lyttelton. Mr Hill was Manager of the Bank of New South Wales on Hereford Street in Christchurch, and a very busy person. Not only was he an honorary member of the Canterbury Acclimatisation Society, but he also served on a number of boards and trusts and was an enthusiastic donator of all sorts of flora and fauna to the Canterbury Museum and the Acclimatisation Society Gardens. He famously paid for, and imported, an egg incubator in the hope of raising game birds for hunting.

On 10 January 1867, the *Matoaka* sails into Lyttelton Harbour, and Captain Stevens is feeling quite pleased with himself. He is about to deliver Mr Hills’ surviving birds to the Canterbury Acclimatisation Society. He has looked after them

assiduously through a long cold journey, and although only 166 have survived, it is still no small feat. He brings larks, blackbirds, thrushes, starlings, and the hull of the boat is full of birdsong. There is disappointment, however, that the five robins on board all died. On subsequent trips the captain, with the aid of his ship's carpenter, John Langdown, succeeds in bringing in finches, redpolls, yellowhammers, and hedge sparrows.

The colonists were looking forward to a large consignment of hedge sparrows, and according to Drummond, had commissioned the captain to bring back 13 dozen of them. Being a seafaring man, he was not familiar with the niceties of identifying bird species. Instead of the hedge sparrow, he had mistakenly brought the working class rabble of the avian world, the common house sparrow. Of the 13 dozen he had nurtured across the oceans only five now survived. The officers of the Canterbury Acclimatisation Society refused to accept these cocky "townies"; they had wanted their pastoral cousins (hedge sparrows), in the hope that they would work their fields and rid them of native insect pests. It is an interesting mirroring of their screening of working class human immigrants that they reject these streetwise urban urchins. Drummond sums up the colonists' attitude to these city birds thus:

*It refuses to go out into the woods and get an honest living (...). It clings to civilisation and cultivation ... its cunning is unsurpassed.*<sup>18</sup>

Captain Stevens, as we have already ascertained, was a good-hearted man and suffered no class prejudice when it came to birdlife. After a thoughtful pause he declares that "the poor little beggars have had a hard time" and opens the cage. They fly up to the rigging and "remain twittering there for some time", and then they are gone. They stay around Lyttelton for about three weeks and then take off to populate Canterbury.

Drummond observed that *the sight of the introduced birds seem to fall in with the early colonists desire to make Canterbury as like England as possible. Their minds were full of the place they had left. The Old Country was their Holy Land, and anything that reminded them of it was given a hearty welcome.*<sup>19</sup>

One hundred and forty-four years later their legacy is astonishing. Most (if not all) of the birds, shrubs and trees, and insects that 'Hopeful' mourned for are to be found in twenty-first-century New Zealand. Flocks of goldfinch perch in the gum trees, starlings forage across Wellington's well-kept lawns, and sparrows and blackbirds fill every silence. In the Wairarapa, across the Rimutaka Ranges, there are oaks, "quivering aspen", and weeping willows. Wild garlic grows down the bank next to my house and the brambles and gorse threaten to choke the native grasses.

When I arrive as a new migrant in Wellington in 2001, everywhere I look I am overwhelmed by images of "home". When I stand in the middle of Wellington in Central Park and look down at my feet, I see familiar meadow, with plantain, creeping buttercup, dandelion, clover, and daisies growing through it. I close my eyes and I hear blackbirds, thrush, and skylark. When you stand on this turf, if you are a British immigrant, you are transported home. Not a native plant is to be

seen in this tightly growing carpet, and the metallic, liquid, sounds of the native birds are subsumed in a cockney racket of sparrows.

The feeling it produces in a Briton far from home is truly (to misuse Sigmund Freud) “unheimlich”, that is, uncanny, or literally “un-homely”. In this case it is, paradoxically, an incongruous and disconcerting *homeliness* that disquiets, as memories of another place are overlaid on a foreign landscape. A place like home that is not home. For the incoming “Pom”, listening to the sounds of lost sparrows, now so rare in British cities, and taken by surprise by the Victorian roses growing as weeds in the ditches next to old colonial houses, New Zealand produces the sensation of living amongst homesick ghosts.

Ironically, this “unheimlich homeliness” is not apparent to the descendents of the ghosts who created it. These unsettling traces are unreadable as anything other than mundane symptoms of the present, and they are absorbed into that synthesis that is this place, *home*, this post-imperial New Zealand. These traces therefore do not speak to New Zealanders in the same disorientating way they speak to me. My “unheimlich” is their normality.

The Victorian settlers in New Zealand were, it could be argued, engaged in a project of mimesis, in which their English “reality” was imitated through the manipulation of the new landscape. Plato, of course, argued that mimesis was untruthful impersonation and could only result in hollow simulacra whereby “truth” was simulated but not present. The result of this intense reconfiguration of an alien environment into a substitute for the familiar, remembered, reality of “home” is a world where things are not, in fact, homely, but are disquietingly “un-homely”. This began to manifest in New Zealand relatively early. Lady Barker, when visiting Wellington in the 1880s, was distressed to discover that the grand edifices of the shops were simply wooden facades. What looked like smart London shops from the front were, once you got beyond the frontage, “mean tin sheds”.

In some cases the nature of the simulacrum carries with it an emotive intensity almost metonymic in its significance. For instance, the oak has a special place in English mythology (as the old song went, “Hearts of oak are our ships, hearts of oak are our men”). The hardness of the tree’s wood had come to symbolise the strength of the English character. The transplanted oak grows everywhere around colonial New Zealand towns. In Nelson, in the South Island, there are specimens planted in the 1840s that are so big they could be twice their age. However, in New Zealand the oak grows so fast that its wood is soft and weak. Here the oak becomes a simulacrum of British identity. The symbolic quality most prized by its colonial planters is absent. It looks like an oak, it grows as big and majestic as any in England, but its “oak-ness”, its hardness and strength, is not there. It is not relevant here; it has lost meaning

In 2001, Pippa Sanderson, a New Zealand artist who I was supervising as a Master of Fine Arts candidate, engaged on a piece of installation art in a colonial house in Island Bay, Wellington. The project was a learning experience for both of us. In her commentary on the project she wrote:

*Seeing the space through the eyes of my Master's supervisor, Sally Morgan, a recent arrival from Britain, was to witness someone experiencing the uncanny, 'recognising' simulacral elements of the house and garden, in a way that I, who have never been to Britain cannot.*

Pippa's description of my engagement with the house and garden accurately described my engagement with the whole country at that time. My first few weeks in Wellington unleashed a torrent of childhood memories sparked off by the sounds of birds, the sight of plants, and the smell of flowers. Birds that I had not seen since my childhood in Swansea thronged through the trees in an exuberant commotion like kids let loose in the park. Things that were plentiful in my childhood, but were gone now at home (like sparrows and wildflowers) were here, thousands of miles away in a Pacific Island once covered in dense strange foliage and populated with now extinct birds.

The New Zealand landscape has been irrevocably changed through British colonisation. The same stubborn refusal to wear clothes that suited the climate, to have anything other than a northern hemisphere Christmas, or to orient their houses towards the warm north rather than the cold south, produced a faux England. One that was a tenuous facsimile, full of dishevelled chrysanthemums struggling to keep their composure in their overheated garden bed, next to the monstrously large lavender and the rampant nasturtiums.

This was a mimetic landscape, aspiring to Englishness, but falling into parody. In attempting to maintain the myth of the "Britain of the South", the settlers created a mnemonic landscape. However, it becomes clear that mnemonics cannot function without access to the original referent. The poignancy of many delicate intrusions that were wrought in the name of memory, home, and patriotism, are (ironically) invisible to the descendents of their originators. They have become mundane; normalised as they have turned into part of ensuing generations' experience of childhood and of home.

The nostalgia of the early settlers that caused them to plant oaks and import skylarks speaks to my nostalgia, and unsettles me because I don't see, as New Zealanders do, a landscape that is *itself* and signifies this place *here*, this place *now*. I see a simulacrum: a simulation of my home. Where for native-born Kiwis this landscape is a unity, the place they have always known, I see an exotic landscape disrupted by the plaintive, domestic familiarity of emblems of another place. It works on my memory and emotions because it is designed to sustain my longings, to mend my loss under the unreadable southern stars and the upside-down moon. Only a British immigrant knows the gap that these living, growing, mementos of home were meant to fill. Only a Briton sees the paradox of the intensely familiar amongst startlingly foreign: the fish and chip shop under the palm trees, the cicada on the oak, the cabbage white butterfly perched on the giant flax.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup>(Artist unknown), Canterbury Association poster (ref 19XX.2.952), Canterbury Museum, Christchurch, New Zealand.
- <sup>2</sup>Blain, M., *The Canterbury Association (1848-1852): A Study of Its Members' Connections* (Anglican Diocese of Christchurch: Christchurch, 2007).
- <sup>3</sup>Journal of Peter Thomson's voyage on board the ship *Matoaka* (1861-1862), copied by Otago Early Settlers Museum, 1955.
- <sup>4</sup>Seeley, J., *The Expansion of England* (Boston: Roberts, 1883).
- <sup>5</sup>Temple, A., *The Making of the Empire: The Story of Our Colonies* (London: Andrew Melrose, 1895).
- <sup>6</sup>Samuel, R. and Thompson, P., *The Myths We Live By* (London: Routledge, 1990), 1-21.
- <sup>7</sup>Osborne, M.A., *Acclimatising the World: A History of the Paradigmatic Colonial Science* (Chicago: Osiris, UCP, 2001), 135-51; and Dunlap T.R. "Remaking the Land: The Acclimatisation Movement and Anglo Ideas of Nature," *Journal of World History*, 8 (1997): 303.
- <sup>8</sup>Pember-Reeves, W., *The Long White Cloud* (Twickenham: 3rd ed. 1924, Reprint Senate, 1998) 34-37.
- <sup>9</sup>Dunlap, T.R., *Nature and the English Diaspora* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999) 19.
- <sup>10</sup>Courage, S.A., *Lights and Shadows of Colonial Life* (Auckland: Whitcoulls Publishers, reprint 1976 ) 181; and 'Hopeful', *Taken In; Being a Sketch of New Zealand Life* (London: W.H. Allen, 1887), 100-01.
- <sup>11</sup>'Hopeful', *Taken In*, 100-01.
- <sup>12</sup>'Hopeful', *Taken In*, 97-98.
- <sup>13</sup>Courage, *Lights and Shadows of Colonial Life*, 231.
- <sup>14</sup>Bachelard, G., *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964).
- <sup>15</sup>Pember-Reeves, *The Long White Cloud*, 34-37.
- <sup>16</sup>C. Tiffin and A. Lawson eds., *De-scribing Empire: Post-Colonialism and Textuality* (London: Routledge, 1994).
- <sup>17</sup>Druett, J., *Exotic Intruder* (Auckland: Heinemann, 1983), 110.
- <sup>18</sup>Drummond, J., *On Introduced Birds* (Auckland: Transcribed N.Z. Inst. 1907) 234.
- <sup>19</sup>Drummond, *On Introduced Birds*, 131.

## Bibliography

- Bachelard, G., *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964).
- Bantock, A., *The Last Smyths of Ashton Court* (Bristol: Malago, 1990).
- Bantock, A. *Bedminster* (Bristol: Chalford, 1997).
- Blain, M., *The Canterbury Association (1848-1852): A Study of Its Members' Connections* (Anglican Diocese of Christchurch: Christchurch, 2007).

- Cleeve, R.E., *St Paul's Bedminster: The Formative Years* (Bristol: Ronald E. Cleeve, 1981).
- Courage, S.A., *Lights and Shadows of Colonial Life* (Auckland: Whitcoulls Publishers, 2nd ed. 1976, first published c.1896).
- Dunlap, T.R., "Remaking the Land: The Acclimatisation Movement and Anglo Ideas of Nature," *Journal of World History*, 8 (1997): 303.
- Dunlap, T.R. *Nature and the English Diaspora* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999).
- Druett, J. *Exotic Intruders* (Auckland: Heinemann, 1983).
- Drummond, J., *On Introduced Birds* (Auckland: Transcribed N.Z. Inst, 1907) 227-52.
- Fedden, M., *Bristol Vignettes* (Bristol: Burleigh Press, 1963).
- 'Hopeful', *Taken In; Being a Sketch of New Zealand Life* (London: W.H. Allen, 1887).
- Latimer, J., *The Annals of Bristol*, 3 (Bristol: Kingsmead Reprints, 1970).
- Little, B. *The Story of Bristol* (Bristol, Redcliffe Press, 1991).
- Mallory, K., *The Bristol House* (Bristol: Redcliffe Press, 1985).
- McGrath, P., *The Merchant Venturers of Bristol* (Bristol: Society of Merchant Venturers of Bristol, 1975).
- McLean, G., *Wellington: The First Years of European Settlement 1840-1850* (London and Auckland: Penguin, 2000).
- Muthesius, S. *Victorian Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985).
- Osborne, M.A., *Acclimatising the World: A History of the Paradigmatic Colonial Science* (Chicago: Osiris, UCP, 2001).
- Pember-Reeves, W., *The Long White Cloud* (Twickenham: 3rd ed. 1924, Reprint Senate, 1998).
- Samuel, R. and Thompson, P. *The Myths We Live By* (London: Routledge, 1990).
- Seeley, J., *The Expansion of England* (Boston, Roberts, 1883).
- Simpson, T., *The Immigrants: The Great Migration from Britain to New Zealand, 1830-1890* (Auckland: Godwit, 1997).
- Temple, A., *The Making of the Empire: The Story of Our Colonies* (London: Andrew Melrose, 1895).
- Tiffin, C. and Lawson A. eds., *De-scribing Empire: Post-colonialism and Textuality* (London: Routledge, 1994).

Tovey, S.G., *Colston the Philanthropist: Memorials of his Life and Deeds* (Bristol: Taylor, 1863).

Walker, F., *The Bristol Region* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1972).

Watkins, J.S., *Furnished with Ability: The Lives and Times of the Wills Families* (Salisbury: Wills Families and Michael Russell, 1991).

Winstone, J., *Bristol Trade Cards: Remnants of a Prolific Commerce* (Bristol: Reece Winstone Archives Publishing, 1993).

### *Archives*

Otago Early Settlers Museum, Dunedin, New Zealand

Canterbury Museum, Christchurch, New Zealand

Public Records Office, Bristol, U.K.

Local History Archive, Bristol Reference Library, U.K.

Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, Bristol, U.K.

Abbey National Mortgage Document Archive, London, U.K.

Local History Archive, Bedminster Library, Bristol, U.K.

Local History Archive (Chew Magna file), Weston Super Mare Library, U.K.

### *Electronic archives*

*Osborne-Clark Archive*: <http://www.osborne-clark.co.uk>

*New Zealand Bound Archive (Records of voyages of the Matoaka)*:

<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~nzbound/index.htm>

*Ships List Archive*: <http://www.oulton.com/cwa/newsships.nsf/by+date>

### **Biographical note**

Professor Sally J. Morgan holds the Chair of Fine Arts at Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand. She has had impact in the area of cultural history and theory through her investigation of material artefacts as “historical texts”. This area of research intersects with her performance art and installation works, the most successful of which have arisen from an examination of history and memory as cultural constructs. Recently her article, “The Ghost in the Luggage: Wallace and



Braveheart: Post-colonial 'Pioneer' Identities", was included in Popular Culture (four volume set), Vol. 1, Sage Benchmarks in Culture and Society Series, edited by Michael Pickering. This collection brings together influential "benchmark" pieces of research in this area. Other authors selected include Theodor Adorno, Stuart Hall, Tony Bennett, and Anthony D Smith.

Email: [S.J.Morgan@massey.ac.nz](mailto:S.J.Morgan@massey.ac.nz)

---

# Settler Dreaming

Stephen Turner

---

## Settler Dreaming

Stephen Turner

---

### Abstract

This article focuses on collective memory in a place that has been radically transformed by settlement and where memory itself is part and parcel of the make-over. Remembering isn't passive or received but active, and forms a process of settlement too. For visitors, says Walter Benjamin, a new country is exotic, and the object of an exoticising gaze, whilst for natives the place is perceived through layers of collective memory. The problem for settlers is that the place they come to consider their own is originally exotic to them. They now have a memory of a place made-over in their own exotic image of it—at first a picturesque landscape occupied by a disappearing indigenous people. Just how an exoticised experience of landscape and its indigenous inhabitants became “us” New Zealanders is forgotten today in declaring settler nature—“our” identity and character—to be of nature, now primordial and pure, and quite organic. Benjamin's formulation suggests a corrective to cultural organicism and the constructed public memory of popular national identity.

The exotic place of settlers' perception, even when familiarised and domesticated, is the lens through which settlers view history. Their collective remembering makes-over the place in terms of the experience of its difference to them, not in terms of Māori experience of European difference to Māori. The gap in perception is foreclosed by the make-over, which itself constitutes national popular memory. The remembering activity of settler culture makes all the more real a made-over place while occluding its making over. An industry of historians, or memory machinery, is needed to support settler place-making, working to shape and contain memory, and to secure it against real knowledge of the making over of place. I will explore how it does so by explaining three components of national popular memory: re-enactment, remediation, and cultural plagiarism.

Keywords: dreaming, settlement, memory, frontier, re-enactment

Aotearoa New Zealand would appear to be a post-settler nation and post-colonial society. The legacy of settlement remains, however, because the assumption that “colonisation” has ended cannot be definitive, or empirically dated. So it is that settlers remain in thrall to the prospective place of those first Europeans who decided that their future lay in the “new” country rather than their countries of origin. These second settlers, due to their numbers, remain colonisers in a way that first settlers, or first peoples, are not. The “logic” of colonisation is a matter of supernumeracy, or weight of settler numbers, in the light of which settlement is constantly rationalised. Rather than reflecting on the civilising mission that made settlement seem both necessary and inevitable, I consider the “prospect” of settlement to be a dream, according to the terms of which the new country could be considered a frontier, or open space, rather than somebody else’s country. In his recent book, Lorenzo Veracini outlines the numerous “transfers” by which settlers removed in their own minds the indigenous peoples from the prospective place of their settlement, but Māori remain very much present to non-Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand (as this more recent denomination would indicate).<sup>1</sup> This ensures that second settlement remains highly contentious, in both cultural and political terms, which makes post-settlement and post-colonialism today a dream of being at home—having a homeland one can take as given. First peoples (Māori) are not then “removed” but rather co-opted by this dream, whose aim is to make us all (New Zealanders or Kiwi) people of different kinds but, crucially, people with the same origin.

If migrants dream in the sense that they hope for a better life in a new land, “settlers” take this land to be their own. In so doing a more natural human hope is inhibited by the dreamscape of New Zealand itself, which, beyond “bush and beach”, must be the place of one people and one country.<sup>2</sup> When the Victorian certainties of earlier settlers fall away—entwined beliefs and values of progress, industry, and Christian virtue—the dream element assumes full force, and its compulsory character is asserted along with attendant anxiety and dread. Subject to the dream-drive, the original hope of settlement may today be contrasted with dreaming as abandonment. This happens when the dreamer isn’t really hoping any longer but rather suffering from a collectively enforced dream. “I” still want to hope but can’t because the hoping is forced, an imperative (hope for your country!) that doesn’t even appear to be my own. Having to dream the good life I must now be enjoying in my own country is then experienced as self-abandonment, as what I am dreaming bears little or no relation to my desire, much less to my experience. So I abandon the “self” (the settler-I) of that dreaming, although “I” cannot but dream. If states of settler abandonment are predicated on settler dreaming in this sense, it is worth asking how and why such dreaming is enforced.

My emphasis on forced hope, rather than a delusion of hope, means that settler “dreaming” in Aotearoa New Zealand is not a case of being mistaken (“you must be dreaming”) or a case of something having been forgotten that makes settler consciousness “false”.<sup>3</sup> In that case there would be an unconscious

and “real” substructure to the dream. While the settler memory—the act of remembering settlement—is certainly a matter of hoping, it is not a matter of repression or repressed content. The specific repression of a prior Māori presence might be an obvious and simple case of wishful forgetting, but it is plain enough today what must have taken place and plenty of evidence for it (a migrant invasion, appropriation of land, cultural colonisation, New Zealandisation, etc). More than the migrant dream of a better life in a new country, it is the idea of making it one’s own that structures settler consciousness, and constitutes “New Zealand” as the dream’s reality. “Settler dreaming” is the problem that this reality can only turn out to be true—as real as anything can be.

The necessity of the settler homeland—the settler being at home—requires a national memory infrastructure to secure it. As Claudia Orange remarked in a keynote address to the Contained Memory conference, a nation must have a memory if it is to have a future. There must be a past to support it—a collective public memory, something to be “captured” and “presented” as “our” own history.<sup>4</sup> In place of latent content or an unconscious I will argue that there is a collective structural intention, which is the desire-drive of settler dreaming, unfolded as the lived dreamscape of New Zealand—the reward of existential investment in the idea of a new country. It is important that the promise of place also appears to settlers to be a promised place, in the sense of a set of expectations which, when thwarted, creates anger.

Importantly, that future never quite arrives. For Francis Pound, the promised place of settler dreaming is always coming but never arrives.<sup>5</sup> This forms part of his critique in *The Invention of New Zealand Art and National Identity 1930-1970*. He might have added that the fact that “New Zealand” never quite comes is actually constitutive of this new country. Historically speaking, its delay or deferral maintains the desire-drive of settlement, encouraging immigration and discouraging emigration. There is always work to do, and settlers are urged to get on with it. The ambiguity for Pound’s New Zealand-based artists, which is whether this country has been “invented” or “discovered”, is key to the settler-deception. Whether the collective public memory of the “nation”—at first largely imaginary and projected—has been invented or discovered by historians is equally moot. A public archive, as much as an artistic one, must today support a settler self and nation whose collective memory and sense of place it supplies.<sup>6</sup> Archiving becomes “our” dreaming. So memory is both produced and contained by a national infrastructure constructed for this purpose.

### The mobile home of settler memory

Being at home for settlers involves more than having a house or property in a new land. The new place must be made into a “homeland”, which requires a history to support it. The memory of home suggests a particular problem for settlers, where home, in the sense of identity and belonging, is not given but made. Collective

memory of settlement is not passive or received but active—an activity and a process of settlement. It is a constant processing of settlement in the sense of an intentional, purposeful, needful remembering.

Settlers have a memory of a place as visitors to it, a place made-over in their own exotic imagination of a picturesque and largely empty land with friendly native peoples, whatever the reality, which serves as a drawcard to greater numbers of themselves. A collective memory of an exotic place that over time becomes familiarised works to construct a place in terms of settlers' experience of its difference to themselves. It does not express Māori experience of the would-be settler's difference to Māori in the Māori view of the newcomers. Rather, the place and its existing peoples must be ceaselessly made-over for the “nation” to come into being. For the perceptual gap to be bridged, the ceaseless making-over of the nation is necessary, but also means it will never be fully made-over. For the gap underpins the majority memory of settlement, and motivates the make-over culture of settlers. The memory, or action of remembering, makes-over again, and thereby makes real, through its own re-enactment, what is remembered. What drives memory is an idea of place in which one must find oneself at home. This is the “reality” of settler dreaming that structures local consciousness.

I have said that collective memory of settlement is a matter of the structural intent, and not latent content, of the dream of home. This collectively intentional memory is productive and projective, driving the make-over of place, including the make-over of the memory of settlement itself which changes, along with everything else, so that settlers will always find themselves at home (for they must do so). The home of mobile settler memory is variously (Mother) England, a better Britain, New Zealand and, most recently, Aotearoa New Zealand. Settlers must remember a place that is always already, in whatever sense of it, their own (they cannot “remember” a place that has nothing to do with them). Continuing threats to this dream, whether by Māori or more recent migrants, require that settler remembering must be made-over for the mobile home to be maintained. A national memory infrastructure is needed to manage the threat, and contain memory, so that the past doesn't leak.

Settler dreaming is a desire, or desiring, something settlers do—“our” core being—that is a condition of the possibility of remembering, and actually constitutive of collective memory. Settlement is a specific desire-drive (for land, prosperity, freedom and belonging). Settler dreaming then manifests the desire-drive of an “intentional” memory, properly a structural intent that operates according to the logic of the weight of settler numbers. Living the dream—actively, productively, unself-consciously—makes the place that dream's reality.

### States of anxiety and abandonment

Settler anxiety or dread registers awareness of the dream's imprisonment: I am stuck in a dream, stuck dreaming, and cannot wake up. Strictly speaking, setter

anxiety is the affect of pausing or stopping, perhaps stopping to think, thereby interrupting the economic desire-drive of settlement—the need to “get on” in order to improve the place that is the forward movement of unfolding settlement, and momentum of colonisation. The official pause of pub, beach and barbeque—the communal rest and recreation that mark the good life of settlement—masks an unofficial anxiety of boredom and oblivion (binge drinking, random violence, depression, and suicide). What we are “getting on” for is a question that might well be felt but is never asked. It prompts a sense of oblivion in which the settler dream, or more specifically the “settler-I” of the dreaming, has been abandoned; such states of abandonment most deeply express the felt emptiness of a purely economic desire-drive, and not being able to wake up from the dream it projects.

My thinking here is not dialectical and Benjaminian: we are not to be blasted out of history, awakened from our settler slumber into a messianic, crystalline constellation of memory.<sup>7</sup> The dream is rather disturbed by abandoned individuals, peoples, and places, which give us pause to stop and think. These rupture the dreamscape of settlement, and mark an aperture, or opening, through which the memory-function of settlement and the infrastructure of its operation can be perceived as such. States of abandonment or dissolution include: the self-abandonment of heavy drinking, depression, and suicide; abandoned people, whether children, the long-term unemployed, or homeless; and historically abandoned places, where settler dreaming is exposed as failed settlements, wasted labour, and ruined lives.<sup>8</sup> In a more obviously political sense, such states also include: historically abandoned peoples, such as Tūhoe, assaulted rather than protected by paramilitary police given the “threat” they have long posed to the government’s indivisible sovereignty; and, similarly, abandoned individuals, such as the refugee, Ahmed Zaoui, placed in legal limbo for the avowed purposes of national security.<sup>9</sup>

I will concentrate on political abandonment, with a nod to the influential work of Italian theorist Giorgio Agamben, because the absence of an original political settlement in New Zealand is foundational to the promised place of settler dreaming, and to the public memory that tells us that the dream is real.<sup>10</sup> The Treaty of Waitangi is widely believed to be that foundational document, and numerous references to its “principles” in government legislation give credence to the lie. But the ability of Parliament, at least in theory, to remove all such references tomorrow tells us that it is a constitutional document in name only. Indeed, it is a quasi-constitutional device, a popular rhetorical fiction, which enables the abandonment of peoples by not fully admitting the other party to a decision-making body it is itself supposed to ground.

The government-sponsored constitutional review, currently underway in 2011, might well resolve the matter, but can hardly do what it is supposed to do if the process remains government-controlled, like the Treaty of Waitangi process for the reparation of historical grievances. Similarly, the real value of historical revision arising from the Waitangi Tribunal’s deliberations will not address the deficit created by non-Māori settlement so long as such work is corralled for

the nation’s sake. “Long history”, which refers to the local inhabitation of first peoples, encompasses but extends beyond the “short history” of non-Māori settlement, hence producing a deficit. If the deficit of short settlement, at once constitutional, historiographical, and existential, is to be adequately addressed then it is the nation, and the idea that what must be done is to be done for its sake, that must for the moment be abandoned. The originary political relation that underpins that nation, or rather the lack of such a relation, is after all what is at issue.

### Anger and the fear of unfulfilment

The lack of a proper political settlement, I suggest, is filled in by settler dreaming. A treaty happily entered into and concluded by both parties must be the basis of the authority of the state (technically the New Zealand Crown-in-Parliament).<sup>11</sup> Its actual unenforceability, should you try to appeal to an article of the Treaty directly in a New Zealand Court, is the condition of abandonment or disappearance of local history, places, and peoples. One cannot “appear” in Court as a party to the Treaty. In any event, the remedy cannot be simply political, or a political solution cannot quite be trusted, given the dream-drive that the Parliamentary body itself incarnates and the dream-content of the promised place that its legislation expresses. Rather, an awareness of the dreaming in the light of abandoned peoples and places is a prerequisite.

Reflecting on abandonment makes critical thinking itself a kind of purgatory—a local limbo—in which one attends to states of anxiety and dread. To be critical of public memory in New Zealand is to enter with full self-consciousness into a permanent internal exile, a forced arrest and condition of waiting whose Māori counterpart, Ranganui Walker, calls *ka whawhai tonu matou* / struggle without end. This is because the end of the struggle would require a majority of the people to reconceive themselves in the view of a minority, a prior peoples whose longer history disturbs the slumber of a second people’s dreaming. Such critics are naturally fretful and disturbed sleepers.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, the desire inherent to that waiting—to consider oblivion bliss and to love limbo—is only apparently negative: it is really a desire for full life, a full experience of place, which settlement denies Pākehā by refusing the long history of Māori inhabitation (a refusal that is “constitutional” in the most embodied sense, connecting who you are and how well you are). Being aware that one is dreaming—that short Pākehā history is also a constructed memory-operation of settlement—makes settler dreaming lucid. It is human to dream, in the sense of having hope, but forced dreaming deprives dreamers of the agency of hope. My hope against collective hope is that what I might wish for isn’t already determined.

A full experience of place for all will ultimately depend on Māori flourishing. By any standard the vital statistics of Māori life in this country suggest that that is not the case.<sup>13</sup> Yet the more immediate response to anything that might alleviate Māori lack of well-being is anger at apparent positive discrimination. The anger



is fuelled by the settler anxiety of unfulfilment, which is that the promised place might not eventuate, or somehow hasn't. Since early settlement, Māori flourishing and that promised place have been inimicable, because land, prosperity, freedom, and belonging have for settlers required Māori dispossession. But having admitted as much, if Māori collectives today (taking in whanau, hapu, iwi, and pan- or cross-Māori urban collectives) aren't free to flourish in Māori terms of flourishing, then no one is. We are all instead beholden to the terms of another's circumscribed life (the circumscribed life of that hapu).<sup>14</sup> One is always beholden to terms that are imposed, which is to say, to having imposed terms. Anger and fear of unfulfilment, as a result, will be the future of non-Māori, too. The place of that freedom and flourishing is not a place to come, not some promised land, because it doesn't belong to the progressive and homogenous time of the settler nation: it is already here, albeit contained by public collective memory.

### Logic of the settler memory machine

It is not just that one remembers some *thing*, an event or experience, but that one needs to remember *with* something: one needs some means or tools of remembering. Consider that the shape and pattern of what one does remember will be remembered by close kin in like forms, if not as the same things. No doubt memory-function has serious cultural wiring. For settlers, however, whose short history of collective memory is under-informed, relative to Māori, the wiring must be engineered if their memory is to be that of New Zealanders. The mechanical production of public memory involves a settler apparatus or memory machine. This apparatus is what Claudia Orange explicitly calls “memory banks” or “memory stimulators”, which stimulate collective memory and constitute a political operation of memory, or memorialising.<sup>15</sup> Settlement is a programme, or programming of settlers, so that the place they inhabit is one they can in time imagine is their own. It unfolds a triadic logic of settler dreaming which involves re-enactment, remediation, and what I call cultural plagiarism.

(1) Re-enactment tells the story of New Zealand as if the place, so-called, always already existed as such, enclosing the long history of Māori inhabitation in the short history of non-Māori occupation. In the first instance “I”, the would-be settler (I-settler), step ashore in someone else's country; in the second instance, which is when I recall or remember stepping ashore, it is my own country. This is the logic of re-enactment, apparent in New Zealand popular national historiography. In the television documentary *Frontier of Dreams* (2005), Dutch explorer Abel Tasman is said to have “brought Europe to our shores”, Captain Cook influenced “Europe's view of us”, “our islands would be brought to the attention of old Europe”, and so on.<sup>16</sup> Embedding a memory of “ourselves” as already here requires a national historians' complex, an institution whose mandate, mindset, and methodology is to construct and maintain cultural memory. *Frontier of Dreams*, which is the most expensive documentary made in New

Zealand, with a large book of essays to match by leading local historians, suggests an always inaugurating act of cultural construction and settler inception.<sup>17</sup>

(2) Remediation refers to the technologies and infrastructure of settlement through which history and collective memory are mediated, namely universities and historians, the Ministry of Culture and Heritage, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, and the numerous local museums and visitor centres.<sup>18</sup> More specifically it refers to the technological mediation or means of re-enactment, the sense of always having seen something before. Thus *Frontier of Dreams*, for instance, is shot through with TV and film clips of earlier re-enactments of settlement. The origin of settlement is not actual encounter, when of course the New Zealand of settlers could not be said to exist, but in the re-enactment of the moment as if it (New Zealand) already did exist.

(3) Cultural plagiarism refers to the “uniqueness” of Māori that Pākehā appropriate to disguise their otherwise unexceptional settlement. I draw on Miles Fairburn’s thesis of New Zealand’s “exceptionally unexceptional” settlement.<sup>19</sup> For Fairburn there isn’t anything about the settlement of New Zealand that couldn’t be said about other Anglophone settler societies. Furthermore, he argues that New Zealand’s public culture is, to a greater extent than these like-countries, made up of materials from elsewhere. One draws the conclusion that New Zealand has been “settled” by other settler societies as much as by the home countries of settlers’ origin. The “exception deficit” is made up for by Māori, who labour for the sake of all New Zealand citizens to produce both a place of origin and an original culture. For settlers the two go hand in hand, requiring co-option and co-ordination. Whether or not the widespread use of Māori insignia to identify New Zealandness is a matter of fruitful borrowing or appropriation, cultural plagiarism makes Māori culture integral to settler identity in a way that settler culture is not integral to Māori identity.

### Structural intent of settler dreaming

I have said that the “intent” of the settler dream is structural, and is the basis of a settler apparatus or memory-machinery. Structural intent in this instance refers to the settler economism that determines the structure of the dream and containment of dream content.<sup>20,21</sup> The dream, I would stress, hardly belongs to everyone (it’s not the dream of many Māori, I assume, and many others who cannot understand themselves in terms of the settler-I). But the dreamwork of settler media, extending from popular history to sport and advertising, is totalising in intent, if not effect, and as “real” and weighty as the numbers of dreamers themselves. These dreamers, or those who have internalised the promise of place to follow hard upon their settlement of it, express the purposeful drive of settler economism. The place-to-come is then a reality we are already living, or dreaming, an experience of a place that is, and indeed always was, already here.

Again, the object or “it” of this dream is a pure intent that is structural and economic, and not any single person’s intent. The intentional memory I am describing is collective, public and shared, which is to say it is everybody’s intent (the conglomerate intent of everybody’s settlement here). Its object, historically speaking, is the place-to-come and person-to-be of the new country—the very personification of settler investment in it. Those who were already here (Māori) or more recently arrived (more recent migrants) must labour to maintain this settler-I, which I elsewhere call compulsory nationalism, for all our sakes.<sup>22</sup>

There is of course another kind of intent at work, which refers to the perceptual gap, already mentioned, between Māori difference to Pākehā, as Pākehā see it, and Pākehā difference to Māori, as Māori see it. This is the intentional presence and counter-memory of long history. Here the settler-I and Māori-you, that foundational relation, is reversed. The question of what “you” are or who you are, if Pākehā, becomes “who are you” to Māori (the I-settler is now you to the Māori-I, second to Māori firstness).<sup>23</sup> The place is not, after all, “exotic” to Māori, but experienced through layers of collective memory, organised by whakapapa. The settler-I, understood in another’s terms, is also intersubjective and relational, and not simply economic, when it is considered you-to-Māori, and not Māori-to-me. Beyond the cultural plagiarism of all things Māori for the nation’s sake, short history opens out to long history, which encompasses it, and the dream is interrupted by a real encounter and exchange beyond settler knowledge of place. Settler dreaming might here include Māori hope—the hope of hapu—and not just the collective hope of “all” New Zealanders.

More positively interrupted, as opposed to the negative interruption by states of abandonment, the dream content appears open rather than closed to a past that is the real basis of the ongoing construction of place. Aware that remembering, too, is a part of the make-over of place, one is dis-burdened of anxiety, anger and dread: the anxiety and settler refrain of being “nowhere”, anger at Māori advancement, and the dread of Māori initiatives for Māori sake. Settler dreaming actually produces a sense of nowhere by making it all the harder to know where one actually is, or more specifically whose place it might actually be, as well as producing a dread of Māori difference as a subtraction, and hence contraction, of national being. The greater “we” are diminished by the loss of territory and numbers. Tūhoe, for instance, must remain part of New Zealand, and Tūhoe must be New Zealanders, for all our sakes. But it is not just Tūhoe who are beholden to the circumscribed life of settler dreaming.

*Throughout this article I am indebted to Soong Phoon, whose brainchild it is.*

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>See Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

<sup>2</sup>In *The Settler's Plot: How Stories Take Place in New Zealand* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2011), 3. Alex Calder's reflection on bush and beach opens out a rich discussion of "Pākehā turangawaewae [standing place of Non-Māori New Zealanders]: Not only are we a predominantly suburban people, only intermittently in contact with dreamscapes of bush and beach, but nature itself isn't what it used to be. These days nature is as likely to be virtual as actual, managed rather than wild, and has come to seem more and more something that culture produces than a realm beyond the ideas and frameworks we have of it."

<sup>3</sup>In *Against Paranoid Nationalism; Searching for Hope in a Shrinking Society* (Annandale, NSW: Pluto Press; London: Merlin, 2003), to which I am much indebted, Ghassan Hage discusses negative and positive moral evaluations of hope (11-12), but not settlement itself, rather than migrancy, as a pathology of hope.

<sup>4</sup>Claudia Orange, "The Memory of a Nation," paper presented at the Contained Memory conference, Pupuri Pohewa, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington, December 9-11, 2010.

<sup>5</sup>Francis Pound, *The Invention of New Zealand: Art and National Identity 1930-1970* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2009).

<sup>6</sup>See Manatū Taonga / Ministry for Culture and Heritage, accessed October 7, 2011, <http://www.mch.govt.nz/>

<sup>7</sup>Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," trans. Harry Zohn, *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 257-58.

<sup>8</sup>See child poverty statistics, accessed October 7, 2011, [http://www.occ.org.nz/home/childpoverty/about\\_child\\_poverty](http://www.occ.org.nz/home/childpoverty/about_child_poverty),

<sup>9</sup>Laurence Simmons, "Rogue Pākehā," *Arena* 28 (2007): 45-64.

<sup>10</sup>See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life (Potere sovrano e la nuda vita)*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

<sup>11</sup>F.M. Brookfield points this out in *Waitangi and Indigenous Rights: Revolution, Law and Legitimation* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1999).

<sup>12</sup>Bill Pearson, "Fretful Sleepers," *Fretful Sleepers and Other Essays* (Auckland: Heinemann Education Books, 1974 – Revised edn. 1952).

<sup>13</sup>See the factsheets relating to Māori health, education, unemployment and personal income on the website for the government ministry Te Puni Kokori, accessed October 7, 2011, <http://www.tpk.govt.nz/en/in-print/our-publications/fact-sheets/>

<sup>14</sup>Māori collectives are typically described in terms of their extent, whether the extended family grouping (whanau), the interrelated families of a subtribe (hapu), or the genealogically interrelated families of a tribal confederation (iwi).

<sup>15</sup>Conference programme notes for Orange, "The Memory of a Nation".

<sup>16</sup>See my own article, "Reenacting Aotearoa, New Zealand," in *Settler and Creole Reenactment*, eds. Jonathan Lamb and Vanessa Agnew (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 245-257.

<sup>17</sup>Bronwyn Dalley and Gavin Mclean, eds. *Frontier of Dreams: The Story of New Zealand* (Auckland: Hodder Moa Beckett, 2005).

<sup>18</sup>See Anna Boswell’s excellent study of museums in Northland, “‘Shakey Notions’: Settlement History on Display” (PhD diss., University of Auckland, 2011).

<sup>19</sup>Miles Fairburn, “Is There a Good Case for New Zealand Exceptionalism?” in eds. Tony Ballantyne and Brian Moloughney, *Disputed Histories: Imagining New Zealand’s Pasts* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2006), 143-68.

<sup>20</sup>“Economism” is privileged as a primary structuring factor of settler dreaming because the identity of the new country is at once necessary to furthering an economic enterprise—to attracting new settlers and capital investment—and can itself be considered an existential return, or reward, for personal investment in the new country. See Stephen Turner, “Compulsory Nationalism,” *Moving Worlds* 8(2), (2008): 7-26.

<sup>21</sup>A structural intent, or settler function, stands in place of an unconscious or latent content. The entwined logic of re-enactment, remediation and cultural plagiarism stands in place of mechanisms of condensation and displacement (so there is strictly speaking no Freudian unconscious or Lacanian Real). The “unconscious” for me is rather settler functioning, which is the systematic unfolding of the dream—dreamscape and dreamland—of second settlers.

<sup>22</sup>Turner, “Compulsory Nationalism,” 7-26.

<sup>23</sup>Jo Smith provides a version of this reversal in “Post-Cultural Hospitality: Settler-Native-Migrant Encounters,” *Arena* 28 (2007), 65-86, where she argues that the “vexed politics of culture” in Aotearoa New Zealand must be reconceived in terms of an originary host-guest (*tangata whenua-munuhiri*) relation. Without such a leap of faith, or trust in Māori reciprocity, the Pākehā will remain truly a vagrant, thief, and usurper.

## Bibliography

Agamben, Giorgio, *Homo Sacer; Sovereign Power and Bare Life (Potere sovrano e la nuda vita)*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

Ballantyne, Tony and Moloughney, Brian, *Disputed Histories: Imagining New Zealand’s Pasts* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2006).

Benjamin, Walter, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in trans. Harry Zohn, *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968).

Boswell, Anna, “‘Shakey Notions’: Settlement History on Display,” (PhD diss., University of Auckland, 2011).

Brookfield, F.M., *Waitangi and Indigenous Rights: Revolution, Law and Legitimation* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1999).

Calder, Alex, *The Settler’s Plot: How Stories Take Place in New Zealand* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2011).

Fairburn, Miles, “Is There a Good Case for New Zealand Exceptionalism?” in eds. Tony Ballantyne and Brian Moloughney, *Disputed Histories: Imagining New Zealand’s Pasts* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2006).

*Disputed Histories: Imagining New Zealand’s Pasts* edited by Tony Ballantyne and Brian Hage, Ghassan, *Against Paranoid Nationalism: Searching for Hope in a Shrinking Society* (London: Pluto Press, 2003).

Orange, Claudia, “The Memory of a Nation,” paper presented at the Contained Memory conference, Pupuri Pohewa, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington, December 9-11, 2010.

Pound, Francis, *The Invention of New Zealand: Art and National Identity 1930-1970* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2009).

Simmons, Laurence, “Rogue Pākehā,” *Arena* 28 (2007): 45-64.

Smith, Jo, “Post-Cultural Hospitality: Settler-Native-Migrant Encounters,” *Arena* 28 (Spring 2007): 65-86.

Turner, Stephen, “Make-Over Culture and the New Zealand Dream of Home,” *Landfall* 214 (2007): 85-90.

Turner, Stephen, “Compulsory Nationalism,” *Moving Worlds* 8(2), (2008): 7-26.

Veracini, Lorenzo, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

### Biographical note

Stephen Turner teaches in the English Department at the University of Auckland, New Zealand and also contributes to courses in the Department of Film, Television and Media Studies. His research interests take in post-colonial and writing studies. He has published articles on settlement and indigeneity in a variety of domestic and international journals and anthologies, and worked with photographer-artist, Ann Shelton, on a text-image exhibition of her recent work. He is currently revising a book for publication on settler-colonialism which addresses issues of law, property and history, and working separately with Sean Sturm on a book about teaching writing. His interests are more broadly united by a concern with pedagogy, whether the performance of the classroom or the education of a national citizen.

Email: sf.turner@auckland.ac.nz

---

# Bedouin Memory Between City and Desert

Alan Weber

---

## Bedouin Memory Between City and Desert

Alan Weber

---

### Abstract

The redrawing of Middle East boundaries by colonial powers following World War I, and the discovery of oil in the Persian Gulf region from the 1920s to 1950s ushered in more change in two generations than the Bedouin tribes had experienced since the founding of Islam. Urban centres rapidly expanded and new national boundaries created a class of stateless urban and desert peasants (*bidoon*), and interrupted migration patterns of the pastoral nomads (*beddu* or *badu*, the “desert-dwellers”) who have migrated throughout the region for thousands of years. As Bedouin lifestyle shifted in the face of urbanisation throughout the Arabic speaking world, Arabs of Bedouin heritage sought to memorialise a romanticised past by constructing heritage villages and tourist destinations designed to deliver an exotic, authentic Bedouin experience for visitors. Competing conceptions of history have characterised this culture’s interactions with newly emergent post-World War I political realities. Their concept of memory contrasts sharply with Western “documentary” memory, which relies on the written word, photography, and an objectivist vision of historical truth. Oral history is still one of the few avenues of memory available to present-day Arabs of Bedouin heritage due to low literacy rates. This fact, in conjunction with their adaptability to the harsh desert environment, allows for creative re-interpretation of a memorialised past both by the Bedouins themselves and the Arab national states. The case studies below present vignettes of how creatively reinterpreted memory has impacted the politics, culture, and social organisation among the Bedouin of the Negev, Egypt, Arabian Gulf (Saudi Arabia), and southern Jordan (Petra and Wadi Rum).

Keywords: Bedouin, *beddu*, memory, identity politics, Middle East, history and social customs



## Introduction: who are the Bedouin?

The Arabic word *badawi* (plural *badu* or *beddu*) means someone who lives in the open steppe desert (*badiyah*). The Bedouin are ethnic Arabs, almost entirely Muslim, who speak various Arabic dialects and who have led a traditional pastoral or nomadic lifestyle based on camel and goat raising, the iconic black goat hair tent, and migration to follow seasonal rains. However, they have also historically settled around oases and engaged in farming and date production. The mythologising of their past and heritage by various groups, including by the Bedouins themselves, obscures the reality that they have always been subject to a “mixed economy, which combines pastoralism, agriculture, trade, and wage labour ... camel-herding Bedouin communities were never exclusively pastoralists but relied on a multi-resource economy”.<sup>1</sup>

The fluidity of Bedouin social organisation and their oral-based memory plays an important role in their self-identity, specifically in how their past was memorialised by themselves and the centralised governments that increasingly restricted their power and movement in the early to mid-twentieth century. Bedouin memory is characterised by its malleableness to different conditions, just as the harsh environment in which they live necessitated flexibility and inventiveness in the face of the constant challenges of drought, disease, conflict, and modernisation.

For example, during times of shifting tribal alliances or in conditions of drought it was often expedient for tribes in close proximity to one another to remember and emphasise times of cooperation and peaceful co-existence rather than periods of conflict. Bedouin memory represents a very different species from Western “documentary” or “photographic” memory which relies on text, documentation, and permanence of recording. These two world views clashed violently during the period of forced sedentarisation of migratory tribes across Egypt, the Levant, and the Gulf between the 1950s to 1980s before reaching equilibrium.

The congruence between the political rhetoric of Western colonial powers and Arab national leaders in the 1950s in their views of the Bedouin as antiquated nuisances is astonishing. However, the idea and structure of the nation-state is in fact a Western creation. Arab leaders in building modern states were necessarily forced to impose the socio-political norms of the nation-state on everyone who fell within its geopolitical boundaries.

Today, most of the Bedouin tribes in the Arab world are now settled in houses, drive trucks, and engage in small-scale ranching and herding or wage labour. Poverty, joblessness, and the lack of modern services are endemic in their communities. In many cases their former ranges (*dirat*) have been appropriated by the state or individual large landowners for airbases, agricultural projects, mining, and along Egypt’s north-west coast (governate of Mutrah) and Red Sea areas, holiday resorts. An unknown number of *beddu* across the Middle East, possibly tens of thousands, have resisted efforts at sedentarisation. In addition, an unknown number, again possibly ranging from thousands to tens of thousands, of *bidoon*

(from Arabic “*bedun jinsiyya*” which means “without citizenship papers”; not etymologically related to *beddu*) are trapped within state borders with no passport, birth certificate, and no possibility of gaining citizenship or official identity due to strict and harsh citizenship laws.<sup>2</sup>

The first extended sociological discussion of the Bedouin appears in the *Muqaddimah* of Ibn Khaldun, a fourteenth-century Tunisian historian sometimes called the father of Islamic sociology. He established an important dichotomy of nomadic pastoral life (*badawah*) and settled life (*hadarah*) that became part of an ethnographic discourse that would resurface centuries later. Although a Muslim with personal knowledge of the Berbers and the Bedouin, as well as a North African and an Andalusian, Ibn Khaldun may have contributed to European orientalist discourse about Bedouins. His ideas concerning the growth and decay of civilisations, and the purity and simplicity of primitive peoples (“noble savages”), sound very similar to Greek and Roman Stoic and later scholastic writings on the subject. Stephen Dale has called Ibn Khaldun “the last Greek and the first Annaliste historian” because of the obvious influence Aristotelianism had on him.<sup>3</sup>

Ibn Khaldun believed that Arab culture had evolved naturally from the primitive to the settled, with the Bedouin representing a primal, earlier form of pre-agricultural development: “Compared with sedentary people, they are on a level with wild, untamable animals and dumb beasts of prey.”<sup>4</sup> In Ibn Khaldun’s analysis, a picture emerges of an impetuous and violent race (“They plunder whatever they are able to lay their hands on”). Additionally, he set Bedouin behaviour in direct opposition to the fundamental principles of civilisation and the rule of law: “all the customary activities of the Bedouin lead to wandering and movement. This is the antithesis and negation of stationariness, which produces civilization”.<sup>5</sup> Given the chance, they will tear down civilised buildings, using the stones for cooking stands and the wood for fires and tent poles.

However, Ibn Khaldun also admired the purity of lineage of the Bedouin (*nasab*), and their courage and loyalty. In contrast he portrayed city dwellers as weak, corrupt, and sinful as part of his general thesis that civilisations move from an original simple purity towards refinement and then to moral weakness and corruption. He also believed that the current city dwellers of the Arab world were derived from Bedouin, and that this transformation followed a natural course of evolutionary progression. This view will resurface in the twentieth-century land disputes between the Bedouin and the Egyptian and Israeli states; the state-sponsored idea that the Bedouin can be easily persuaded to become modern city dwellers and are eager to abandon all aspects of their former lives to enjoy the benefits of the modern state.

States tend to view economic production as the defining characteristic of citizen subgroups. While the Bedouin’s economic organisation has changed—the tent has been abandoned and mass migrations have ceased—their culture is still firmly established in poetry and proverbs (for example, see the collections of Holes and Abu Lughod).<sup>6</sup> Traditional law (*urf*), and marriage and family customs (such as first cousin marriage which has actually increased in the last decade in Jordan

and Qatar) are still firmly rooted in contemporary Bedouin culture. Modern state officials in the Middle East have been surprised by the tenacity of this culture and their inability to deracinate traditional Bedouin practices.

### Bedouin identity and land disputes: settlement of the Negev Bedouin

In the mid-nineteenth century European colonisation and Ottoman land policy caused the displacement of Bedouin from desirable lands, the privatisation and concentration of land into large estates, and consequent social stratification. These trends, acutely visible in Algeria and to a lesser extent across the entire Arabic-speaking world, were exacerbated by the creation of the State of Israel and the 1948 War, resulting in the designation of the Negev Desert as Israeli government land.

The expulsion and re-settlement of the Negev desert Bedouin in modern southern Israel follows an identifiable pattern also repeated in Egypt and carefully documented by Cole.<sup>7</sup> This demonstrates that the ways in which historical discourse, memory, and stereotypical rhetoric about their culture were negotiated between nation-states and these tribes were not strictly based on religious differences since both the Israeli and Egyptian governments enacted very similar policies. The primary Bedouin tribes of the Negev region (including the Azazmeh, Jibarat, Sa'idiyin, Hanajira, and Tiyaha) ruled the desert semi-autonomously under both the Ottomans (who set up an administrative centre at Be'er Sheva in 1900) and the British Mandate.

Both the Ottoman (*daftar khana*) and British land registration systems did not reach into the southern Negev. It is doubtful whether these colonial powers were very much interested in the semi-arid area, except in the case of the British securing it as a land bridge for deployment of British troops to their Indian possessions and Gulf protectorates. After the 1948 War, the Israeli government forcibly moved the Bedouin into a 1,000-square kilometre area called the *siyag* (fence) triangle near Be'er Sheva. In 2000, about 60% of them had been resettled in this area in government towns designed to provide them with electricity, water, and sewage facilities. This was with the ultimate aim of ending their nomadic sheep-herding practices and transforming them into wage labourers. However, substantial numbers of Bedouin live in the technically illegal “unrecognised towns” and a few in traditional tents. Steven Dinero argues that the aim of the resettlement plans was:

*... to actively alter not only the geography of the bedouin communal structure, but their economic, political and social bearings as well in an effort to 'debedouinise' the community, converting it into a de-politicised, non-threatening, proletariat class.*<sup>8</sup>

In published state reports and Israeli scholarly literature in history, sociology, and ethnography concerning the Negev resettlement, Ibn Khaldun's evolutionary

hypothesis can frequently be uncovered, as Dinero further argues in a recent study of the Negev Bedouin:

... [settlement] efforts were based in part upon assumptions, expressed throughout the literature, that the passing of nomadism is a “natural” phenomenon, as peoples move from the pole of “traditionalism” to the pole of “modernity”.<sup>9</sup>

Dinero’s thesis that the resettlement was a well thought out government plan to transform Bedouin culture is borne out in a statement by Moshe Dyan while he was serving as Israel’s Minister of Agriculture in 1963:

*We should transform the Bedouins into an urban proletariat—in industry, services, construction, and agriculture. 88 per cent of the Israeli populations are not farmers, let the Bedouins be like them. Indeed, this will be a radical move which means that the Bedouin would not live on his land with his herds, but would become an urban person who comes home in the afternoon and puts his slippers on. His children would be accustomed to a father who wears trousers, does not carry a Shabaria [the traditional Bedouin knife] and does not search for head lice in public. The children would go to school with their hair properly combed. This would be a revolution, but it may be fixed within two generations. Without coercion but with governmental direction ... this phenomenon of the Bedouins will disappear.*<sup>10</sup>

Several phrases in this statement should be underscored: the privileging of the urban Western lifestyle (*hadarah*), the planned incorporation of the Bedouin into Israel as workers for the state (an economic as opposed to humanitarian motivation for resettlement), and the relinquishing of coercion (they can be coaxed into following their natural evolution into settled lives).

The discourses and rhetoric about Bedouin primitiveness, found both in Ibn Khaldun’s sociological analysis and Dayan’s statement, are so strikingly similar that there must be some relationship between them. A determinist might argue that both Ibn Khaldun and Dayan had accurately uncovered essential characteristics of their culture (i.e. biological, racial or environmental determinism). However, another explanation is that Ibn Khaldun and Dayan are simply drawing on the same pre-modern orientalist Greek and Roman discourses of the barbaric other (*barbaroi*), implicit in much nineteenth and early twentieth-century Western ethnographies. Also, the sedentary/nomadic dichotomy and primitivism labels have always been to some extent politically motivated, beginning with the Arab conquests and the establishment of centralised Caliphates in Cairo, Damascus, and Baghdad to contain the Bedouin’s military and political power, occupy their lands, and extract tribute or taxes.

Although the immediate sources of Ibn Khaldun’s thought cannot be determined, he was certainly familiar with Aristotle via his reading of the Arab scholastics, Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina. In Aristotle’s *Politics* and *Nicomachean Ethics*, barbarians are described as child-like, naturally possess the disposition of the beast and slave, and are therefore ruled (according to the law of nature) by superior races. Also, standard Roman historiography, such as Ammianus Marcellinus’s *Roman History* (380 AD), describes Arab tribes (Saracens) to the same effect, such as their plundering nature (“like rapacious hawks”).

In turn, the Arabs in their North African conquests adopted the Romanised Greek term, Al-Barbar (modern Berber, from Greek *barbaros*) for various non-Arabic speaking tribes. From 1949 to 1952, when the Arab League (soon joined by international development experts at WHO and UNESCO) began calling for sedentarisation as the solution to the “Bedouin problem” of nomadism, the discourse of the primitive “other” or barbarian provided a convenient intellectual framework. Analysis of Bedouin culture in international development reports was not based on modern ethnographical field work or consultation with their leaders. Instead it was coloured by Western orientalist conceptions of the nineteenth century, having been impacted by earlier classical writings and the historiography of the Arabs themselves.

This ethnocentrism, and the attitudes of both Western experts and the Arab leaders who penned the proposals and studies for the sedentarisation of the Bedouin, were based on commonly-shared biased, outdated, or romanticised historical notions. The style, imagery, and subtexts in these reports were also remarkably similar: “the divide opposing Western experts to bedouin populations is mirrored in the gulf separating the Arab intelligentsia from the rural people of their own countries”.<sup>11</sup>

The Bedouin had a traditional system of land rights management and ownership, some of it documented in bills of sale (*saned*), in addition to oral agreement, cultural memory, and tradition. They also held mutual unspoken understandings between tribes and individuals. Unlike the Ottomans and the British, who often respected their land management practices and traditional boundaries, the current Israeli government does not recognise the Bedouin system of law and tradition with respect to land rights:

*This position was explicitly stated by the head of the Israeli Land Title Settlement Unit, who asserted “the Bedouin ownership claims are not based on legal grounds but rather on their own tradition and the period of time they occupied the land, with limited documentation”.*<sup>12</sup>

Here we see explicitly how the Bedouin’s oral and memory-based system of customary law (*urf*) is de-legitimised in a clash of historical perspectives and representation. The desert is represented in Israeli and Western academic literature as empty and barren, where tribes wandered with no fixed abode, as Kram points out:

*Israel recognised virtually no indigenous land rights, both because most Bedouin did not have the written land ownership documentation which was required by the Israeli legal system, and because in most popular and academic Israeli accounts of the Negev desert, it was depicted as an empty space in which the Bedouin were only rootless nomads.*<sup>13</sup>

As one Negev Bedouin recently remarked in an interview: *The Bedouins were here during the Ottoman and British area [era]; no one told us this is not your land. We lived here before the state was established. The Ottomans purchased land from the Bedouins to establish the city of Be’er-Sheva ... The tribes knew the boundaries between different matot [groups of tribes]. The tribes among*

*the matot knew all the boundaries, similarly the chamulut [groups of families] and the family. It worked like this for hundreds of years.*<sup>14</sup>

In addition, the recurrent discourse of primitiveness was often invoked by Israeli courts in specific land disputes to demonstrate that the Bedouin lacked any conception of individual property and were wandering opportunists, who “never resided permanently in any place whatsoever”,<sup>15</sup> using and seizing land or property by brute force.

These disputes were in part fuelled by Israel’s self-perception as a modern European-style democratic state in contrast to the autocratic, pre-modern, lawless culture which they ascribed to the Bedouin. Nomadic tribes were frequently criticised for overgrazing and degradation of the land because, as primitive peoples stuck at the pre-agricultural stage of human development, and without modern education systems, they could not have any conception of the sciences of ecology, biology, or scientific farming and ranching methods. In this patriarchal discourse, land could not be entrusted to child-like peoples who did not know how to care for it properly.

### Where memory coalesces: integrating the Bedouin into military service

Loyalty and fierceness in war is a common theme of *beddu* poetry which often celebrates military prowess and exploits.<sup>16</sup> However, as we have seen, to their detractors the Bedouin were dishonourable and deceitful opportunists who stole whatever they could grab furtively without direct confrontation. Even in modern scholarship, their superior military abilities have been dismissed. Jean Poncet, for example, has attributed the successful eleventh century North African invasions of the Bedouin tribes of Bani Hilal to the weakened political situation, not to any intrinsic military superiority or racial essentialism (valour) of this group.<sup>17</sup>

Pasha Mehemet Ali (reigned 1805-1848), who ruled Egypt under the Ottomans, was compelled to address the troublesome military problem of the Bedouin tribes living in the desert areas since they would periodically disrupt trade routes or harass settled peasant villagers (*fellahin*) of the Nile Valley. Bolstering and flattering the war-like image of the Bedouin warrior, Ali embarked on a policy to employ Bedouin tribes such as the Hawwara in his wars in the Sudan, Hejaz, and al-Sham to spark and quell revolts, execute hit-and-run raids, and maintain supply lines.

By courting the Bedouin as loyal retainers, and then distancing them in special irregular units established specifically for them, he could control them so they did not unite and directly confront his power base in Cairo. As Aharoni points out, “the main motive of the bedouin for joining the army was economic”, not a sense of nationalism or loyalty to the Pasha or to Egypt. Thus the trope of loyalty based on a past which the *beddu* memorialised in their songs and poetry was convenient for Mehemet Ali and the Bedouin alike.<sup>18</sup>

Through the manipulation of their self-image and their memorial history as possessing *sharaf* (honour), *nasab* (undiluted bloodline), and unwavering loyalty to the kin group, Mehemet Ali was able to successfully prevent the internal raiding of tribes such as the Awlad ‘Ali. This tribe distinguished its purity from the *bani pharosan*, or the Nile Valley farmers and merchants, whom they scorned for their mixed birth. One contemporary European military observer remarked that the Pasha’s decision to recruit 12,000 Bedouin to fight in al-Sham was specifically motivated by his desire to rid the interior of nomads who were harassing settled farmers.<sup>19</sup>

Similarly, Abdul al Aziz Ibn Saud recruited the religious and military brotherhood of the Ikhwan Bedouin warriors in the same manner to subdue the Arabian peninsula and create the modern state of Saudi Arabia in the 1920s. Ibn Saud creatively reinterpreted the central Islamic concept of *hijra* (migration) to mean that the Ikhwan should “move away” from nomadism by selling their herds, joining the military, and settling in the new villages (*hujar*).<sup>20</sup>

However, as the Ikhwan became increasingly critical of Ibn Saud and more uncontrollable the king was forced to destroy them at the battle of Sibilla in 1929. The remaining Bedouin were incorporated into the al-Haras al-Watani (Saudi Arabian National Guard), which is separate from the regular Saudi army forces, and is specifically tasked with internal security and protecting Medina and Mecca, and preventing internal coups against the royal family. In reintegrating the Ikhwan into the Saudi state, the image of Bedouin loyalty and military prowess was again invoked.

This same scenario was also played out in many of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries that maintain elite corps of guards comprised primarily of Bedouin soldiers. These military groups are often separate from the national army and receive more advanced training and access to higher levels of military intelligence; they are designed in part to fend off internal military coups and rival sheikhs and directly protect the royal family who reinforces their traditional Bedouin self-image of fierceness, military prowess, and honesty while simultaneously flattering them with royal favour and lucrative salaries. The social contract between the state and the Bedouin is therefore at its root economic, but accompanied by elaborate ceremonial trappings and imagery by mutual manipulation of memorial attitudes.

### Commodifying heritage: the Bedouin of Petra and Wadi Rum

As the modern material conditions of most Bedouin have shifted dramatically towards wage labour, sedentarisation, and ranching, the specific customs of their past existence (all within living memory) have ironically become fetishised. As Roger Webster, who carried out extensive ethnographic research on Bedouin in the Rub’ al Khali (Empty Quarter) of the Saudi Arabian peninsula, observes:

*... as the traditional life of the desert becomes more irrelevant to the needs of a*

*growing industrial society so it becomes more highly valued for its symbolic and sentimental significance, at least in the eyes of the traditional elites. Therefore the cash value placed on camels, falcons, poetry and hunting skills is elevated to levels quite out of proportion to any practical economic usefulness.*<sup>21</sup>

Even for non-Bedouin urban Arabs of the Gulf who have historically been engaged in pearl trading and shop-keeping, Bedouinism has developed into a mutually shared and fiercely protected false memory and unifying identity to present a united front to an increasingly non-native workforce. For example, expatriate workers constitute between 75-80% of the workforce in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Qatar. Hawker argues that in the UAE, “Bedouinism provides a trope around which a collective national identity can be assembled and presented to outsiders as a clear encapsulating image of who the people of the Emirates are.”<sup>22</sup>

Jordan has been particularly successful in packaging and commodifying its Bedouin memories. Bedouinism is big business in Jordan; the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Petra received 813,267 visitors in 2008, and tourism accounted for 14.7% of Jordan’s total GDP for that year.<sup>23</sup>

Hospitality is also an important feature of all Bedouin tribes; guests are treated as sacrosanct and injuring or insulting a guest could have serious consequences for inter-tribal relations. The Jordanian state, in attempting to resolve the “Bedouin problem” in the Petra Park, drew on the same primitivist and more recently “green” (eco-tourism) rhetoric also used in handling the Bedouin of the Negev, Sinai, and Mutrah region of Egypt.

The archaeological site of the Nabataean civilisation at Petra has been inhabited for hundreds of years by such tribes as the Bdul, Ammarin, Liyathna, and the Sa’idiyyin. They lived in hollowed-out tombs and caves at the site using the still partially functional water cisterns of the Nabataeans, grazed goats, searched for ancient artefacts for sale, and provided donkey, camel, and horse transportation into the site for European tourists who began arriving in the nineteenth century. From 1975-1985, the Jordanian government moved the Bdul and other tribes out of the Petra Park area based on a 1968 USAID report that complained that the:

*... sedentary Bedouin tribes who with their goats, guns, plows, and their endless quest for antiquities are, without malice, quickly converting this area to a wasteland ultimately fit for neither Bedouin nor tourist.*<sup>24</sup>

The subtext is familiar: the Bdul and Liyathna as pre-modern, pre-agricultural, and historically unaware peoples had neither any proper land management practices (which would eventually lead to their own demise or forced migration) nor any respect for the cultural heritage of the ancient Nabataeans (a child-like self-centeredness and a-historicity). The housing plans proposed for the Petra Bedouin relocation were consequently beset with a number of problems based on basic misunderstandings about their culture such as the lack of pens for herd animals, and offering them farming tools despite the fact that these tribes were primarily shepherds. As seen earlier, powerful state agencies with written reports



and experts will enforce their version of reality over any oral, memory-based, knowledge of an indigenous culture.

Wadi Rum, a desert area south of Petra, is another significant tourist destination in Jordan, known for its association with Colonel T.E. Lawrence (“Lawrence of Arabia”) who encamped in the area during the Arab Revolt of 1916-18 and wrote about his experiences in *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. Lawrence was popularised in David Lean’s 1962 film, *Lawrence of Arabia*, filmed in Wadi Rum. Many tourists travel to the area specifically in search of the visual images of Lawrence’s Arabia or vestiges of stories and memories of him among the local population.

Among many Bedouin and Arab intellectuals, however, Lawrence is dismissed as a “liar” for his promise to Sherif Hussein and Faisal that a large Pan-Arab state would be supported by Britain in return for Arab assistance in harrying Ottoman possessions during World War I. However, unknown to Lawrence, the secret Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916 had divided the Levant and Bilad al-Sham into French and British zones of influence. This ended dreams of Arab independence and provoked angry reactions of betrayal and suspicion throughout the Arab countries.

Tourists at Wadi Rum can stay at a Bedouin camp, ride camels, smoke sheesha, and participate in traditional life. For Lawrence of Arabia aficionados, part of the allure of the experience manufactured for Western tourists involves searching for authentic memories from elders whose fathers or grandfathers may have known or fought with Lawrence against the Ottomans. In response, the Bedouin produce fictional memories of him, not so much for commercial gain or in the hope of larger tips, but as a way of augmenting the tourist experience and fulfilling their expectations. Tourists crave an exotic “other” experience filled with romance and adventure, and the Bedouin become obliging hosts, drawing on their tradition of pleasing and protecting the guest and fulfilling all their needs. Géraldine Chatelard calls these invented memories “white lies”, or *kedhb abyad* in Arabic, designed to obscure some of the negative local attitudes towards Lawrence:

*Bedouin create fictive links with the hero so as not to confess the breach in the transmission of memories that would testify to the historically secondary nature of the character, demystify him, and displease the visitors.*<sup>25</sup>

The UNESCO Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity for 2005 clearly recognised that this invented neo-Bedouinism in Wadi Rum and Petra was threatening to efface and obscure their orally-transmitted culture. The organisation therefore included the *beddu* of Petra and Wadi Rum in their groups of protected peoples. They also specifically warned that “the increase of desert tourism and its demand for ‘authentic Beddu culture’ may lead to its distortion”.<sup>26</sup>

## Conclusion

Memory—specifically the oral memory of the Bedouin that transmitted not only cultural and social norms but also legal systems that the West encodes in written

form (inheritances, property rights, customary law, and legal, and political agreements between tribes)—remains one of the unique features of their culture. The fluidity of this memory, as I have shown, is closely analogous to the flexibility of their way of life and means of production. The memorialised past has been a frequent site of contestation between centralised Arab governments and colonial powers and the Bedouin. It has been used both to create social cohesion or sadly, in other forms, as a tool of de-legitimisation, oppression, and appropriation. That this memory has been subjected to evasions, forgettings, misappropriations, and realignments in their history is not new in human experience. However, the oral and strikingly fluid aspect of Bedouin memory as it was re-negotiated in the twentieth century creates an interesting study in politics and culture.

### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup>Steven C. Dinero, “New Identity/Identities Formulation in a Post-Nomadic Community: The Case of the Bedouin of the Negev,” *National Identities* 6(3), (2004): 263-64.
- <sup>2</sup>Alan S. Weber et al. eds., *Qira’at* (Vol. 2), (Doha: Dar-al Sharq, 2011), 7-13.
- <sup>3</sup>Stephen Frederic Dale, “Ibn Khaldun: The Last Greek and the First *Annaliste* Historian,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 38 (2006): 431.
- <sup>4</sup>Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddima: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, ed. N.J. Dawood (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005), 93.
- <sup>5</sup>Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*, 118.
- <sup>6</sup>Clive Holes and Said Salman Abu Athera, *Poetry and Politics in Contemporary Bedouin Society* (Ithaca: Ithaca House, 2009); Lila Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).
- <sup>7</sup>Donald P. Cole and Soraya Altorki, *Bedouin, Settlers, and Holiday-Makers: Egypt’s Changing Northwest Coast* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1998).
- <sup>8</sup>Dinero, “New Identity,” 263-64.
- <sup>9</sup>Steven C. Dinero, *Settling for Less: The Planned Resettlement of Israel’s Negev Bedouin* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 4.
- <sup>10</sup>Ismael Abu-Saad, “Spatial Transformation and Indigenous Resistance: The Urbanization of the Palestinian Bedouin in Southern Israel,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 51(12), (2008), 1731.
- <sup>11</sup>Riccardo Bocco, “International Organisations and the Settlement of Nomads in the Arab Middle East, 1950-1990,” in eds. Martha Munday and Basim Musallam, *The Transformation of Nomadic Society in the Arab East* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), 197.
- <sup>12</sup>Noa Kram, *Final Report: The Negev Bedouins: Struggles for Land Rights and Cultural Survival in Israel* (San Francisco: California Institute of Integral Studies, 2010), 22.
- <sup>13</sup>Abu-Saad, “Spatial Transformation,” 1726.

- <sup>14</sup>Kram, *Final Report*, 17.
- <sup>15</sup>Kram, *Final Report*, 8.
- <sup>16</sup>Clive Holes and Said Salman Abu Athera, *Poetry and Politics*, 9-11.
- <sup>17</sup>J. Poncet, "Le Myth de la Catastrophe Hilalienne," *Annales: Economie, Societes, Civilisations*, 22 (1967), 1099-20.
- <sup>18</sup>Reuven Aharoni, *The Pasha's Bedouin: Tribes and State in the Egypt of Mehemet Ali, 1805-1848* (London: Routledge, 2007), 207.
- <sup>19</sup>Aharoni, *The Pasha's Bedouin*, 188.
- <sup>20</sup>Ugo Fabietti, "Facing Change in Arabia," in ed. Dawn Chatty, *Nomadic Societies in the Middle East and North Africa: Entering the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 574-75.
- <sup>21</sup>R.M. Webster, *Bedouin Settlements in Eastern Arabia* (PhD diss., University of Exeter, 1987), 91.
- <sup>22</sup>R.W. Hawker, "Imagining a Bedouin Past: Stereotypes and Cultural Representation in the Contemporary United Arab Emirates," Lebanese American University, accessed July 1, 2011, [http://inhouse.lau.edu.lb/bima/papers/R\\_W\\_Hawker.pdf](http://inhouse.lau.edu.lb/bima/papers/R_W_Hawker.pdf)
- <sup>23</sup>Ahmed Abu Al Haija, "Jordan: Tourism and Conflict with Local Communities," *Habitat International* 35 (2011), 93.
- <sup>24</sup>Laurie A. Brand, "Displacement for Development? The Impact of Changing State-Society Relations," *World Development* 29(6), (2001), 964.
- <sup>25</sup>Géraldine Chatelard, "Tourism and Representations: Of Social Change and Power Relations in Wadi Ramm," in ed. S. Latte-Abdallah, *Représentation et Construction de la Réalité Sociale en Jordanie et Palestine* (Beyrouth et Amman: Institut Français du Proche-Orient, 2005), 27.
- <sup>26</sup>UNESCO, *Third Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity*, accessed July 12, 2011, [http://www.unesco.org/culture/intangible-heritage/20arb\\_uk.htm](http://www.unesco.org/culture/intangible-heritage/20arb_uk.htm)

## Bibliography

- Abu-Lughod, Lila, *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).
- Abu-Saad, Ismael, "Spatial Transformation and Indigenous Resistance: The Urbanization of the Palestinian Bedouin in Southern Israel," *American Behavioral Scientist* 51(12), (2008).
- Aharoni, Reuven, *The Pasha's Bedouin: Tribes and State in the Egypt of Mehemet Ali, 1805-1848* (London: Routledge, 2007).
- Al Haija, Ahmed Abu, "Jordan: Tourism and Conflict with Local Communities," *Habitat International* 35 (2011).

Bocco, Riccardo, "International Organisations and the Settlement of Nomads in the Arab Middle East, 1950-1990," in eds. Martha Munday and Basim Musallam, *The Transformation of Nomadic Society in the Arab East* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000).

Brand, Laurie A., "Displacement for Development? The Impact of Changing State-Society Relations," *World Development* 29(6), (2001).

Chatelard, Géraldine, "Tourism and Representations: Of Social Change and Power Relations in Wadi Ramm," in *Représentation et Construction de la Réalité Sociale en Jordanie et Palestine*, ed. S. Latte-Abdallah (Beyrouth et Amman: Institut Français du Proche-Orient, 2005).

Cole, Donald P. and Soraya Altorki, *Bedouin, Settlers, and Holiday-Makers: Egypt's Changing Northwest Coast* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1998).

Dale, Stephen Frederic, "Ibn Khaldun: The Last Greek and the First *Annaliste* Historian," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 38 (2006).

Dinero, Steven C., "New Identity/Identities Formulation in a Post-Nomadic Community: The Case of the Bedouin of the Negev," *National Identities* 6(3), (2004).

Dinero, Steven C., *Settling for Less: The Planned Resettlement of Israel's Negev Bedouin* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010).

Fabietti, Ugo, "Facing Change in Arabia," in ed. Dawn Chatty, *Nomadic Societies in the Middle East and North Africa: Entering the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

Hawker, R.W., "Imagining a Bedouin Past: Stereotypes and Cultural Representation in the Contemporary United Arab Emirates," Lebanese American University, accessed July 1, 2011, [http://inhouse.lau.edu.lb/bima/papers/R\\_W\\_Hawker.pdf](http://inhouse.lau.edu.lb/bima/papers/R_W_Hawker.pdf)

Holes, Clive and Said Salman Abu Athera, *Poetry and Politics in Contemporary Bedouin Society* (Ithaca: Ithaca House, 2009).

Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddima: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, ed. N.J. Dawood (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005).

Kram, Noa, *Final Report: The Negev Bedouins: Struggles for Land Rights and Cultural Survival in Israel* (San Francisco: California Institute of Integral Studies, 2010).

Poncet, J., "Le Myth de la Catastrophe Hilalienne," *Annales: Economie, Sociétés, Civilisations*, (22) (1967).

UNESCO, *Third Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity*, accessed July 12, 2011, [http://www.unesco.org/culture/intangible-heritage/20arb\\_uk.htm](http://www.unesco.org/culture/intangible-heritage/20arb_uk.htm)

Weber, Alan S. et al. eds., *Qira'at* (Vol. 2), (Doha: Dar-al Sharq, 2011).

Webster, R.M., *Bedouin Settlements in Eastern Arabia* (PhD diss., University of Exeter, 1987).

### Biographical note

Dr Alan Weber, Assistant Professor of English, teaches writing and the history of medicine at Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar. He previously taught at Cornell University, Ithaca and the Pennsylvania State University. Alan is editor of *19th Century Science* (2000), and the author of publications on Shakespeare, women's medicine, and seventeenth century medicine. He is also the Editor-in-Chief of the *Middle Eastern Journal of English Studies* (MEJES).

Email: [alw2010@qatar-med.cornell.edu](mailto:alw2010@qatar-med.cornell.edu)

3.

---

## REMEMBERING SPACES

---

# Re-enacting Traces: The Historical Building as Container of Memory

Sarah Bennett

---

## Re-enacting Traces: The Historical Building as Container of Memory

Sarah Bennett

---

### Abstract

In this article I refer to an aspect of my recent artistic practice—“wall-wounds”—that was created in response to the site of a former lunatic asylum. This was carried out to explore how art can operate in the interstices between historical narratives, memory, and material evidence relating to the inhabitation of institutional space. The key artistic method was re-enactment, a critical tool that was activated through interaction between my body (and my embodied actions) and the metaphorical “body” of the historical building. This was in order to explore the gaps between architectural spaces and the indexical remainders that point to institutional frameworks and regulatory systems employed therein. I direct my attention to the hollowed traces left behind doors that index the operations of constraint and control through aperture and enclosure, and investigate the role of the body as the means by which the past is brought into the present through re-enactment. My processes address the inherent problem of a lack of verifiable witness accounts by regarding the building itself as “witness” and container of memory relating to absent bodies. I propose that imagination plays a central role in re-enactment by activating a past that we cannot altogether know, and that it is equal to interpretative and analytical modes of enquiry.

Keywords: asylum, re-enactment, indexical, archive, imagination, memory



... *Reenactment confounds history with geography, spatialises the past and treats its linearity and continuity as an architectural site ...*<sup>1</sup>

Jennifer Allen’s proposition above suggests that re-enactment works as temporal incision, slicing through time, and re-inserting events that took place in the past in the spaces of the present. It resonates closely with my own use of re-enactment as an embodied research method for investigating the site of the former Devon County Pauper Lunatic Asylum opened in 1845 (Figure 1). This is done through what Graeme Sullivan describes as “situated cognition”, a form of “visual arts knowing” that is responsive to “context-specific situations”.<sup>2</sup> It leads towards critical understandings, in this case of the architectural spaces of the asylum in relation to the ideologies of cure that influenced its design and management.

Initially, using digital photography I archived traces of inhabitation that I discovered within the now abandoned asylum.<sup>3</sup> This was specifically the damage that occurs behind each door through acts of (en)closure and aperture (Figure 2), where the handle or lock hits the plaster wall with force. These contusions, or “wall-wounds (found)” as I named them, were formed through the containment and constant ordering of the patients’ bodies in time and place. In the present I suggest that they operate as the indices of spatial and temporal control—the building’s own memory trace (Figure 3).

Figure 1. Aerial view of the former Devon County Pauper Lunatic Asylum, Exminster. Source: Express and Echo, 22 January 1999.

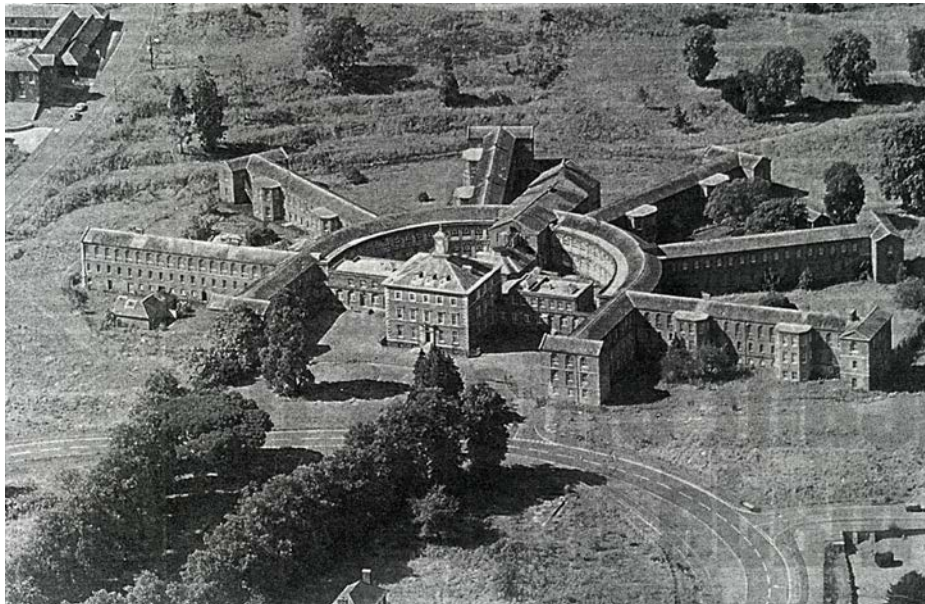


Figure 2. Wall-wound (found) DCH – 2. Digital photograph from artist’s bookwork. Sarah Bennett PhD submission 2010.



Figure 3. Wall-wound (found) DB – 2. Digital photograph from artist’s bookwork. Sarah Bennett PhD submission 2010.



When embarking on this practice-led research project, I was initially perplexed by how little evidence was held in the official archives relating to the patients' lives and their individual narratives. On the other hand numerous accounts exist made by the professionals, medical superintendents, and “mad doctors”. Their publications advance ideologies and perspectives based on the preeminence of medical, moral, and scientific viewpoints in the nineteenth century. Disturbingly, most of the information about the patients that could be discovered related to recent patients in the many confidential medical documents and x-rays that had been left in the building when the National Health Service moved out in 1986.

I was not, however, aiming to “represent” the patients or attempt to mediate the memories of those contained and constrained within this edifice, or indeed to account for their individual circumstances through drawing on their personal narratives.<sup>4</sup> For as Donna Haraway suggests, although “there is a premium on establishing the capacity to see from the peripheries and the depths”, there “lies a serious danger of romanticizing and/or appropriating the vision of the less powerful while claiming to see from their positions”.<sup>5</sup>

My focus instead was on the traces that stood in for the absent bodies, and seemed to point to the conditions of their containment. Central to my approach was Paul Ricoeur's argument for “what” is being remembered rather than “who” is remembering, an emphasis that places the “egological question” second to the phenomena itself—the trace.<sup>6</sup> This privileging of “what” and “how” before “who” echoes the prominence I gave to the trace and I began to investigate how these potent remnants of immurement were formed. I started a process where I used my own bodily actions to reveal *and* scrutinise the conditions under which the range and complexity of forms emerged on the walls (Figure 4).

Here I turned again to Ricoeur for his typology of mnemonic phenomena, which includes and invokes three types of trace, two of which opened up ways for me to consider the significance of “wall-wounds (found)”.<sup>7</sup> The first is a psychical or affective trace, which when using the metaphor of a block of wax as memory is akin to an impression left on the surface of the wax. This is due to “an affection resulting from the shock of an event that can be said to be striking, marking. This impression is essentially undergone, experienced” and is formed in the moment of the event.<sup>8,9</sup>

Importantly this imprint or trace is recognised by the subject as faithful to the original affection and recalls the moment of impact, the trauma. In the context of the asylum the wall-wounds are formed through affective encounters, and represent a dynamic relationship between the social and the biological through a transactive process whereby the transmission of affect occurs. Affect is therefore metaphorically lodged in the fabric of the building in what I term the “somatic grumblings” of the former asylum.

In addition to the affective trace I found that Ricoeur's documentary trace framed my proximal and material investigations of the “wall-wounds (found)” through hapticity and an embodied (rather than objectifying) vision.<sup>10</sup> Alongside

written evidence, documentary traces include physical vestiges or unwritten traces, things which act as “clues”—objects that are the subject of archaeology, such as the remains of buildings and fragments of pottery.<sup>11,12</sup> The materiality of the “wall-wounds (found)” provide just such evidence through traces formed by an impression left on the surface of the wall as the result of a physical strike, an indexical trace that also acts as a reminder or memory trace of an event. In this case the “wall-wounds (found)” point to both trauma *and* immurement.

Paradoxically, as I was starting this research the empty building’s identity was itself being re-formed through its redevelopment as gated residential housing—a place of exclusion transformed into an exclusive and desirable dwelling-place masquerading in the marketing material as a former stately home and obscuring its past as an asylum.<sup>13</sup> This was because, as the director of the redevelopment company suggested to urban planner, Bridget Franklin: “99% of people don’t want to live in a mental hospital”.<sup>14</sup> Here one heritage (that relating to patients and staff) is being obscured, but the values attached to an altogether different type of heritage (country estates) has been inscribed through new names and narratives for marketing purposes, inventing a new identity.

I am not suggesting that a singular or homogenous “history” linked to the former asylum exists, for dominant and culturally constructed versions of history or homogenising meta-narratives need to be resisted.<sup>15</sup> No one narrative could fully encompass the history of the asylum. However, the re-inscription of the building as faux stately home enabled the erasure of a significant site in local history.

Figure 4. Wall-wound (fabricated) No. 1021. Digital photograph from artist’s bookwork. Sarah Bennett PhD submission 2010.



By inserting my body *into* the building my intention was to critique the mechanisms of institutional power metered out in this edifice designed—by architect Charles Fowler in 1842—to facilitate the use of regulatory practices and impose conformity and compliance through self-coercion. These were methods that were considered powerful cures for madness by the nineteenth-century moral reformers and Commissioners of Lunacy.<sup>16</sup>

The building's semi-radial form served the purpose of managing, observing, and securing the “mad” and of controlling the entry and exit points. For as Franklin notes, Fowler “achieved a plan with a minimum circulation area, but with maximum supervision capability, with long sight lines into wards and exercise yards”.<sup>17</sup> Its walls provided the source material for my research, albeit contextualised by nineteenth-century writings on methods of cure and control such as Henry Burdett’s *Hospitals and Asylums of the World*, as well as more recent perspectives by Foucault, Scull, Goffman, Showalter, and Porter.<sup>18,19,20,21,22,23</sup>

Figure 5. Wall-wound (fabricated) No. 2249. Digital photograph from artist’s bookwork. Sarah Bennett PhD submission 2010.



Re-enactment has been used extensively by contemporary artists and filmmakers, such as Peter Watkins in *La Commune (Paris, 1871)* (2000), to critique memory, history, and authenticity. As Sven Lütticken points out, art is well placed to “examine and try out ... forms of repetition that break open history...” and creates “small yet significant acts of difference”.<sup>24</sup> These acts are not an alternative to political force, but produce a space for reflection. By using my body as the agent to re-enact the institution, and following Steve Rushton’s analysis of re-enactment as an “agent of memory and experience”, I was replacing the need for “authentic” historical sources for re-enactment (such as film footage and written accounts) by using the building as a “witness” and incorporating my own experiences into the process.<sup>25</sup>

I considered the building as a “container of memory”, a self-archiving archive, recalling Derrida’s notion that “the technical structure of the *archiving* archive also determines the structure of the *archivable* content even in its very coming into existence”.<sup>26</sup> That is, these traces and marks only exist because the plaster walls in the building “structure” the archive and allow the evidence of the force of the handles to materialise. Significantly, in using re-enactment as a research method I was not aiming to replicate the wall-wounds through mimesis, but to repeat the institutional practices that produced them. The wall-wounds that I created through my actions (Figure 5) were, in effect, new events.

Unsurprisingly the overlooked indexical traces did not attract witness accounts for they are laid down anonymously over time. They are however happenings that index the regulatory methods of the former institution that mark time, space, and action. For, as Thomas Markus states, “time and space are joined in rules that govern the opening times of specific spaces”.<sup>27</sup> Ordering and managing the movements and locations of the former patients is therefore inextricably linked to: timetables; to the sequence of architectural spaces; to the thresholds, the doors, their hinges, the handles, and locks; and to the position, surface, and consistency of the walls.

Figure 6. Wall-wound (found)  
ERRN-1. Digital photograph  
from artist’s bookwork. Sarah  
Bennett PhD submission 2010.



One historical document is of interest as it highlights the problems pertaining to usage of the doors in the asylum, and emphasises the prevailing attitudes towards the care of the “mad” when it was first occupied. In his final architect’s report of 28 April 1846, Fowler writes that “... the locks are exposed to high usage, and consequently the more liable to be out of order ... others have had the mortar shaken out of the joist on the shutting side, by violent concussions”. Fowler ends the report with advice for asylum staff to be watchful as “... in so extensive a range of buildings it must be obvious that a vigilant attention by persons on the spot will be necessary to prevent and amend these injuries to which all buildings are liable, and particularly in such an establishment as a lunatic asylum”.<sup>28</sup>

Fowler’s metaphor of the building as a body, which is subject to “concussions”, aligns with my use of the same metaphor. This particularly relates to my reference to the surface of the wall which in the “wall-wounds (found)” and “wall-wounds (fabricated)” photographs appear skin-like—damaged and scarred (Figure 6) and blistered and sore (Figure 7). The absent bodies of the past are alluded to in this metaphor, and Allen usefully observes that re-enactment always “presupposes a missing body”, but nonetheless “uses the body as a medium for reproducing the past”.<sup>29</sup> She continues: “while a re-enactment may depend upon historical documents and artifacts—from newspaper reports describing an event to the

clothing worn by key figures—the body remains the vehicle that can carry the past into the present, that can give the past presence”.<sup>30</sup>

My embodied process reveals the past, that is, how these anonymous indices of institutional control are formed. The dialectic between absent and present bodies is drawn into focus within re-enactment as a performance of memory, one in which this event draws on the past and simultaneously forges new events in the present. These new events then produce further memories, which stand in for the inaccessible past. This is a process of slicing, cutting, assembling, and reassembling action and memory in new configurations.

Figure 7. Wall-wound (fabricated) No. 351. Digital photograph from artist's bookwork. Sarah Bennett PhD submission 2010.



I re-enacted (en)closure and aperture, monotonously repeating my actions to find out how to produce the wall-wounds. At the outset I used actual doors and then I made a hinged device to which I could add a variety of handles and locks, then swung and pushed them, hitting them against layered plaster panels that I fabricated for this purpose. I was aware that in the asylum closure is symbolised by the external walls that confined, enclosed, and excluded the patients and the internal walls that isolated, partitioned, distributed, and segregated. Aperture is symbolised through observable space, the doctors' rounds, the x-rays, and the lack of privacy. My body was the conduit for this exploration of boundaries, both symbolic and actual.<sup>31,32</sup>

These re-enactments led to the production of a number of wall-wounds on the plaster panels. However, I recognised that in the process of production I was constantly erasing the previous state through each subsequent action. Equally, in the digital archive of the “wall-wounds (found)” the traces were photographically captured at an arbitrary point in their process of becoming. By introducing stop-frame capture technology, I could document the outcome of each impact and reveal what could not be experienced through the archival image. That is, the emergence of the wall-wound as a durational process, resulting in short pieces of moving image that transform the digital photographs into a narrative event.

I documented one frame between each hit, involving a set of disciplined actions and bodily movements to render the process visible through the camera lens, compressing action, time, and space. When projected back onto the institutional wall as artworks these “wall-wound (projections)” appear to restore both duration and space simultaneously. By reintroducing the temporal in relation to the spatial I was, in Allen’s words, “confounding history with geography” and spatialising the past.<sup>33</sup>

The production of what appears to be a piece of moving image is dependent on the sequencing of single images, a development that is explored by Mary Anne Doane in her examination of early cinema and its relationship with the still analogue image. Thus, “a duration based upon division, upon sequential serialization of still photographs ... when projected, produced the illusion of motion and the capturing of time”.<sup>34</sup> Also significant to my research is her related observation that “the promise of indexicality is, in effect, the promise of the rematerialization of time—the restoration of a continuum of space in photography, of time in cinema”.<sup>35</sup>

Here a question arises about the relationship of indexicality to its referent during the process of re-enactment. The imprint of my action, the trace, is captured in the plaster surface, “embodying in its form the existential traces of its referent”—my absent body. I then capture that physical trace within a digital frame, and each frame is subsequently placed in sequence to produce the illusion of transformation and movement.<sup>36</sup> However, my absent body is re-enacting the actions of other absent bodies so the referent (my body) is already referring to an event that was never “captured” in any documentary sense, suggesting a loss of history or of memory.

The artworks, when projected into institutional spaces, including buildings other than the former asylum, and therefore seem to actively hover between representation and mis-representation, bringing fact into dynamic tension with fiction. They remind us of the unreliability of both memory and interpretation of documentary evidence, and caution us to acknowledge the extent to which we assume that we can reconstruct the past in the present.

What began as my refusal to search for a homogenising narrative of the inhabitants of the former asylum resulted in artworks that allude to institutional control, but in a different register. This register involves re-enactment as an imaginative as well as critical act which, according to Rushton’s reading of R.G. Collingwood, “affords us the possibility of imagining the position of the protagonists within an historical narrative and the interrogation of evidence weighted against our interpolation of that evidence”.<sup>37</sup>

Figure 8. Wall-wound (found)  
PSQ – 1. Digital photograph  
from artist's bookwork. Sarah  
Bennett PhD submission 2010.



Hence we imagine the missing parts of the historical narrative based on our interpretation and understandings of the things that remain, such as Ricoeur's documentary "clues", or the things we think we "know". The "wall-wounds (found)" (Figure 8) provide such provisional clues, as does the structuring structure of the architectural rationale of the original asylum. Through re-enactment as an embodied research process I investigated and trialed movements, locks, and actions that I *imagined*, and that produced similar marks and evocative hollows.

The resulting moving image artworks, when projected onto institutional walls, subsequently allude to the building as a container of bodies and the "memories" of those bodies in the body of the building without recourse to representation, but as an imaginative act that refuses homogenising narratives. My body and the body of the building act as surrogates. They perform a form of *intercorporeality* involving the *interaction* between situated bodies—the body of the building and my own body—through re-enactment as a critical and embodied artistic research method to explore the immurement of other absent bodies.<sup>38</sup>

All images copyright the artist 2002–2010.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Jennifer Allen, "Einmal ist Keinmal: Observations on Re-enactment," in ed. Sven Lütticken, *Life, Once More: Forms of Re-enactment in Contemporary Art* (Rotterdam: Witte de With, 2005), 187.



<sup>2</sup>Graeme Sullivan, *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in Visual Arts* (Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC: Sage, 2010), 134-35.

<sup>3</sup>I also collected wall-wounds from a range of other former asylums, hospitals, and institutional buildings.

<sup>4</sup>See Sarah Bennett, “Re-forming the Institution: The Wall as Memory Archive,” *Journal of Media Practice* 11(3), (2010): 199-214.

<sup>5</sup>Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association of Books, 1991), 191.

<sup>6</sup>Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006): 3.

<sup>7</sup>The further trace is the cerebral or cortical trace that is the domain of neuroscience and known as *mnesic* but that in this instance is of less relevance to my practice. Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 415-16.

<sup>8</sup>Ricoeur, *Memory History, Forgetting*, 9.

<sup>9</sup>Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 14.

<sup>10</sup>Donna Haraway argues for a “feminist objectivity” that embraces vision as embodied, critical, and situated rather than a gaze from nowhere. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 188.

<sup>11</sup>Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 173.

<sup>12</sup>Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 170.

<sup>13</sup>I explore this paradoxical shift in my doctoral dissertation. Sarah Bennett, *Traces, Boundaries, Surfaces: An Investigation Through Art Practice of Institutional Sites with Particular Reference to a Former Lunatic Asylum* (PhD diss., University of Plymouth, 2010), 100-23.

<sup>14</sup>Bridget Franklin, “Hospital – Heritage – Home: Reconstructing the Nineteenth-Century Lunatic Asylum,” *Housing, Theory and Society* 19 (2002): 177.

<sup>15</sup>Brian Graham, Greg Ashworth and John Tunbridge, *A Geography of Heritage: Power, Culture and Economy* (London and New York: Arnold, 2000), 75.

<sup>16</sup>Moral treatment was part of the regime of cure in the early days of the asylum and the first Medical Superintendent, John Bucknill, was a proponent of a healing environment. However, the asylum was quickly full and many of the aspirations of moral approach were deemed uneconomic and containment of a mass scale became the norm.

<sup>17</sup>Franklin, “Hospital – Heritage – Home,” 175 (personal communication).

<sup>18</sup>See Henry C. Burdett, *Hospitals and Asylums of the World: Their Origin, History, Construction, Administration, Management, and Legislation, Volume One: Asylums – History and Administration* (London: J & A Churchill, 1891).

<sup>19</sup>See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. A. Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1991).

<sup>20</sup>See Andrew T. Scull, *Museums of Madness: The Social Organization of Insanity in Nineteenth-Century England* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982); and Andrew, Scull, *The Most Solitary of Afflictions: Madness and Society in Britain 1700-1900* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993).

- <sup>21</sup>See Erving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991).
- <sup>22</sup>See Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture 1830-1980* (London: Virago, 1987).
- <sup>23</sup>See Roy Porter, *A Social History of Madness: Stories of the Insane* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989).
- <sup>24</sup>Sven Lütticken, “An Arena in Which to Re-enact,” in ed. Sven Lütticken, *Life, Once More: Forms of Re-enactment in Contemporary Art*, (Rotterdam: Witte de With, 2005), 60.
- <sup>25</sup>Steve Rushton, “Playing Dead,” in eds. Anke Bangma et al., *Experience Memory Re-enactment* (Rotterdam: Piet Zwart Institute, Willem de Kooning Academy Hogeschool, 2005), 11.
- <sup>26</sup>Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 17.
- <sup>27</sup>Thomas A. Markus, *Buildings and Power: Freedom and Control in the Origin of Modern Building Types* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 97.
- <sup>28</sup>Devon Records Office, Devon, U.K. (Ref: Devon Q/S 116/1).
- <sup>29</sup>Allen, “Einmal ist Keinmal,” 179.
- <sup>30</sup>Allen, “Einmal ist Keinmal,” 181.
- <sup>31</sup>Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 141-43.
- <sup>32</sup>See Sarah Bennett “*Traces, Boundaries, Surfaces*,” 111-32.
- <sup>33</sup>See <http://sarahbennett.org.uk/currentPracticeWWPR1.html>
- <sup>34</sup>Mary Anne Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, The Archive* (Cambridge (MA) and London: Harvard University Press, 2002), 208.
- <sup>35</sup>Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*, 10.
- <sup>36</sup>Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*, 70.
- <sup>37</sup>Rushton, “Playing Dead,” 89.
- <sup>38</sup>See Gail Weiss, *Body Images: Embodiment as Intercorporeality* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

## Bibliography

Allen, Jennifer, “Einmal ist Keinmal”: Observations on Re-enactment,” in ed. Sven Lütticken, *Life, Once More: Forms of Re-enactment in Contemporary Art* (Rotterdam: Witte de With, 2005), 177-213.

Bennett, Sarah, *Traces, Boundaries, Surfaces: An Investigation Through Art Practice of Institutional Sites with Particular Reference to a Former Lunatic Asylum* (PhD diss., University of Plymouth, 2010).

Burdett, Henry C., *Hospitals and Asylums of the World: Their Origin, History, Construction, Administration, Management, and Legislation, Volume One: Asylums – History and Administration* (London: J & A Churchill, 1891).

- Derrida, Jacques, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans Eric Prenowitz (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995 – Revised edn. 1998).
- Doane, Mary Anne, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge (MA) and London: Harvard University Press, 2002).
- Foucault, Michel, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. A. Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1975 – Revised edn. 1991).
- Franklin, Bridget, “Hospital – Heritage – Home: Reconstructing the Nineteenth-Century Lunatic Asylum,” *Housing, Theory and Society* 19 (2002): 170-84.
- Goffman, Erving, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961 – Revised edn. 1991).
- Graham, Brian, Ashworth, Greg and Tunbridge, John, *A Geography of Heritage: Power, Culture and Economy* (London and New York: Arnold, 2000).
- Haraway, Donna, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association of Books, 1991).
- Lütticken, Sven, “An Arena in Which to Re-enact,” in ed. Sven Lütticken *Life, Once More: Forms of Re-enactment in Contemporary Art* (Rotterdam: Witte de With, 2005), 17-60.
- Markus, Thomas A, *Buildings and Power: Freedom and Control in the Origin of Modern Building Types* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993).
- Name removed, “Re-forming the Institution: The Wall as Memory Archive,” *Journal of Media Practice* 11(3), (2010): 199-214.
- Porter, Roy, *A Social History of Madness: Stories of the Insane* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989).
- Ricoeur, Paul, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006).
- Rushton, Steve, “Playing Dead,” in *Experience Memory Re-enactment*, eds. Anke Bangma et al. (Rotterdam: Piet Zwart Institute, Willem de Kooning Academy Hogeschool, 2005), 85-98.
- Scull, Andrew T., *Museums of Madness: The Social Organization of Insanity in Nineteenth-Century England* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982).
- Scull, Andrew, *The Most Solitary of Afflictions: Madness and Society in Britain 1700-1900* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993).
- Showalter, Elaine, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture 1830-1980* (London: Virago, 1987).

Sullivan, Graeme, *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in Visual Arts* (2nd Edn), (Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC: Sage, 2010).

Weiss, Gail, *Body Images: Embodiment as Intercorporeality* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

### Biographical note

Sarah Bennett is an artist and Associate Professor in Fine Art. She is currently Programme Leader for MA Fine Art at the University of Plymouth, U.K., and academic liaison for MFA Creative Practice at Transart Institute, New York, U.S. In her art practice she explores the historical, social, and cultural contexts of institutional sites. She completed a practice-based PhD in 2010.

Email: [sarah.bennett@plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:sarah.bennett@plymouth.ac.uk)

---

# Thinking Inside the Box: Objects of Mental Space in the Psychoanalytic Consulting Room

Julie Leavitt

---

## Thinking Inside the Box: Objects of Mental Space in the Psychoanalytic Consulting Room

Julie Leavitt

---

### Abstract

In his enigmatic appeal to psychoanalysts to work *without memory or desire*, Wilfred Bion (1970) warned against saturating the mental field of the analytic dyad with past and future elements. Doing so, he said, risks impinging on present sense impressions and infusing the patient's emerging associations with specific meaning, relegating them to occurrences of knowing rather than experiences of becoming. With an eye to becoming, Bion broadened the clinical uses of projection and projective identification to conceive of a model he called "container/contained" in which the analyst's mind (container) becomes a real-time, designated space for transforming patients' projected sense impressions and memory traces (contained) into elements that may be consciously thought and felt. In this article, I extend Bion's model to include physical and spatial aspects of the psychoanalytic environment. Drawing from clinical material I illustrate how patients associatively link memory fragments and projections to my office; from its concrete boundaries to the objects, sounds, and other sensory phenomena it houses. I argue that patients may thus experience my office as part of my mind, which "remembers" facets of their lived experiences. Based on these findings I will demonstrate how, in the present clinical moment, the materiality of my office becomes an extension of the transference field. Here the patients' sense impressions and memory traces become cast as contained memories, more accessible for conscious understanding in the therapeutic encounter.

Keywords: space, desire, memory, consulting room

## The presence of memory in psychoanalytic space

Ever since the inauguration of psychoanalysis in the late nineteenth century, the evolution of its theories and praxis has been intrinsically shaped by the enigmatic status and function of memory in the operations of the human psyche. Using three clinical vignettes, I hope to illustrate how the term *contained memory* has helped me conceptualise particular ways in which memory impacts evolving clinical moments I have had with patients within a shared field I call *psychoanalytic space*. This space is (among other things I will say about it) a presently lived space, where emergent memory is captured and *contained* in the immediate setting as it links with concrete, present experience.

With this in mind, I draw from the work of mid-twentieth century British psychoanalyst, Wilfred Bion, to show how certain material objects or other physical qualities residing within (and inherent to) the *psychoanalytic space* meld with the insistent flow of memories conjured in the minds of the analytic pair to incite new thought and emotional experience. I elaborate on the layered breadth and complexity of what I am calling *psychoanalytic space*, as its special qualities are essential to the ways in which memory becomes a ubiquitous and complicated force in psychoanalytic work.

To borrow a term from Donald Winnicott, I begin by noting that psychoanalytic space is always a *potential space*.<sup>1</sup> It encompasses multiple phenomenological axes—psychical, emotional, temporal, material, corporeal, relational—where the interplay of these is always *on the verge* of conjoining what is evolving between my mind and that of the patient. What delimits psychoanalytic space is the treatment frame, a virtual border consisting of stable and familiar parameters within which unconscious impressions emerge and analytic treatment unfolds.

Before presenting clinical vignettes it is important to outline a few concepts *fundamental* to psychoanalysis. First, in a broad sense the psychoanalytic quest is to make conscious through symbolisation contents of the patient's unconscious psyche. This provides, to use a phrase from Bion, “a prelude to exploration of meaning”, where the exploration itself is accomplished in the articulated space between the analytic dyad.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, the unconscious part of the mind contains that which we are compelled to repress from consciousness. Adam Phillips poetically depicts the unconscious in describing the function of psychoanalysis: to provide a language “for what matters most to us; for what we suffer from and for; for how and why we take our pleasures.”<sup>3</sup>

Finally, psychoanalysis conceives of the unconscious as temporally non-linear. In it, there is no relation to past, present, and future. In 1899, Freud wrote in *The Interpretation of Dreams*:

... it is a prominent feature of unconscious processes that they are indestructible. In the unconscious nothing can be brought to an end, nothing is past or forgotten.<sup>4</sup>

Two decades later in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* he was more to the point: *We have learnt that unconscious mental processes are in themselves “timeless”.* This

*means in the first place that they are not ordered temporally, that time does not change them in any way, that the idea of time cannot be applied to them.*<sup>5</sup>

Instead, the unconscious is a wash of mental elements, sense impressions, and mnemonic (or memory) traces, ever-present but unknown, whose only structuring parameters are the pre-existing signifying laws of one's surrounding culture.

To expand on an earlier point, in the context of exploring the unconscious mind in psychoanalytic space, *memory* defies the logic of time. It might more appropriately be imagined as a spontaneously constituted thinking surface, woven from bits of past sensual and perceptual experience, soldered together with acquired knowledge and captured in present experience. It is of course paradoxically always associated with that which is absent (in the Platonic sense where memory is *the presence of an absent thing*).<sup>6</sup> So it is at best a *half-truth* in the present moment—*re*-collected—a background onto which these bits of remembered data spontaneously coalesce and link with here-and-now experience to make meaning.

Likewise the spontaneous past-into-present quality of memory can generate those links, leading to psychical and emotional transformation, as when such an emergence occurs in the analytic encounter through free association. Paul Ricoeur eloquently captured this emergence visually: “Once past things are irrevocably absent, does not memory seem to place us in contact with them through the present image of their vanished presence?”<sup>7</sup>

### Clinical vignette: Jonathan

I became distinctly aware of the transformative capacity of memory and its ability to be contained in some tangible, material aspect of a clinical moment on a chilly San Francisco afternoon last winter. My 13-year-old patient, “Jonathan”, suddenly wrenched himself free from an immobilising, silent protest. Angry over having been plucked from school for his appointments with me, he had been tightly coiled in his chair for several sessions without eye contact. Barely a word had crossed his lips. Anything I said seemed utterly useless. But on this day, with a start he became animated, pointing to an antique box that sits on a shelf in my office. He announced that the box reminded him of similar boxes his mother used to keep on the mantelpiece in their living room, which contained the cremated ashes of family pets from her past.

Jonathan then added that he had suddenly wondered if my box contained ashes too, and imagined with sardonic and morbid delight that perhaps they were the cremated remains of a dead patient. An avid comic book artist, he went on to say that he was going to create a “weird and freaky” ‘zine about a therapist who kept the ashes of a dead patient on a shelf in her office. He did not elaborate his fantasy to include what had happened to *my* dead patient, what I may have actually *done* to now possess the patient's ashes, or *why* I might be keeping them in my office in that box.



I might have interpreted that Jonathan's box association pointed to an unconscious fear of being annihilated by me as a mother figure, and of course there might be truth in that. But what unfolded suggested something else: what he *did* was gradually shift his posture toward me. He seemed somehow more tolerant of my presence in the room, and a space opened between us in which we began appreciating the freaky weirdness of it together. Jonathan had begun to speak, and the threat of an encroaching impasse gave way to real verbal exchange.

In the final minutes of the hour, with renewed irritation he returned to his mother's boxes, exclaiming: "Why would anyone keep their pets' ashes in boxes? In the living room!"

"Perhaps she really loved those dogs and couldn't yet let go of them," I responded. He calmed down then, thoughtfully considering this. I wondered to myself if he might have been alluding to a worry he felt: not about being annihilated by his mother or his therapist, but about how things are most valued only after they die, about being kept versus being thrown away, or about having a place on his mother's mantel, or mine. I also imagined his desperate need for clear boundaries from his parents who, a couple years earlier, had gone through a painful and bitter divorce, causing him to now have to bounce between his mother's house and father's house each week, making school his only stable environment.

Finally, I thought he could also be speaking about longing, and the lonely deadness that can creep in when boundaries are set and adhered to. I thought of the boundary of our twice-weekly, 50-minute sessions competing with the "oceanic feeling" that soothes him when he lingers after school with his beloved friends. I recalled the suicide attempt he made just before we had begun treatment, at a time in which his most beloved friend, whom he described as "the only person in the world I trust", was away for an entire semester. In this instance a space was made for *me* to *think*. I, too, along with Jonathan had been led out of the dark by his sudden, enlivening association to boxes of ashes.

To reiterate my point more generally: through momentary association a patient can use an object in my office as an extension of my mind—to make contact with and contain what he can remember but cannot yet think, cannot yet link with feeling—and in that moment find meaning.

### "No memory or desire"—the emergence of the emotional link<sup>8</sup>

In my second vignette I will hone my thesis about the potential for memory to be contained in the material dimension of psychoanalytic space as it relates to processing *emotions*, the essential currency required for psychic change. Here, the function of memory shifts from fostering a kind of reified knowledge *about* something from the past, to a catalyst that, drawn into the present by its link to a tangible thing, can induce spontaneous emotional expression, allowing for its

release. An important point to grasp is that for the human psyche, that which is *remembered* represents something *long since lost*.

Bion asserted by way of analogy that for the geometer—one who studies points, lines, and space—the concept of *space* represents “a place where something was”. In the domain of psychoanalysis it is meaningful to say that one feels *depression* as a marker for “the place where a lost object (or other) was” and that *space* is “where the original emotion for the lost other—used to be”.<sup>9</sup> I understand this to mean that there is a *space (or spaces)* inside the unconscious mind of the patient which marks the place where there was an emotion now long since forgotten (repressed), felt for an *other* long since lost. What is left then is the mark, the *space* where emotion used to be and can once more be felt, given the conditions for resonant contact in the present moment between self and a (present) other. (I imagine this as a first step in developing the capacity to mourn.)

Paradoxically, in his famous edict Bion warns analysts to work with no memory or desire.<sup>10</sup> He cautions against resorting to memory (which tends toward ever-more fixed narrative of the past), as well as desire (toward a particular outcome in the future) for indications about what is being experienced in the present moment in the analytic space.

### Clinical vignette: Theresa

A second patient, “Theresa”, walks into my office, and before lying down on the couch wanders, as if secretly snooping, over to the narrow table in the corner where I have neatly arranged some of my favourite objects. I am struck when she drags her finger across the table, muttering with disgruntled concern, “you’ll never get the dust off that wax cup”. I find myself wishing that she had taken notice of the objects themselves, which I value and could in a small way share with her. So what does she mean by that comment? Does she worry that I am already overburdened with the detritus of my own life—or hers? Is the dust a symbol of my negligence, my lack of attention to those objects I have chosen to showcase?

*Is that how I treat what I love most?* Is this about the indelible stain, what cannot be got rid of, made tidy, or fixed? Is it her dead mother, whom she lost as a small child and who now amounts to a profound void. No-thing. No-love. Barely a film of dust in Theresa’s memory, and certainly no more useful to her now than dust. Finally, there is that invisible but malignant vestigial connection to her mother in the form of the breast cancer gene she inherited from her, that sparked Theresa’s own near-fatal bout of breast cancer at age 30. Her own double mastectomy, another lost breast, the no-thing left of primary necessity?

In fact, Theresa and I can never arrive at absolute knowledge regarding the meaning of her comment. It speaks, in a way, to something that she’ll never get back. The question is rather, can we tolerate *not* knowing, living with uncertainty, surviving without. Can she have faith in my willingness to experience the terror

of uncertainty with her, rely on me to remain present, to continue *being* in the unbearableness of her losses.

### The seduction of memory

In psychoanalytic work, one is always grappling with the *presence* of memory, in both senses of the word. For patient and analyst, the psychical field is always being happened upon by bits of memory, seduced by narrative memory, colonised by intrusive memory. This is, in part, to avoid unbearable states of uncertainty. Because of this, it is easy to be pulled in by the narrative determinism that reminiscences evoke, which according to Bion can encumber the analytic field.

Bion maintained that memory and desire can fill or *saturate* the mental space between patient and analyst with fixed knowledge, or knowledge *about* something: “[T]he more successful the memory is in its accumulations, the more nearly it approximates to resembling a saturated element saturated with saturated elements.”<sup>11</sup> This fixing propensity of knowledge collapses the thinking space of the therapeutic dyad, otherwise open for the potential of “becoming”—through acts of faith—bringing one closer to psychic truth.<sup>12</sup> “The more reminiscence is indulged,” he warned, “the farther one is removed from a form of anxiety ... reminiscence becomes a[n] ... orgy to keep out the painful insights that follow on the denial of sensuous experience.”<sup>13</sup>

I imagine that the “sensuous experience” he alludes to here, which he suggests needs to be denied for the sake of avoiding unbearable internal states, is that which at times can more easily be accessed through associations or contact with present inanimate objects in such a way that is psychically tolerable.

In my clinical work I often struggle with Bion’s enigmatic concept of “no memory or desire”. This is not only because of the ways I find memory useful in developing an alliance with a patient and in tracking their course of treatment, but admittedly because it seems impossible *not* to always be in the company of memory. It has been through experiences like those I describe that I have come to appreciate and rely on Bion’s assertion. It serves to remind me to keep memory’s insistence in check, optimising my receptivity for traces of that key unconscious association in the timeless zone of the analytic space—what Melanie Klein called the “point of urgency”.<sup>14</sup>

### Clinical vignette: Agnes

I will conclude with a brief vignette in which the psychoanalytic space can become stripped of the capacity for speaking, thinking, and dreaming—by constant threat of psychic annihilation. I am including this example because it extends the material parameters of the analytic space, reflecting this patient’s profoundly constricted capacity for verbal articulation.

I will call her Agnes, a middle-aged woman who looks as though she carries a dense mass in her core that causes the rest of her posture to cave in. She cannot think about a future other than a time somewhere beyond the present when she will kill herself, and has only begun to have dreams in the last year of our six-year treatment. Agnes had been subjected to a perversely seductive violence to body and soul from ages eight to 19. She came to incorporate into her own ego those who seduced, hurt, and shamed her: persecutory captors who have joined forces inside and against her fragile self, never letting her forget her shameful badness and worthlessness.

Silence emanates from Agnes's constricted body like an atmospheric straightjacket. At times she stares in sessions, as if she is scanning the void *behind* the objects in the environment rather than seeing the objects themselves. In her presence I experience the consulting room as a hollow organ, its sheath a porous membrane. The walls become permeable to noise, amplifying it as it seeps in from outside.

The cooing of pigeons outside the window amplify and recede like the heaving moans of a sexual encounter; creaks in the walls grate the flesh, and our stomachs snarl and growl like ravenous cats. I start to feel humiliated, and cut myself down in my thoughts. How can I have such a horribly inadequate office? How can I call myself a professional? My shame has nowhere to hide.

With Agnes the materiality of the environment is not visualised in physical objects. Rather it is more primitively *sensed* in atmospheric phenomena: invisible but invasive, colonising, pernicious. Like with Agnes herself there is no skin—nothing solid to hold onto. Instead there are forces of energy that permeate, pass through, suffocate the air passages, suck life out of things—noises, life outside, my own breathing. The body is the instrument of communication. She winces, startles, shrinks, slumps, stares. I fidget, drift, am overcome with dizzy nausea.

This primitivity in our sessions belies a persistent absence of trust in the psychoanalytic space—so raw, the wounds ever-fresh and open. We still so often find ourselves imprisoned in what Bion refers to as “the bondage of inarticulation”.<sup>15</sup> Over time, though, Agnes is beginning to link in words her internal states. This past Monday, as the end to our last session approached before I left to give this conference paper, she silently and intently scanned a Turkish woven rug on my wall. I said: “I have a sense you're looking for something.” She turned to face me and smiled, a rare moment indeed. “I was,” she said. “I think that maybe I've memorised it. All of those imperfections, where the shapes don't match from side-to-side.” She was silent for a moment. Finally she said, “Maybe I'll try to draw it while you're gone, from memory.”

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup>D.W. Winnicott, “The Location of Cultural Experience,” in *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 4 (1967): 370, accessed July 14, 2011 via Psychoanalytic Electronic Publishing <http://www.pep-web.org/search.php?volume=48&journal=ijp>.
- <sup>2</sup>W.R. Bion, *Attention and Interpretation* (London: Tavistock, 1970), 36.
- <sup>3</sup>Quoted in Patricia Elliot, “A Psychoanalytic Reading of Transsexual Embodiment,” in *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 2 (2001): 297, accessed July 14, 2011 via Psychoanalytic Electronic Publishing <http://www.pep-web.org/document.php?id=sgs.002.0295a&type=hitlist&num=0&query=zone1%2Cparagraphs|zone2%2Cparagraphs|author%2CElliot%2C+Patricia|viewperiod%2Cweek|sort%2Cjournal%2Ca#hit1>.
- <sup>4</sup>Sigmund Freud, “The Interpretation of Dreams,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume IV* (London: The Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1975), 576.
- <sup>5</sup>Sigmund Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVIII (1920-1922)* (London: The Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1975), 27.
- <sup>6</sup>Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 508.
- <sup>7</sup>Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 7.
- <sup>8</sup>Bion, *Attention and Interpretation*, 34
- <sup>9</sup>Bion, *Attention and Interpretation*, 9.
- <sup>10</sup>“Receptiveness achieved by denudation of memory and desire (which is essential to the operation of ‘acts of faith’) is essential to the operation of psycho-analysis ...” in Bion, *Attention and Interpretation*, 35.
- <sup>11</sup>Bion, *Attention and Interpretation*, 28.
- <sup>12</sup>Bion, *Attention and Interpretation*, 26.
- <sup>13</sup>Bion, *Attention and Interpretation*, 66.
- <sup>14</sup>Melanie Klein, “The Psycho-Analysis of Children,” in *The International Psycho-Analytical Library* 22 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1932), 50.
- <sup>15</sup>Bion, *Attention and Interpretation*, 14.

## Bibliography

Bion, W.R, *Attention and Interpretation* (London: Tavistock, 1970).

Elliot, Patricia, “A Psychoanalytic Reading of Transsexual Embodiment,” in *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 2 (2001), accessed July 14, 2011 via Psychoanalytic Electronic Publishing <http://www.pep-web.org/document.php?id=sgs.002.0295a&type=hitlist&num=0&query=zone1%2Cparagraphs|zone2%2Cparagraphs|author%2CElliot%2C+Patricia|viewperiod%2Cweek|sort%2Cjournal%2Ca#hit1>.

Freud, Sigmund, “The Interpretation of Dreams” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume IV (1900)*, (London: The Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1975).

Freud, Sigmund, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVIII (1920-1922)*, (London: The Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1975).

Klein, Melanie, “The Psycho-Analysis of Children,” in *The International Psycho-Analytical Library 22* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1932).

Ricoeur, Paul, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

Winnicott, D.W., “The Location of Cultural Experience,” in *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 48 (1967), accessed July 14, 2011 via Psychoanalytic Electronic Publishing <http://www.pep-web.org/search.php?volume=48&journal=ijp>.

### Biographical note

Julie Leavitt MD is a private practice psychiatrist, Medical Director at the San Francisco-based Access Institute for Psychological Services, and advanced candidate at the Psychoanalytic Institute of Northern California. Her teaching encompasses various psychoanalytic perspectives regarding creativity, sexuality and gender, and interdisciplinary treatment collaboration. Her current writing focuses on the clinical application of creativity theory and draws on the work of Wilfred Bion and Marion Milner.

Email: [juleavitt@gmail.com](mailto:juleavitt@gmail.com)

---

# The Museum Junkerhaus: Monument to an Unhappy Love

Anne-Kathrin Wielgosz

---

## The Museum Junkerhaus: Monument to an Unhappy Love

Anne-Kathrin Wielgosz

---

### Abstract

From the 1950s to the 1970s, the sign “Monument to an Unhappy Love” stood in front of the Junkerhaus, referencing the inhabitant’s unrequited love for his master’s daughter while a carpentry journeyman in Hamburg. Built in 1890 by architect, woodcarver, and painter, Karl Junker (1850-1912), the Junkerhaus is a “museum-house” that integrates living and creative spaces and is situated just outside the historic centre of the small northern German town of Lemgo. Orphaned as a boy, and rejected as architect and artist and as a man, Junker earned himself the reputation of a tight-lipped recluse who, at age 40, set out on his last, most singular and single-minded project: to design, build, furnish, and decorate his house without concession to style or artistic tradition. With an enormous marriage bed and a beautifully carved cradle (both of which, like the rest of the furniture, are solid and grounded in stasis for a settled existence), Junker appeared to ready himself for a life that never arrived with a house that he, a bachelor, never needed. Thus, the space became a repository for a longing infused with such interiority and confinement that, at its centre, could be nothing but Junker’s most intimate and hidden “window-view” painting of a domestic scene. Arrested in a past that never was, the Junkerhaus contains the memory of lost time and inevitably intertwines it with the very materiality of the house. Perhaps this memory was only a potential one—an “it could have happened this way”—and the house, as it were, was built on the subjunctive.

Keywords: containment, memory, petrification, repetition, secret



A life like Karl Junker's is worthy of a legend: he was orphaned and lost his brother as a young boy, unhappily loved his master's daughter when a carpentry journeyman in Hamburg, moved to far-away Munich to study at the Academy for the Arts, then travelled in Italy some years before returning to his small northern German hometown of Lemgo with nothing but a moderate inheritance and time on his hands. He set up shop there and worked quite prolifically, but soon experienced professional disapproval and artistic rejection.<sup>1</sup> The enormity and corporeality of this injustice is humbling, never more so than when face-to-face with the monumental model of one such rejected design for Berlin's Museum Island. At age 40, in what looks like an act of defiance, a dogged feat of force, he set out on his last most singular and single-minded project: to design, build, furnish, and decorate his house. From inception it was envisioned as a "museum-house" (where living space and that for the creation and exhibition of art would be integrated, without concession, beyond artistic tradition), and as final claim to his right as architect and artist.<sup>2</sup> "I will develop a new style", he is supposed to have said, and "Perhaps people will not understand me right away. I will fare like Richard Wagner with his music. But later, after fifty or perhaps after a hundred years, people will realize what I was."<sup>3</sup>

Today, the Junkerhaus, a true "Gesamtkunstwerk" incorporating different art forms, is considered the culmination of this artist's life work and he, himself a captive, both the "creator ... and prisoner of an extraordinary (artistic) vision" and its highly systematic and controlled execution.<sup>4</sup> In ever-increasing isolation, Junker lived and worked in his house for the remainder of his life, dying there, a strange recluse, at age 62.

Since 1891, the building has stood there, set back from the street with its vivid, yet disciplined, façade of squares and axial references. Classically academic proportions and the oddity of a belvédère meet the regional "Fachwerk" half-timbered construction (Figure 1).<sup>5</sup> When applying for building permission, Junker presented with a wooden show piece model, whose modules could be taken apart and reassembled.<sup>6</sup> Such compartmentalisation reaches far beyond the precise, conventionally bourgeois, and well-behaved interior layout with vestibule, atelier, workshop, kitchen, and (for a measure of comfort quite forward at the time) an indoor toilet on the first floor. A salon, living-room, guest, children's, and master bedroom were outfitted with a beautifully carved cradle on the second (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Front "Fachwerk" façade of the Junkerhaus.



Figure 2. Wooden cradle in the master bedroom.



With the endurance of unstinting work, and what seems a persistent insistence on his plan, Junker appeared to ready himself for a life that never arrived, building a house that he, a bachelor, never needed. Those who enter the space feel the weight, almost too heavy to carry, of the longing infused and suffering endured here, inside this repository of uncanny homeliness, where time is weighed down with dust, waiting worked into every corner, fidelity nailed down. Exigencies may well be frightening, but the Junkerhaus is precisely that, a necessity. Fostered for many years by a neighbouring couple, it has withstood time and neglect and remains a work of astonishing determination, steadfastness, and consequence, following its own rules quite rhythmically, yet without a real precedent or artistic reference point.

Every house is built to shield from threat, but Junker also sheltered and stored his solitude in casings at the core of internal framing. From the outside in, the building materials for furniture, doors, windows, and picture frames, often coloured, and worked in relief, are earthbound with carvings raw and knobby like roots. In front of coffered walls, underneath panelled ceiling medallions, and in the silent presence of furniture that appears to grow out of its surroundings as if it “continued ... the trees”, the truly precious is contained in an intricately carved, wall-mounted cabinet.<sup>7,8</sup> It is the picture of a domestic scene and Junker’s most intimate, so-called “window-view” painting. In the background church steeples, in the foreground a woman and child looking out a window as a man (very like the portraits of the elder Junker with dark beard, top-hat, and obviously returning home from a venture), while still outside, embraces the woman as the boy waves at him (v 3).<sup>9</sup>

Figure 3. “Window-view” painting inside a wall-mounted cabinet.



The recycled cabinet door, whose interior carries the painting, holds the key that is second nature to enclosed space, where things are predictable and controlled.<sup>10</sup> Yet, when Junker adorns a carved wardrobe with a wooden architectural model (Figure 4), makes girding into umbrella stands, or lets the ornamentation at the tip of a chair's canopy function as an oil lamp hook, he walks the line of boundaries precariously. His paintings are enclosed by frames that dissolve separation, then merge with them in substance, and whose ornamentation continues in the wooden carvings and poles nailed to the wall. Junker aesthetically binds in both ways: he encloses and connects with borders both rigid and malleable. Regardless of the spatial relationship, however, every frame comes at a cost. It narrows a sphere, perhaps even a life-sphere, and what is excluded may forever be “elsewhere”. For Junker, with little connection to the outside world, leaving the confines of his house must have meant exposure to the risk of life and that, perhaps, is only for the fearless.

Figure 4. Wooden architectural model on top of a carved wardrobe.



In the years leading up to the Junkerhaus project, paintings and drawings of branches, trunks, stumps, and roots covered in fungus accumulate, with “irregularities in bark (of) pathogenic excrescence ... as if [Junker] were particularly fascinated by the biotic processes of growth and decay”.<sup>11,12</sup> Now the visitor enters the house through the vestibule as under a thicket of sticks from

crude dead trees (Figures 5 and 6). Whether it is called “Buckelstil” (hump-style), “Warzenstil” (wart-style), “Knorpelstil” (gnarl-style), or “Stabornamentik” (twig-ornamentation), Junker fingers them. He seems to encrust the entire interior—nothing remains untouched—as with a fossilised overgrowth, and adorns, even crowns, furniture with entwined wood mazes or embosses it with the lattice work of mounted struts and poles.<sup>13,14</sup> Ornamentation, at its best yet another self-contained system, works on seams and naturally attaches itself to boundaries that tie up edges and create connections where materials or objects meet, then puts them “in motion through shifting, angling, and displacing them”.<sup>15</sup>

Figures 5, 6. Ceiling and wall of the vestibule.

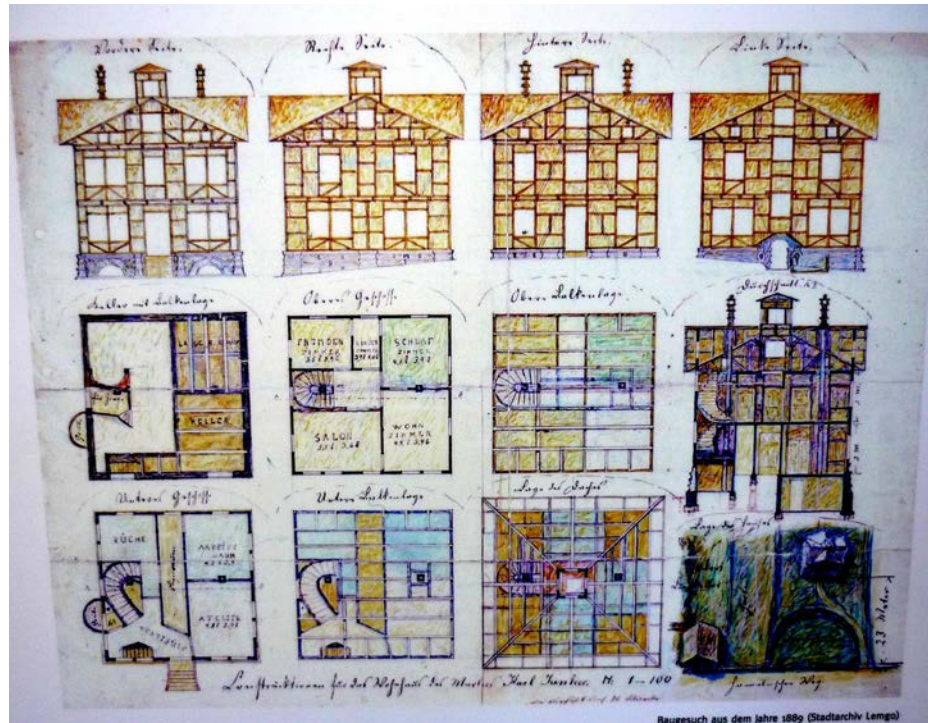


For Junker, however, ornamentation meant something more and different: the steady and ordered filling of the surface of the work with embellishment after embellishment of the same, yet bespoke, sculptural elements. There is no fury of genius here, but a fear of absence that is corporeally mediated by an overabundance worked from wood and habit. With each new carving, he seems to reiterate “this is worth my doing”. Repetition insists, that is obvious here, and this makes Junker’s an architecture of “holding in place” and “doing over”, one of faithfulness and abandon, one that, ultimately, tries to fill the space of the irreplaceable and thus knows itself justified. In doing so, his ornamentation both repeats and varies, because each repetition produces a difference, and their accumulation constructs combinations and structural patterns of referencing that satisfy a deeply-rooted need for continuity and safety in a house that, like no other, manifests the unrepeatable. The spatial reverberation of repetition is felt everywhere.<sup>16</sup> It propels the visitor up to a tiny attic room, the only one in which Junker actually lived.

In the architectural plan submitted for building permission, the staircase is the sole feature Junker “drew in by hand, that is to say, without a ruler” (Figure 7).<sup>17</sup> Its unusual curve “finds its preparation in the slanted shape of the vestibule”, but seems out of step with the otherwise symmetrical layout of the house.<sup>18</sup> What looks like wooden undergrowth houses the steps, and surrounding the staircase,

is a dense, nailed lattice-work of branches, sticks, and twigs, which turns and “turns on itself” as the stairs narrow and wind their way up to a ladder into the belvédère.<sup>19</sup> Where the curve forms little niches, shelving is integrated into a space that otherwise succeeds in blurring the line between wall and ceiling, creating a singular, cage-like space that appears increasingly menacing and impenetrable, even when flooded with light from a shaft above.

Figure 7. The Junkerhaus architectural plan.



Generally, Junker appears to favour the vertical over the horizontal, and when a staircase presents us with a choice, we know that “up” leads us to privacy and seclusion.<sup>20</sup> As if to celebrate this ascent, an enormous wooden chandelier hangs through an opening in the ceiling into the second floor hallway (Figure 8). A carpenter and woodcarver, Junker was trained to work the range from fitting a broom-stick to fashioning butterfly cases. The extent of his craftsmanship is displayed in a construction that covers the crude and the filigree without any inconsistency in style.

Figure 8. Wooden chandelier in the second floor hallway.



On the second floor, Junker never rested in his heavy bedstead (Figure 9), underneath which is preserved the original floor painting, and which (like most other architectural features) is solid and grounded in stasis with “struts ... [to] secure [such] exceptional stability” as appropriate for a settled existence.<sup>21</sup> Unwieldy wardrobes and chests, containing the unmovable, can bear the burden and make quite clear “this is where things stand”. The archaic nature of wood, the material with which Junker was so intimate, served his purpose well. An early critic, making the best of it, tells us: “Feverishly, he worked day and night at his joiner’s bench, lugged knobby branches, tree stumps, even entire tree trunks to his house on a small hand wagon.”<sup>22</sup> Another recounts that inside the Junkerhaus “[a]ll furniture [was] playground for knives and chisels”.<sup>23</sup>

Figure 9. Bedstead in the master bedroom.



The nails he used to hammer the ornamentation onto the surface, like succinct punctuation marks, have become part of Junker's architectural syntax. True, their use is fast and practical, but nails also leave lasting marks of a subtle violence that compounds the erotic nature of the poles with their bulbous carvings and enveloped polymorphic human figures (Figure 10). The desire here is so raw and naively sincere that it is deeply moving. It only expends itself in building up more of the same rough chisel work from inside. Despite opening his home for a small fee to outside visitors, simply to rush them through in a manner both grumpy and proud, the space is infused with such interiority and confinement, that this is no house of welcome. Rather, it is one of a radical and irreversible leave-taking into a petrified world, where severance is expressed in sculptural work that seems to reach for something beyond permanence.<sup>24</sup>

Figure 10. One of many wooden poles throughout the Junkerhaus.



The sheer amount of furniture handles, often indistinguishable from ornamentation, invites to reach and take hold of knobs you can close your fist around. It is but another small pleasure when the wood looks rough like bark, but is soft to the touch and drawers pull smoothly. A multitude of hooks and boards indicates that Junker insisted on a proper place for everything. To unburden

himself, shelves were installed on top of walls, overhead stretching from one wall to another, under table-tops, inside and attached to seating and beds, above and next to doors, and, perhaps most in keeping with Junker's aesthetic, in corners, those box-like spaces, half-open, half-closed, but never neglected. How could he ever have filled them all? It is clear only that the shelves themselves become part of the escalating web of "Stabornamentik", kept only just shy of dispersion, only just superable.

With rigour, Junker manages the grid by segmenting and centering with suspended knobs, while "lunettes", the light-coloured wall and ceiling paintings, soften the squares of the wood medallions with their arched frames and a style reminiscent of pointillism. In these, along with the creatures of myths and fables, he painted stereotypical men, women, and children, grouped as family, mother and child, or lovers, while embracing, sitting together, dancing, playing musical instruments, or drinking from goblets. Rather than their schematic faces, the viewer notices their disproportionate, overly long limbs, arms holding, reaching, or waving. These are all gestures that aim at narrowing distance and recall Junker's "window-view" painting; as before, recognisable as Junker himself, the dark-haired and dark-bearded man in the centre.

Befitting an artist with historicist tendencies, his work is conservative, backward-looking, and arrested in the past. The rigidity of the nailed lattice work, and the embossed mounting of struts and poles, mark the end of change and a disengagement from the present to a point that does not pass, "a past that does not pass by".<sup>25</sup> When you tread the same spot, repetition works itself out of memory; a memory which accumulation, in its turn, attempts to preserve. Besides, is not memory always space? If the Junkerhaus contains a remembrance "that belonged to a lost time", its "very materiality ... means that memory is not abandoned", that house and memory are "inevitably intertwined".<sup>26, 27, 28</sup> Perhaps it was only a potential one—an "it could have happened this way"—along with the pictures and furnishings that so often tell a family story, and the house, as it were, was built on the subjunctive.

How truthful, then, the sign in front of the house that from the 1950s to 1970s read, "Monument to an Unhappy Love".<sup>29</sup> However, regardless of what we know about Junker, we feel that the house contains far more than a guarded memory, but an inviolate secret whose force derives from a tightly controlled balance that rasps its own boundaries and exemplifies the necessity and totality of giving over. The legends that so readily attached themselves to this reclusive man (receiving a medal from the German Emperor, building for the mad Bavarian King Ludwig, or travelling to India) are poetry and feed from the fact that Junker left a house, along with hundreds of paintings, watercolours, drawings, sketches, gouaches, sculptures, and models, but no personal documents. The exception is two letters, only discovered in 1982, to a former Lemgo school mate: the first to announce his love and future prospects in Hamburg; the second to inform about his intentions to move to Munich.<sup>30, 31</sup> The two secret cabinets he hid behind the cassette panelling



of the staircase are empty today, as they should be. Without further commentary, Junker's work simply says "I existed once". His house could be nobody else's.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>For a detailed account of rejected projects see: Bernd Enke, "Biographische Anmerkungen zur Künstlerpersönlichkeit: Karl Junker (1850-1912)," in *Karl Junker und das Junkerhaus*, eds. Regina Fritsch and Jürgen Scheffler (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 2000), 15-17.

<sup>2</sup>"Between 1830 and 1914 about 120 'museum houses' were built in Europe, 40 in Munich alone, followed by 25 in Berlin, four each in London and Paris, three each in Vienna and Brussels. About one-fourth of these 'museum houses' were designed, like Junker's, by the artist himself. In no other city but Munich could Junker have had such intense exposure to what became his life's work ... During the 1870s and 1880s twelve 'museum houses' were built in Munich, for instance for Heß, Gedon, Seitz, Kaulbach, Defregger or Lenbach, to mention only the ones most known." See also Eckart Bergmann, "Das Junkerhaus als Künstlerhaus und Gesamtkunstwerk," in *Karl Junker und das Junkerhaus*, eds. Regina Fritsch and Jürgen Scheffler (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 2000), 129. All translations by the author.

<sup>3</sup>Jörg Katerndahl, "Karl Junker als Quelle Psychiatrischer Begutachtung nach dem Tod," in *Karl Junker und das Junkerhaus*, eds. Regina Fritsch and Jürgen Scheffler (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 2000), 101. This alleged quotation is first mentioned in Karl Meier, *Das schöne alte Lemgo* (Lemgo: Ernst Weege, 1927), 92.

<sup>4</sup>Joachim Huppelsberg, *Karl Junker. Architekt. Holzschnitzer. Maler. 1850-1912* (Lemgo: Wagener Verlagsgesellschaft, 1983), 39.

<sup>5</sup>All photographs by the author.

<sup>6</sup>For a detailed discussion of the model see: Jochen Georg Günzel, "Der Architekturmaler Karl Junker und der Zimmermeister Heinrich Schirneker: Ihre Anteile an Bauplan und Modell des Junkerhauses," in *Karl Junker und das Junkerhaus*, eds. Regina Fritsch and Jürgen Scheffler (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 2000), 22-26. See also: Wilhelm Salber, *Drehfiguren. Karl Junker. Maler. Architekt. Bildhauer* (Cologne: Walter König, 1978), 24; Klaus Peter Schulmann, "Karl Junker – ein Lemgoer Künstler Zwischen Impressionismus, Jugendstil und Expressionismus," in *800 Jahre Lemgo. Aspekte der Stadtgeschichte*, eds. Peter Johaneck and Herbert Stöwer (Lemgo: Wagener Verlagsgesellschaft, 1990), 518. For an animated visual presentation see *Das Junkerhaus Lemgo*, directed by Hermann-Josef Höper (Landschaftsverband Westfalen-Lippe, 2004), DVD.

<sup>7</sup>Regina Fritsch was the first to use the image "as if this 'furniture' were growing out of the wall" in "Truhe, Schrank und Bett. Zur Funktionalität und Künstlerischen Gestaltung der Möbel von Karl Junker," *Karl Junker und das*

*Junkerhaus*, eds. Regina Fritsch and Jürgen Scheffler (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 2000), 58. Junker's Hanover gallerist, Herbert von Garvens, his only true supporter and promoter, commented that Junker "feels the trees grow" and that for him "everything turned into (a) growing-out-of." See Jan Ochalski, "Karl Junker (1850-1912). Biographie eines Universalkünstlers unter Berücksichtigung der Malerei," (PhD diss., University of Bochum, 1998), 157.

<sup>8</sup>Stefan Mischer, "Das Heim als Heiligtum: das Junkerhaus im Spannungsfeld Zwischen Nationalromantik and Christlicher Erneuerungsbewegung" (PhD diss., University of Hamburg, 1998), 64.

<sup>9</sup>These are an etching by Walter Steineke from 1910, which depicts him painting, and a postcard, between 1895 and 1912, which shows him with the Junkerhaus model. For a representation of the etching see Enke, "Biographische Anmerkungen," 18. The postcard is shown in the *Junkerhaus* DVD cited above.

<sup>10</sup>Wolfram Bangen speaks to Junker's practice of recycling in "Grußworte und Ansprachen zur Eröffnung des Junkerhauses am 11. 9. 2004," accessed October 10, 2010, [http://www.junkerhaus.de/ansprache\\_bangen.pdf](http://www.junkerhaus.de/ansprache_bangen.pdf), 4.

<sup>11</sup>John MacGregor first took note of this preoccupation with trees in "Karl Junker: Das Unheimliche als Haus," in *Karl Junker und das Junkerhaus*, eds. Regina Fritsch and Jürgen Scheffler (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 2000), 197-98. Peter Gorsen, in "Karl Junker, 1950-1912. Das Haus in Lemgo," in *Kunst und Wahn*, eds. Ingrid Brugger, Peter Gorsen and Klaus Albrecht Schröder (Cologne: DuMont, 1997), 288, speaks of 'portraits' (rather than 'nature studies') of trunks, stumps, and roots that took anthropomorphic forms. Ochalski dedicates an entire chapter, "Landscapes and Nature Studies" to the representation of trees. See also "Karl Junker (1850-1912)," 144-60.

<sup>12</sup>Mischer, "Das Heim als Heiligtum," 63.

<sup>13</sup>Karl Meier uses 'Buckel-, and ,Warzenstil' in "Ein gespenstisches Haus. Das Junkerhaus in Lemgo – Eine Bauschöpfung ohne Vergleich," *Westfalen im Bild* 9(10), (1935): 12.

<sup>14</sup>Bergmann uses 'Knorpelstil' and 'Stabornamentik' in "Das Junkerhaus als Künstlerhaus und Gesamtkunstwerk," 131.

<sup>15</sup>Salber, *Drehfiguren*, 52.

<sup>16</sup>Gilles Deleuze, in *Difference and Repetition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), has long since established that "(d)ifference inhabits repetition" (76).

<sup>17</sup>Günzel, "Der Architekturmaler Karl Junker," 27.

<sup>18</sup>Bergmann, "Das Junkerhaus als Künstlerhaus," 134.

<sup>19</sup>Salber, *Drehfiguren*, 46.

<sup>20</sup>Huppelsberg, in *Karl Junker. Architekt. Holzschnitzer*, 31, points to the rigid vertical structuring in many of Junker's paintings.

<sup>21</sup>Fritsch, "Truhe, Schrank und Bett," 56.

<sup>22</sup>Gerhard Kreyenberg, "Das Junkerhaus in Lemgo i.L. Ein Beitrag zur Bildnerie der Schizophrenen," *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Neurologie und Psychiatrie* 114 (1928): 154.

<sup>23</sup>Meier, “Ein gespenstisches Haus,” 12.

<sup>24</sup>Both Enke, in “Biographische Anmerkungen,” 19, and Kreyenberg, in “Das Junkerhaus in Lemgo,” 170, give accounts of this practice.

<sup>25</sup>Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 60.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Tom Cresswell, *Place. A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 83.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 85.

<sup>29</sup>Günzel, “Der Architekturmaler Karl Junker,” 42.

<sup>30</sup>Enke, “Biographische Anmerkungen,” 20.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid, 16.

## Bibliography

Bangen, Wolfram, “Grußworte und Ansprachen zur Eröffnung des Museums Junkerhaus am 11. 9. 2004,” accessed October 10, 2010 [http://www.junkerhaus.de/ansprache\\_bangen.pdf](http://www.junkerhaus.de/ansprache_bangen.pdf) .

Bergmann, Eckard. “Das Junkerhaus als Künstlerhaus und Gesamtkunstwerk.” in *Karl Junker und das Junkerhaus*, eds. Regina Fritsch and Jürgen Scheffler (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 2000), 127-49.

Cresswell, Tom, *Place. A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).

Deleuze, Gilles, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

Enke, Bernd, “Biographische Anmerkungen zur Künstlerpersönlichkeit: Karl Junker (1850-1912),” in *Karl Junker und das Junkerhaus*, eds. Regina Fritsch and Jürgen Scheffler (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 2000), 13-20.

Fritsch, Regina, “Truhe, Schrank und Bett. Zur Funktionalität und Künstlerischen Gestaltung der Möbel von Karl Junker,” in *Karl Junker und das Junkerhaus*, eds. Regina Fritsch and Jürgen Scheffler (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 2000), 49-60.

Gorsen, Peter, “Karl Junker, 1850-1912. Das Haus in Lemgo,” in *Kunst und Wahn*, eds. Ingrid Brugger, Peter Gorsen and Klaus Albrecht Schröder (Cologne: DuMont, 1997), 283-89.

Günzel, Georg, “Der Architekturmaler Karl Junker und der Zimmermeister Heinrich Schirneker: Ihre Anteile an Bauplan und Modell des Junkerhauses,” in *Karl Junker und das Junkerhaus*, eds. Regina Fritsch and Jürgen Scheffler (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 2000), 21-48.

Höper, Hermann-Josef (Director), *Das Junkerhaus Lemgo* (Landschaftsverband Westfalen-Lippe, 2004), DVD.

Huppelsberg, Joachim, *Karl Junker. Architekt. Holzschnitzer. Maler. 1850-1912* (Lemgo: Wagener Verlagsgesellschaft, 1983).

Katerndahl, Jörg, “Karl Junker als Quelle Psychiatrischer Begutachtung nach dem Tod,” in *Karl Junker und das Junkerhaus*, eds. Regina Fritsch and Jürgen Scheffler (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 2000), 93-108.

Kreyenberg, Gerhard, “Das Junkerhaus,” in Lemgo i.L. Ein Beitrag zur Bildnerei der Schizophrenen, “*Zeitschrift für die gesamte Neurologie und Psychiatrie* 114 (1928):152-72.

Kristeva, Julia, *Black Sun*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

MacGregor, John M, “Karl Junker: Das Unheimliche als Haus,” in *Karl Junker und das Junkerhaus*, eds. Regina Fritsch and Jürgen Scheffler (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 2000), 193-224.

Meier, Karl, *Das schöne alte Lemgo* (Lemgo: Ernst Weege, 1927).

Meier, Karl, “Ein gespenstisches Haus. Das Junkerhaus in Lemgo,” *Westfalen im Bild* 9(10), (1935): 12-13.

Mischer, Stefan, “Das Heim als Heiligtum: Das Junkerhaus im Spannungsfeld Zwischen Nationalromantik und Christlicher Erneuerungsbewegung,” (PhD diss., University of Hamburg, 1998).

Ochalski, Jan, “Karl Junker (1850-1912). Biographie eines Universalkünstlers unter Berücksichtigung der Malerei,” (PhD diss., University of Bochum, 1995).

Salber, Wilhelm, *Drehfiguren. Karl Junker. Maler. Architekt. Bildhauer* (Cologne: Walter König, 1978).

Schulmann, Klaus Peter. “Karl Junker – ein Lemgoer Künstler Zwischen Impressionismus, Jugendstil und Expressionismus,” in *800 Jahre Lemgo. Aspekte der Stadtgeschichte*, eds. Peter Johanek and Herbert Stöwer (Lemgo: Wagener Verlagsgesellschaft, 1990), 509-37.

### Biographical note

Anne-Kathrin Wielgosz teaches cross-disciplinary courses in language and literature at Walsh University in the U.S. Her long-standing interest in the semiotics of spatial structures dates back to her work as language and writing liaison in architecture.

Email: awielgosz@walsh.edu

4.

---

## NATIONAL IDENTITY

---

# Whiteout: An Examination of the Material Culture of Remembrance and Identity Generated Between New Zealand and Antarctica

Peter Wood

---

## Whiteout: An Examination of the Material Culture of Remembrance and Identity Generated Between New Zealand and Antarctica

Peter Wood

---

### Abstract

This article examines the cultural artefacts of memory that have been produced as a result of New Zealand's ongoing participation in the exploration of Antarctica. In this research I define two classes of Antarctic memory-making. The first is composed of geographically located artefacts directly associated with New Zealand's physical participation in South Pole exploration. The second class posits representational interpretations of Antarctica as sites of cultural "meaningfulness" to New Zealand's identity. Both categories are defined chronologically by the Antarctic Treaty (1959), which sought to protect objects of "historical interest" from damage or destruction while prohibiting the addition of other permanent artefacts. I suggest that one unforeseen outcome of the Antarctic Treaty was the creation of two states of memory: one of authentic history dating from before 1959, and another of documentary history (requiring representational interpretation), which has occurred since that time. The best examples of the former are the rudimentary huts which remain from the so-called "heroic period" of Antarctic exploration. An excellent example of the latter is found in the Artists to Antarctica programme in which selected New Zealand artists—writers, visual artists and musicians—have the opportunity to visit and record their views of the region's unique qualities. In two parts I give some critical consideration to each memory state using specific examples, and discuss the implications they present. Finally, the article introduces what I consider an "illegitimate" monumentality in the example of Air New Zealand Flight TE-901 (which tragically collided with Mount Erebus in 1979), and which lies uneasily between historical and documentary classifications of memory.

Keywords: Antarctica, explorer huts, monumentality, architectural nationalism

Françoise Choay has written that the “monument” reveals itself as an object whose function is to “make us remember”.<sup>1</sup> From this Latin origin, a monument is not simply a reminder, a pointer to some past event. It operates first as a warning taken from the past and into the future.<sup>2</sup> This is first self-evident in the example of nationalism. The New Zealand landscape is littered with war memorials that, in reminding us of the loss of life suffered in violence, also show us what is at stake in future conflicts. In other examples of monumentality, warning presents itself through postscript. The classical ruins of Europe stand as a testament to the passage of empires, as do empty houses in New Zealand’s small towns during economic downturn. Our most everyday monument is the cemetery headstone, but what warning are we to take from this prosaic and universal standard: that death finds us all? A visitor to the historic Karori cemetery in Wellington may well ask even more of the past’s lessons when facing the grave of Harry McNish, which features a bronze cat reclining on its surface. McNish was the ship’s carpenter on Sir Ernest Shackleton’s doomed Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition (1914-1917). He was also the custodian of a cat named “Mrs Chippy”, which he had smuggled on board. After the loss of their ship, ironically named *Endurance*, McNish was instrumental in ensuring the seaworthiness of the small boats that eventually lead to Shackleton making the islands of South Georgia in an extraordinary sea voyage of 800 miles. However, long before then, Shackleton had ordered Mrs Chippy be destroyed because, in his view, the animal had no chance of survival. McNish never forgave Shackleton for having the cat killed. Shackleton, in turn, denied McNish a Polar Medal, despite the carpenter being integral to the party’s survival.

McNish died destitute in 1930, and his grave remained unmarked for almost 30 years until the New Zealand Antarctic Society erected a headstone in 1959. In 2004, the New Zealand Antarctic Society added a life-sized bronze sculpture of Mrs Chippy to the grave. Visiting today, one might imagine it to be the grave of a man with a special relationship with this particular cat and one would not be wrong. However, this only hints at the scale of history hidden in this diminutive scene. In the face of the monumental mythology of Shackleton’s escape from Antarctica, McNish’s grave is a fitting tribute to the pain of personal sacrifice that lives long after the heat of heroics has gone.

McNish’s grave is a part of the material culture of Antarctica and, like many other examples, it is also a notable part of New Zealand’s cultural and historic fabric. In this article I discuss other examples of this country’s ongoing participation in the geographic, scientific, and cultural exploration of the region. I begin by establishing two classes of Antarctic memory-making. The first is composed of geographically located artefacts directly associated with New Zealand’s actual participation in Antarctic exploration. The second consists of representational interpretations of Antarctica that present it as a site of cultural meaningfulness to the New Zealand identity. These two categories are defined chronologically by the Antarctic Treaty, which sought to protect objects of “historical interest” from damage or destruction, while prohibiting the addition of other permanent artefacts.



Unfortunately, one unforeseen outcome of the Antarctic Treaty was the creation of two states of memory: one of “authentic” history dating from before 1959, and another of documentary, which requires representational interpretation and has occurred since that time. The best examples of the former are the rudimentary huts, which remain from the so-called “heroic period” of Antarctic exploration. An excellent example of the latter is found in the Artists to Antarctica programme in which selected New Zealand artists—writers, visual artists and musicians—have the opportunity to visit and record their views of the region’s unique qualities.

I will first give some critical consideration to each memory state using specific examples, and then discuss the implications they present. Finally, the article will briefly examine an example of what I consider to be an “illegitimate” monumentality in the example of Air New Zealand Flight TE-901, which tragically collided with Mount Erebus in 1979, killing all 257 on board. The recent date of the event, and the sensitive nature of the site, means that it falls into a state not authenticated by the Antarctic Treaty and not available to documentary. It is an alien intrusion in a landscape that has been, and still is, defined by concepts of natural wilderness. Nonetheless, this flight plays its own significant role in the construction of New Zealand’s national narrative, and the place of the New Zealander in the Antarctic.

Despite our obvious southern association, the relationship with Antarctica should not be taken for granted. That it is significantly greater in size than New Zealand’s domestic landmass makes a case for ownership more surprising, and is due in large part to this country’s geographic proximity as the closest outpost of the British Empire to this section of the continent when the first round of division occurred in 1923. The signing of the Antarctic Treaty Agreement in 1959 ratified New Zealand’s ballot in what remains, at least passively, contested territory.<sup>3</sup> This Agreement also bestowed upon this country responsibility for the heritage artefacts left behind by the “heroic period” explorations of 1901-1920, prominent amongst which are the explorer huts of the expeditions led by Robert Falcon Scott and Shackleton.

### Part 1 – The explorer huts

*Cool! Wow! Beautiful! Awesome!*<sup>4</sup>

These short words, punctuated with four exclamation marks, were liberated by poet, Bill Manhire, from the visitors’ book at Shackleton’s Cape Evans hut for his own collection, *Visiting Mr Shackleton (for Chris Cochran)*. It is not clear whether we should take such abridged feedback as a failure of words, or a failure of vocabulary. Perhaps we should marvel that an isolated shack, built a century ago as temporary accommodation in an inhospitable and largely unapproachable region, has a visitors’ book at all.

Ironically, it is probably the neglect of these huts that has assured their longevity. In 1956, United States explorer, Richard Byrd, found Scott’s Discovery

Figure 1. The hut at Cape Adare in the Antarctic, built by the “Southern Cross” party in 1896. 1901-1904. Photographer unidentified. Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand. Ref. F-51719-1/2.



Hut appearing as if it had only recently been abandoned: “The timbers looked as if freshly sawn.”<sup>5</sup> Abandoned cabin biscuits were sampled and found to be edible, if rather tasteless. Wax matches lit cleanly, and nails from a broken barrel had not rusted. While the hut could not be entered because of ice intrusion, the disarray of human detritus surrounding the huts was commented upon, and a variety of artefacts were removed as souvenirs.<sup>6</sup>

From this re-discovery every contact with the huts reinforced their historic value as monuments to a period in Antarctic exploration marked by tragedy and heroics. However, on this continent the absence of occupation elevates all artefacts to monumental status as proof of human resilience. Yet, this same logic means that nothing ever leaves behind its utilitarianism enough to become fully monumental. After his 1907-1909 expedition, Shackleton left supplies in the Cape Royds hut, writing later that: “The vicissitudes of life in the Antarctic are such that such a supply might prove of the greatest value to some future expedition.”<sup>7</sup> Attempts at restoration in the 1960s took this theme quite literally and sought to return the huts to the moment when the explorers left, locking the door, but leaving the key for others.<sup>8</sup>

In the summer of 1964-1965 structural strengthening of the hut at Hut Point was completed with the restoration team having arranged “... the stores and equipment in the most effective way possible” to recreate a domestic sphere from the past.<sup>9</sup> These first attempts at historical conservation owed a great deal to the historic shadow cast by the early explorers. Quartermain records the team returning discarded “relics” to what they felt were their correct places in the huts in order “... to make the hut look as far as possible as it had done when occupied by the pioneers”.<sup>10</sup>

What had been left behind as survival shelters by one generation were uncovered as historic monuments by another. The awe that saturated this invention is apparent in comments written by Frank Ponder, the New Zealand

Government architect who oversaw the design of Scott Base. He recalled in his memoirs: “These places were a shrine to their memory ... I was overcome by the importance of maintaining these buildings as a monument to the explorers, pioneering spirit, bravery and endeavour.”<sup>11</sup>

Ponder’s romantic nationalistic view of Antarctic exploration sets the scene for New Zealand’s subsequent approach to restoration and conservation. The explorations of Scott and Shackleton may not have been New Zealand initiatives, but through associations of empire and locality New Zealanders are implicated in the history of Antarctica, and have inherited a responsibility toward the material evidence of exploration.

While there is no question that these rudimentary shelters are important historic sites, the issue of restoration and preservation of the huts reveals a conflict between conventional building heritage conservation and the protection of crude dwellings built in the most barren environment on the planet. These huts were not conceived of as enduring monuments. While they are deteriorating as a result of climate and activity, the reality is that they were never built for anything other than as a respite against the elements for a very brief moment in Antarctic history. Despite originally being considered a temporary contingency, the huts have actually lasted exceedingly well in the extremes of the southern continent.

All the historic sites in the Antarctic region are governed by the provisions of the Antarctic Treaty of 1959, the same year the New Zealand Antarctic Society recognised Harry McNish. This Agreement requires governments to “adopt all adequate measures to protect such tombs, buildings or objects of historical interest from damage or destruction”.<sup>12</sup> However, nationalistic competition over Antarctica and its resources has elevated almost all evidence of human occupation in this environment to the status of artefact. The nature of monuments at isolated locations is itself a suspect exercise given that the Treaty’s Annex of Historic Monuments includes a heavy tractor left by the USSR at Vostok Station, the abandoned installations of the Argentine Station, General San Martin, and a “concrete monolith” erected by the Chilean government as a point of reference for hydrographical work.<sup>13</sup>

Monuments are evidence of nationalistic ownership even as they stand as stark symbols of the failures of Western progress to dominate in this region. This language of monumentality is at odds with the monumental traditions of Europe. The great Gothic revivalist, Augustine Pugin, saw the Western monument as defined by a strict contrast with the evidence of industrial and cultural progress, and he designed accordingly.<sup>14</sup> However, the monuments of Antarctica, and especially the explorer huts, are afforded monumental status on the basis that they stand distinct from their surroundings. In representing the extent of civilised occupation in a continent otherwise inhospitable to human life, they also signal a failure of Western progress to productively occupy this site. It is for this reason that pieces of utilitarian machinery (which is the typological role played by the huts) can gain monumental significance. They embody the failure of conquest, and although they depart dramatically from normalised architectural heritage they

nonetheless represent, in imperial terms, a proprietary investment.

Ownership is the reason why preservation of the Antarctic huts is such an important issue. Unlike conventional heritage culture, what is at stake here is not ownership of the architectural artefact but the power of this artefact to claim possession of its environment, particularly those environments with a claim. As Geoffrey Bennington has argued, a concept of nation cannot exist outside of those narrative structures that construct it.<sup>15</sup> This is the difference between a hut and a tractor. Architecture, however rudimentary, will always display these stories of human occupation more poignantly than a tractor, if only because it can throw the weight of human history behind its gesture.

The paradox is that this acknowledgement of the failure of Western conquest allows the prosaic and banal to take on monumental qualities. Placed against the background of industrialised Europe, any symbolic significance attached to a primitive or mechanical form would be immediately overwhelmed by a more tangible artefact of human occupation, in particular the cathedral. Here, significance is built upon failure, and not success, but it does serve Choay's requirement that heritage enterprises maintain *valorization*. However, as she explains, this word refers not only to intellectual and spiritual values but also those economic values that valorization offers.<sup>16</sup>

Scott and Shackleton saw these diminutive dwellings in fond, but otherwise pragmatic, terms. They were a means to an end. Today that end has shifted from geographic exploration for political purposes to scientific exploration, which leads inevitably to economic purposes. The immediate example of this practice is the rise in Antarctic tourism in which the huts play a key symbolic role as pilgrimage destinations in a broader wilderness experience. This elevates the historic prominence of the huts, but visitors are also a destructive factor working against long-term historical preservation. Moisture from the breath of visitors is contributing to the deterioration of the hut interiors. Every utterance of "Cool!", "Wow!", and "Awesome" is nothing less than a biological attack on the material integrity of these memory containers.

Figure 2. Captain Robert Falcon Scott at a table writing in his den in Antarctica, 7 October 1911. Photographer: Herbert George Ponting. Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand. Scott Album. PAColl-5011 Ref. F-11384-1/2.



## Part 2 – Photographic records

*It stinks of blubber. It's cold and it's dark and it's godforsaken.*<sup>17</sup>

Thoughts of biological warfare were probably not on the mind of photographer, Jane Ussher, during the time spent photographing in the Antarctic huts. Columnist, Steve Braunias, describes meeting Ussher at Scott Base, feral and delirious, raving about “the huts, the huts”.<sup>18</sup> The images she recorded are the central element of a book, *Still Life*, which provides the most detailed photographic documentary of these huts. Herbert Ponting first pointed his camera lens at his colleagues in 1910. Ussher visited at the invitation of the Antarctic Heritage Trust, with the express purpose of recording the expedition huts of Scott and Shackleton. Ussher’s images can be imagined as a kind of architectural portraiture.

Comparing Ussher to Ponting serves to contrast the differences between them. Ponting’s photographs are images from history; Ussher’s are, as she indicates in the title of her book, images that make things history. Or, as Braunias describes her work, Ussher has “... lit beauty. She’s framed melancholy. She’s exposed still death”. To give Braunias’s comment a context, one needs to know that his view of Antarctica is refreshingly unflattering. Of his experience he says, “Everything about Antarctica was a monument to death”.<sup>19</sup> The huts, too, are in his view just another monument to death. This view comes closest to what it might have actually been like to have visited this place 100 years ago. Against Ponting’s hero worship, Braunias sees old-fashioned hardship. Harry McNish wrote frequently in his journal of the misery of having piles. Not a heroic notation, but it is one consistent with the grimy wretchedness recorded by Ponting.

Ponting’s iconic portrait of Shackleton working at his desk in the Cape Evans hut (c.1911) may be viewed as a scene of civility. Until, that is, one understands

that the books, photographs, the smoking pipes, are all that pass for human activity in this place. There is nothing of civilisation outside the image. There is nothing at all outside the image Ponting gives us. Ussher's images are different. They are, to understate it even, beautiful photographs, but this is not necessarily a compliment. Beauty, writes architectural theorist, Mark Cousins, is used as a way of turning from ugliness. Ussher draws out of the decomposing penguins and corroded cans of food beautiful images of ugly things.

In discussing exploration of the Antarctic during the nineteenth century, Francis Spufford has suggested that the concept of the sublime, espoused by writers such as Edmund Burke in the eighteenth century, provided Victorian travellers with a ready-made paradigm for understanding their experiences. In buildings, Burke saw greatness of dimension as the defining characteristic of the sublime, but in the Antarctic buildings contract in a spectacular way against the vastness of wilderness. The effect is to create two sublimities: a timeless continental sublime outside the hut, and an historic domestic sublime inside the hut. This is why the painstaking detail in Ussher's photographs is so important. The infinity of detail in these interiors becomes a sublime world contained within another greater sublimity. However, in their exacting attention to light and resolution they also whisper that something is wrong.

In 1985, Chris Burden, an American conceptual artist, built a gallery installation called *SAMSON*, in which a 100-ton jack, connected by gearbox to a turnstile, exerted pressure on the gallery walls. Every time a visitor passed through the turnstile a small increase in extension was transmitted to the jack, thus increasing the outward pressure on the walls. Each individual movement of the jack was imperceptible, but the combined impact contained the potential for catastrophe. Burden's dealer described this slow inevitability as being like that of a glacier.<sup>20</sup> Ussher's photographs remind me of *SAMSON*. I see in them a similar inevitability, although I am not sure that this was Ussher's intention. The glacial analogy given to *SAMSON* represents that the destructive weight of imperceptible entropy has a literalness and poignancy in Antarctica that seeks to own it as a turn of phrase.

I imagine the photographer leaning over her tripod, checking aperture and adjusting focus, all the time oblivious to her own breathing which is inching an entropic jack forward one foggy exhalation after the next, and all in the interests of preservation.

### Part 3 – Flight TE-901

*An orchestrated litany of lies.*<sup>21</sup>

Just before 8.30 am (NZDT) on 28 November, 1979, Air New Zealand Flight TE-901 lifted off from Mangere airport in Auckland on an 11-hour sightseeing round-trip that was to return to Auckland. At 12.49 pm (NZST) it collided with Mount Erebus, an active volcano in Antarctica. The specific cause of Flight TE-901's loss was a

typing error 14 months prior that led to a low-level flight plan being superimposed over the 3,794-metre peak of Erebus.<sup>22</sup> Flying in whiteout conditions, the pilots would never have seen the mountain approaching. An unchecked typo and, over a year later, 257 people died in New Zealand's worst civilian disaster.

The promotional ephemera Air New Zealand produced for its Antarctic "day trips" emphasised the opportunity to "look down on the lonely land of Scott, Shackleton and Byrd, and their explorer-scientist successors".<sup>23</sup> We should not forget, however, that this was a commercial tourism venture driven by economic demands in an environment with a history for being unforgiving to ambition.

Understandably, this tragedy has a prominent place in the national memory of New Zealanders, but it differs from other tragic shadows cast across our collective psyche in two significant ways. First, unlike the Tangiwai rail accident (1953) or the Napier earthquake (1931), Flight TE-901 was a national incident that did not take place inside our national borders. Secondly, and again in contrast to comparable events (including the *Wahine* sinking, of 1968), Erebus was not a natural disaster. It may have occurred in as natural an environment as one might imagine, but it was a tragedy of human error. These paradoxes extend to the present day. The crash site has become a sacred place of memory, but it is one at odds with the Antarctic Treaty which classifies aircraft wreckage as an unwelcome intrusion. At the same time, the Erebus disaster is within living memory, so the associations are still too raw to lend themselves to artistic interpretation.

The wreckage of Flight TE-901 remains in-situ on Mount Erebus, with parts of it becoming visible during warm periods when the snow recedes. This is not a monument in any traditional sense. We are not at liberty to walk through the physical remnants of this event like the marble ruins of a civilisation, witnessing for ourselves the evidence of failed aspirations. Unlike Gallipoli, Erebus will not become a place of pilgrimage, nor a right of nationalistic passage. It is removed from any immediacy of place.

Of the 257 onboard the flight, 200 were New Zealanders.<sup>24</sup> This bleak statistic means that more New Zealanders have died in Antarctica than any other nationality. This, one could argue, gives New Zealand a peculiar stake in the region. Where other nationalities might see a potential holding, this country already has a historic relationship of hardship and sacrifice found in the lives of men like Harry McNish. Just as we are, in some small way, defined by Antarctica, so it is by us in a mutual recognition. Sir Edmund Hillary was to have been on the flight before other commitments forced his withdrawal. The heroic figure of Hillary is an interesting foil. There was no opportunity for heroics onboard Flight TE-901. One moment it was a routine flight, the next it was gone. The heroes of the flight were found in the aftermath of the tragedy (arriving as police, military, and civilian personnel tasked with collecting and identifying the remains of the crew and passengers), and in the personage of Justice Peter Mahon, whose one-man Royal Commission of Inquiry cleared the flight crew from error.

## Conclusion

As a geographically and historically significant locality the crash site of Flight TE-901 holds a special meaning to New Zealanders, but what does it mean to consider it a national monument? Unlike the explorer huts it arrived too late, and too pointlessly, to operate as a symbol of empire building. At the same time, the ordinances of the Antarctic Treaty classify it as alien in what that document defends as a pristine wilderness. The wreckage of the flight is an illegitimate presence that refuses to be removed, either literally or figuratively, and it persists as a particular type of container for holding national memory. Phenomenologist, Gaston Bachelard, wrote that a casket contains things that are unforgettable to us: “The past, the present and a future are concentrated inside. In this way the casket becomes the memory of time immemorial.”<sup>25</sup> The image of the casket runs through these Antarctic monuments, from the remote isolation of a hut, to the oppressive detail in a photographic study, and the spatial configuration of an aeroplane fuselage. Each, in its own way, is a funerary monument as life gives way to the spectacle of *nature morte*. After all, isn’t it the case that memory needs to be frozen in time and place?

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Francoise Choay, “Alberti: The Invention of Monumentality and Memory,” *The Harvard Architectural Review* 4 Spring (1984): 99.

<sup>2</sup>Choay, “Alberti,” 99.

<sup>3</sup>A complete account of how New Zealand came to be a claimant state in the division of Antarctica can be found in Malcolm Templeton, *A Wise Adventure: New Zealand & Antarctica 1920-1960* (Wellington, Victoria University Press, 2000).

<sup>4</sup>Manhire, Bill ed., *The Wide White Page* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2004): 298.

<sup>5</sup>Byrd quoted in L.B. Quartermain, *Two Huts in the Antarctic* (Wellington: Antarctic Division New Zealand Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, 1963): 64.

<sup>6</sup>According to Quartermain the 1947 party found a copper tube containing a piece of ruled paper bearing the names Mackintosh, Hayward, and Spencer-Smith, and some inaccurately remembered lines of poetry by Browning. They also removed a sledge, which is now lodged in the Navy Academy Museum at Annapolis. Similarly the 1947-1948 group removed artefacts including a typed letter whose present location is not known. It should be considered likely that other artefacts were removed by the navy personnel and not declared. Quartermain, “Two Huts,” 64.

<sup>7</sup>Ernest Shackleton, *The Heart of the Antarctic: Being the Story of the British Antarctic Expedition, 1907-1909* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, Inc., 1999).

<sup>8</sup>“The hut was locked up and the key hung up outside where it would be easily found, and we readjusted the lashing of the hut so that it might be able to withstand the



attacks of the blizzards during the years to come. ... If any party has to make use of our hut in the future, it will find there everything that it requires.” Shackleton, “The Heart of the Antarctic,” 443-44.

<sup>9</sup>L.B. Quartermain, *New Zealand and the Antarctic* (Wellington: A.R. Shearer, Government Printer, 1971): 228.

<sup>10</sup>Quartermain, “New Zealand,” 228.

<sup>11</sup>Frank W Ponder, *A Man from the Ministry* (Christchurch: Wenlock House, 1996): 127.

<sup>12</sup>“Antarctic Treaty Recommendations 2.6.2, I-IX Historic Sites (January 2005),” accessed November 5, 2010, [www.anta.canterbury.ac.nz/resources/handbook/vol2/2-6.html](http://www.anta.canterbury.ac.nz/resources/handbook/vol2/2-6.html)

<sup>13</sup>Antarctic Treaty, *Handbook of Measures in Furtherance of the Principles and Objectives of the Antarctic Treaty* (Canberra: Department of Foreign Affairs, 1983).

<sup>14</sup>A.W.N. Pugin, *Contrasts: Or, a Parallel between the Noble Edifices of the Middle Ages, and Similar Buildings of the Present Day* (New York: Leicester University Press, 1836; 1969 ed.).

<sup>15</sup>“We undoubtedly find narration at the centre of nation: stories of national origins, myths of founding fathers, genealogies of heroes. At the origin of the nation, we find a story of the nation’s origin,” quoted in Geoffrey Bennington, “Postal Politics and the Institution of the Nation,” in ed. H.K. Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990): 121.

<sup>16</sup>Choay, “Alberti,” 143.

<sup>17</sup>Steve Braunias, “Hut Valley,” *Sunday Star\*Times Magazine* (14 November 2010) 46.

<sup>18</sup>Braunias, “Hut Valley,” 46.

<sup>19</sup>Braunias, “Hut Valley,” 46.

<sup>20</sup>Zwirner & Wirth, *Chris Burden: Early Work* (14 September – 23 October 2004), accessed December 4, 2010, [www.zwirnerandwirth.com/exhibition/2004/090burden/press.html](http://www.zwirnerandwirth.com/exhibition/2004/090burden/press.html)

<sup>21</sup>Peter Mahon, *Report of the Royal Commission to Inquire into the Crash on Mount Erebus, Antarctica of a DC10 Aircraft Operated by Air New Zealand Ltd, 1981* (Wellington: Government Printer, 1981): para 377.

<sup>22</sup>New Zealand History online, “Timeline to Disaster – Erebus Disaster,” accessed November 16, 2011, <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/culture/erebus-disaster/crash-of-flight-901>

<sup>23</sup>Christchurch City Libraries, “New Zealand Disasters: Aircraft Accident: DC 10 ZK-NZP Flight 901,” accessed November 25, 2010 <http://christchurchcitylibraries.com/kids/nzdisasters/erebus.asp>

<sup>24</sup>The other nationalities were composed of 24 Japanese, 22 Americans, six British, two Canadians, one Australian, one French, and one Swiss. The Erebus Story “Roll of Remembrance,” accessed November 15, 2011, <http://www.erebus.co.nz/MemorialandAwards/RollofRemembrance.aspx>

<sup>25</sup>Gaston Bachelard, “Chest and Casket,” *Daidalos* 53 (1994): 57.

## Bibliography

- Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station, “Air New Zealand DC-10 Crash into Mt Erebus,” accessed December 10, 2010, <http://southpolestation.com/trivia/history/te901.html>
- Antarctic Treaty, *Handbook of Measures in Furtherance of the Principles and Objectives of the Antarctic Treaty* (Canberra: Department of Foreign Affairs, 1983).
- “Antarctic Treaty Recommendations, I-IX Historic Sites (January 2005),” accessed November 5, 2010, [www.anta.canterbury.ac.nz/resources/handbook/vol2/2-6.html](http://www.anta.canterbury.ac.nz/resources/handbook/vol2/2-6.html)
- Bachelard, Gaston, “Chest and Casket,” *Daidalos* 53 (1994): 56-57.
- Bennington, Geoffrey, “Postal Politics and the Institution of the Nation,” in *Nation and Narration*, ed. H.K. Bhabha (London and New York: Routledge, 1990): 121-37.
- Braunias, Steve, “Hut Valley,” *Sunday Star\*Times Magazine* (14 November 2010): 46.
- Choay, Françoise, “Alberti: The Invention of Monumentality and Memory,” *The Harvard Architectural Review* 4 Spring (1984): 99-105.
- Christchurch City Libraries, “New Zealand Disasters: Aircraft Accident: DC 10 ZK-NZP Flight 901,” accessed November 25, 2010, <http://christchurchcitylibraries.com/kids/nzdisasters/erebus.asp>
- Mahon, Peter, *Report of the Royal Commission to Inquire into the Crash on Mount Erebus, Antarctica of a DC10 Aircraft Operated by Air New Zealand Ltd, 1981* (Wellington: Government Printer, 1981).
- Manhire, Bill ed., *The Wide White Page* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2004).
- New Zealand History Online, “Timeline to Disaster – Erebus Disaster,” accessed November 16, 2011, <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/culture/erebus-disaster/crash-of-flight-901>
- Ponder, Frank W., *A Man from the Ministry* (Christchurch: Wenlock House, 1996).
- Pugin, A.W.N., *Contrasts: Or, a Parallel Between the Noble Edifices of the Middle Ages, and Similar Buildings of the Present Day* (New York: Leicester University Press, 1836; 1969 ed.).
- Quartermain, L.B., *Two Huts in the Antarctic* (Wellington: Antarctic Division New Zealand Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, 1963).
- Quartermain, L.B., *New Zealand and the Antarctic* (Wellington: A.R. Shearer, Government Printer, 1971).

Shackleton, Ernest, *The Heart of the Antarctic: Being the Story of the British Antarctic Expedition, 1907-1909* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, Inc., 1999).

Templeton, Malcolm, *A Wise Adventure: New Zealand & Antarctica 1920-1960* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2000).

The Erebus Story “Roll of Remembrance,” accessed November 15, 2011, <http://www.erebus.co.nz/MemorialandAwards/RollofRemembrance.aspx>

Zwirner & Wirth, *Chris Burden: Early Work* (14 September – 23 October 2004, accessed December 4, 2010, [www.zwirnerandwirth.com/exhibition/2004/090burden/press.html](http://www.zwirnerandwirth.com/exhibition/2004/090burden/press.html))

### Biographical note

Dr Peter Wood is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Architecture, Victoria University of Wellington, where he teaches in the area of architectural design. His current research interest is concerned with the visual and material culture of Antarctica.

Email: [peter.wood@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:peter.wood@vuw.ac.nz)

---

# Remembering Katyn: Mourning, Memory, and National Identity

Vanessa Fredericks

---

## Remembering Katyn: Mourning, Memory, and National Identity

Vanessa Fredericks

---

### Abstract

This article examines the connection between mourning, memory, and national identity in Poland after World War II, with specific reference to the Katyn Massacre. In 1940, approximately 22,000 Polish citizens were executed by the Soviet secret police under Stalin's orders, and then buried in mass graves. In 1943, German soldiers discovered one of the graves in the Katyn Forest. Stalin denied responsibility for the massacre and accused the Germans of committing the crime. Successive Soviet governments denied culpability for the Katyn massacre until documents that proved Soviet guilt were released under Mikhail Gorbachev in 1990, and then Boris Yeltsin in 1992. Drawing on Jacques Derrida's work on mourning, this article argues that mourning and historical memory are integral to recreating a sense of national identity after traumatic events. Commemorations and memorials are often instrumental in aiding this memory work. In post-World War II Poland, however, Soviet policy dictated which historical memories could be told. Memorials were used to reinforce the Soviet narrative of Katyn, silencing the public work of mourning and memory for the relatives of the victims.

Keywords: Katyn massacre, mourning, memory, national identity, Derrida

## Introduction

This article examines the role of historical memory and national identity in Poland after World War II, with specific reference to the Katyn Massacre of 1940. Drawing on French philosopher, Jacques Derrida's, work on mourning this article suggests that mourning and memory are integral to recreating a national identity after traumatic events. One of the ways nations restructure national identity after these traumas is via public commemoration and memorials. While each individual will have their own experiences, these communal mourning rituals serve as a place in which these memories can be shared and are used to create new narratives about national identity.<sup>1</sup> This was not possible in post-World War II Poland, however, as the newly instated communist government sought to control the types of stories that could be told. The establishment of several censorship agencies helped to silence any narratives which conflicted with the Soviet version of history. Katyn was a particularly taboo subject in communist Poland. To even mention the word in public was a punishable offence, so relatives of the victims were forced to mourn in private. This also meant that there could be no shared historical memory of the event, as the Soviet government sought to erase the crime from historical memory and public discourse.

## Katyn

The word “Katyn” has come to represent the massacre of approximately 22,000 Polish men (and one woman) comprising of generals, army officers, policemen, teachers, priests, rabbis, and doctors, taken prisoner by the Soviet secret police (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs or NKVD) in the spring of 1939. The prisoners were kept in three separate concentration camps at Kozelsk, Ostashkov, and Starobelsk. In 1940, Soviet leader, Joseph Stalin, ordered the execution of the prisoners. They were shot in the back of the head and buried in various locations in Russia and the Ukraine as part of his attempt to implement “class cleansing” in Poland. The prisoners being held at Kozelsk were buried in mass graves in the Katyn Forest, and those from Ostashkov in Miednoye, and from Starobelsk were in Kharkov. The graves at Katyn were discovered by German soldiers in 1943 and, as a result, “Katyn” now refers to all the massacres.

The first public mention of the Katyn graves was made by the German news agency, Trans-Ocean, on 11 April 1943. The German government publicly announced the discovery of the graves and accused the Soviets of mass murder. The following day this was countered by a pro-Soviet, Polish language broadcast from Moscow which claimed the accusations were German propaganda. British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, and U.S. President, Franklin D. Roosevelt, accepted Stalin's claim that the German accusations were false and supported his decision to set up a special Soviet commission for the investigation of the site.

From then on, successive Soviet governments continued to deny responsibility for the Katyn massacre until 1990, when documents released under Mikhail Gorbachev, President of the USSR, confirmed Soviet guilt.

The end of the World War II marked the beginning of a new political regime in Poland. Stalin retained control over the country, and swiftly instituted a Polish communist government. In order to control communication throughout the country, the Polish communists implemented a sophisticated censorship authority.<sup>2</sup> Katyn became a forbidden topic within this political climate. The newly instated censorship agencies suppressed all references to Katyn in published texts, and merely mentioning the atrocity risked reprisal.<sup>3</sup> Relatives of the Katyn victims were unable to speak publicly about the cause of their deaths for fear of retribution. Control of the issue continued in this vein for the life of the Polish Communist Party.<sup>4,5</sup> However, after the death of Stalin and the dissolution of Stalinist communism in 1957, individuals were no longer repressed for private political discussion as they were in the early days of the party.<sup>6</sup> The continued suppression of the event meant that those who had relatives buried in Miednoye or Kharkov did not learn the fate of their loved ones until 1990, when Gorbachev disclosed the whereabouts of the mass graves at Ostashkov and Kharkov.

### Historical memory and national identity

In her book, *The Haunted Land: Facing Europe's Ghosts After Communism*, journalist, Tina Rosenberg, highlights the importance of historical memory for the Poles. She attributes this to the fact that, throughout history, Poland's borders have "fluctuated so wildly that for decades at a time the country disappeared from the map and existed solely in the minds of the Poles".<sup>7</sup> Rosenberg suggests that they have a "keen sense that having no geography, history must take its place".<sup>8</sup> Without a fixed geographical location in which to create collective memories, narratives about the past needed to be negotiated in this abstract memory space. National identity is symbolic, not geographic. We see evidence of this on the home page of the Institute of National Remembrance–Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation (IPN) website. Established in Poland in 1988, the IPN was created to investigate "issues which are considered essential to the legislative power in Poland", namely, the preservation of historical memory and the investigation of crimes committed against the Polish nation during the period 1939–1989.<sup>9</sup>

A quote on the Institute's website reads "Our History Creates Our Identity".<sup>10</sup> This reiterates the idea that national identity is informed by the past, and by the retelling of historical narratives. Anna Maria Orla-Bukowska, a social anthropologist writing on memory and identity in post-war Poland, argues that "it is still World War II which weighs heaviest on and delineates Polish national memory".<sup>11</sup> She suggests that Polish ways of remembering this war demonstrate "how Polish historical memory connects with its social identity", because during

World War II “a social and spiritual community fell apart catastrophically”.<sup>12,13</sup> The entire “symbolic universe” of Poland was destroyed: the Polish army, the government, the landscape and, of course, many families were split apart due to deportation, death, or migration.<sup>14</sup> It is this destruction of so many symbols of Polish culture which seems to drive narratives about national identity. Because so much was lost, there is a need to re-remember historical narratives in order to recreate Polish national identity.

In their study of the memorialisation process as it pertains to identity formation in post-totalitarian societies, Benjamin Forest, Juliet Johnson, and Karen Till suggest that for societies undergoing political transition, “place-making and memory processes are significant spatial practices through which the national past is reconstructed and through which political and social change may be negotiated.”<sup>15</sup> That is, the representation of national identity and historical narratives requires participation in public spaces. For societies transitioning from an oppressive regime, such as totalitarianism, this process is particularly useful as it provides a shared space in which memories about the past can be acknowledged, and new memories and histories can be reconstructed. The case of Katyn is a unique case study in Polish World War II history because there was no public space in which the Polish people could negotiate mourning and national identity.

As Ewa M. Thompson, a research professor in Slavic studies, points out, between 1939 and 1989 there was “no freedom to remember” in Poland.<sup>16</sup> The Soviet government attempted to erase all traces of the crime in public memory by obliterating references to Katyn on maps and in official reference works.<sup>17</sup> As noted earlier, government censorship agencies suppressed all mention of the event, preventing children of the Katyn victims from speaking publicly about the cause of their father’s deaths.<sup>18</sup> For many Poles then, Katyn became “a family story”<sup>19</sup> and narratives about the Katyn victims were only told within the home. Thompson argues that this “denial of access to memory ... was destructive of Polish political culture”.<sup>20</sup> Families of the victims were also denied access to rituals of mourning. They were not allowed to openly commemorate the death of their loved ones, while the families of those officers buried in Miednoye and Kharkov had no confirmation of their fate or where they were buried.<sup>21</sup> This denial of a culture of mourning and commemoration was equally destructive to identity, both national and individual.

## Mourning

Like memory, mourning is a communal practice.<sup>22</sup> Derrida suggests that, “There is no culture without a cult of ancestors, a ritualization of mourning and sacrifice, institutional places and modes of burial”.<sup>23</sup> There can be no community that is not somehow haunted by death. While the meaning of death may change from one culture to the next, each one has its own culture of death, mourning rituals,



commemorative practices, and funerary customs. In Polish culture, there is a long history of communal mourning, the origins of which can be traced back to the Romantic era.<sup>24</sup> For the families of the Katyn victims, this culture of mourning was silenced for 50 years after the event. Staniswava Soyova, whose father, Ignacy Dec, died at Katyn stresses that, “The worst was the silence, the prohibition against speaking openly of their death, of a dignified burial, for half a century. It was forbidden even to visit the places of execution.”<sup>25</sup> For Soyova, this denial of mourning is the worst of the injustices done to the Polish nation. The denial of memory through mourning is, in a sense, a denial of (Polish) national identity.

Contemporary narratives on mourning owe much to the father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud. For Freud, normal mourning is a process by which the mourner must detach themselves from the lost object and move on. Normal mourning comes to an end and the libido becomes “free” as long as it is able to “replace the lost objects that are, where possible, equally precious, or with still more precious new ones”.<sup>26</sup> For Freud, mourning is an enclosed, internalised memory, and successful mourning entails finding a substitute for the other. For Derrida, however, the dead are irreplaceable, and the death of the other is a call to responsibility.<sup>27</sup> In *Memoires for Paul De Man* (1986), a series of lectures Derrida wrote after the death of his friend literary critic, Paul De Man, he draws on De Man’s idea of *gedachtnis* (memory) as a thinking, externalising memory and re-conceptualises mourning as a future-oriented memory:

*The memory that we are considering here is not essentially oriented toward the past, toward a past present deemed to have really and previously existed. Memory stays with traces, in order to “preserve” them, but traces of a past that has never been present, traces which themselves never occupy the form of presence and always remain, as it were, to come—come from the future, from there to come.*<sup>28</sup>

Memory appears in the present as a trace of the past, but it belongs in neither. Memory belongs in the “to come” that can never be *presented*. For Freud, mourning is an “interiorising memory”.<sup>29</sup> Derrida, on the other hand, presents mourning as “an externalising memory that is future-oriented”.<sup>30</sup> Freud’s model of mourning involves detachment from the lost object, replacement, and moving on. The legacy of this model is evident in contemporary narratives about grief. It is commonplace to talk about “healing” or “moving on”, which is essentially what Freud’s model of mourning suggests. A variation of this model is also commonly applied to traumatic events in history. Tina Rosenberg, for example, proposes that nations “need to face up to and understand traumatic events before they can put them aside and move on”.<sup>31</sup> While Freud’s model of mourning promises finality, for Derrida, the work of mourning does not end.<sup>32</sup> In *The Work of Mourning*, he presents mourning as an ethical responsibility that the living owes the dead. This responsibility is ongoing; the mourner does not renounce their memories of the dead as Freud proposes.

The relatives of the Katyn victims were, in a sense, forced to renounce their memories of the dead as in Freudian mourning. They were prevented from

speaking about the deaths of the Katyn victims due to the censorship laws that dictated how the event could be discussed. For Derrida, mourning also includes a political dimension; he once claimed that there can be no politics without the time and space of mourning.<sup>33</sup> Derridean mourning is not only an ethical response to the death of a loved one; it is an ethical political response to traumatic events. His interpretation of mourning as an ethical responsibility that the living owes the dead highlights the importance of mourning and remembering the Katyn victims, as well as victims of other atrocities, as a gift to the future.

### Memorials and monuments

Orla-Bukowska suggests that one way in which communities restructure identities after traumatic experiences is to organise the new identity “around specific symbolic axes such as time and space, and via heroes, museums, monuments, and the like”.<sup>34</sup> The erection of monuments has been central to Polish ways of remembering.<sup>35</sup> In the post-war years, however, the Soviet version of Katyn became enshrined not only in Soviet history books and encyclopaedias, but also in monuments. While monuments which commemorated the struggle against the Nazis were allowed, Soviet crimes in Poland remained a taboo subject.<sup>36</sup> The function of these monuments was to “forget” as opposed to commemorate or remember. They were informed by what French philosopher, Jean-François Lyotard, would call a “politics of forgetting”.<sup>37</sup>

One particular monument to the Polish victims was constructed at the burial site at Katyn in the late 1940s, to be replaced by a new one in the early 1960s. The first one, erected around 1945 read: “Here are buried the prisoner officers of the Polish Army murdered in terrible torments by the German-Fascist occupiers in the fall of 1941.”<sup>38</sup> Another inscription, noted some 30 years later read: “Here rest the remains of Polish officers, prisoners of war bestially martyred by the German-Fascist occupiers of in the fall of 1941.”<sup>39</sup> This monument was used to reinforce the Soviet narrative regarding German guilt. As late as 1981, members of the Solidarity movement created a memorial which simply said: “Katyn, 1940”. Even though there was no mention of the NKVD, the police removed it. Later, the Polish government, on cue from Moscow, replaced it with another memorial reiterating the Soviet version of events. This one said: “To the Polish soldiers—victims of Hitlerite fascism—reposing in the soil of Katyn.”<sup>40</sup> Instead of being used to commemorate and mourn the victims of Katyn, these monuments were used to reinscribe Soviet myths about the massacre and rewrite historical memory.

Soviet censorship and concealment of the issue of Katyn was far-reaching. The Soviets sought to control how the event was discussed even outside the Soviet Block.<sup>41</sup> In 1969, the Soviet government erected a memorial to people murdered by the Germans in a Belorussian village near Minks named Khatyn.<sup>42</sup> There was no particular significance for choosing this site; it was one of thousands of Belorussian villages the Germans had destroyed. While in Russian and Belorussian,

Katyn and Khatyn are spelled and pronounced differently, in English they look and sound alike.<sup>43</sup> When President Nixon visited the USSR in July 1974, he visited the Khatyn memorial. Sensing that the Soviets were exploiting the visit for propaganda purposes, *The New York Times* headlined its coverage of the tour: “Nixon sees Khatyn, a Soviet Memorial, Not Katyn Forest”.<sup>44</sup>

George Sanford, a political scientist who specialises in Polish and Eastern European studies, suggests that the Soviets attempted to confuse Khatyn with Katyn in Western minds.<sup>45</sup> However, by this stage, attempts to control historical memory in the West were futile. In the mid-1960s and early 1970s, Katyn became a heated topic in the West after the publication of a few important books.<sup>46</sup> In London, on October 1971, the Katyn Memorial Fund came into being and pledged to erect a memorial in London to honour the men who were murdered “because they were the faithful sons of the gallant Polish nation”.<sup>47</sup> After a long drawn-out political process, it was decided that the memorial would be built at Gunnersbury Cemetery in West London, and on 18 September 1976, the memorial was unveiled. Louis Fitzgibbon, the secretary of the memorial fund, explains the importance of the monument:

*It is necessary to honour the dead and to perpetuate their memory, to bring some solace to the widows of these victims, their surviving relatives, brother officers and men; to constitute a lasting tribute to the sufferings of Poland in the case of Freedom; to proclaim the truth and symbolise the struggle for justice not yet achieved, to mark an event in history which so many have for so long conspired to erase.*<sup>48</sup>

For Fitzgibbon, this memorial is more than just a place that the London Poles can come to commemorate and mourn. This memorial symbolises Poland’s struggle for freedom, and is a necessary requirement for reinscribing the memory of this event within the context of Polish historical narratives. In a speech given at the unveiling of the memorial it was said: “we are here not only to mourn those Poles who died, defenceless and still defiant. We are here to celebrate the invincibility of that spirit of Poland for whom they died. This is not simply a memorial to the dead past. It is a pledge to the living future”.<sup>49,50</sup> This memorial is not simply about memory, or about mourning. It is about maintaining narratives about the past, and highlighting the importance of historical memory as it pertains to narratives about national identity. In a way, this memorial serves as an externalising memory that honours the past as a gift to the future.

### Memorialising the event after 1990

In 1988, the media reform that accompanied Mikhail Gorbachev’s *glasnost* (open discussion) policy, and the ensuing public discussion of Stalinist crimes in the USSR, also led to the relaxation of censorship in Poland. This resulted in growing pressure for the facts on Katyn. *Glasnost* led to the opening of some state archives to three Russian historians (Yuri Zoria, Valentina Parsadonova, and

Natalia Lebedeva), who had a significant impact on the uncovering of the truth about Katyn.<sup>51</sup> In 1989, they found previously unknown documents on the Polish prisoners of war including archival materials on those held in the three camps which corresponded with the names of the dead officers compiled by the Germans in 1943.<sup>52</sup> In April 1990, Gorbachev released the NKVD lists of Polish prisoners and some accompanying documents,<sup>53</sup> thus revealing that the Soviet secret police were responsible for the massacres. This revelation came 50 years after the event. In October 1992, Russian President, Boris Yeltsin, released the remainder of the documents.<sup>54</sup>

Bożena Łojek, who lost her father at Katyn and founded the Warsaw Katyn Families Association, noted that the “possibility of achieving a measure of justice within the legal-judicial framework, passed away for good in the mid-1990s”.<sup>55</sup> The fight for justice was replaced with a “campaign to commemorate the massacre through appropriate monuments at the burial sites as well as in cemeteries and churches”.<sup>56</sup> In 1994, Boris Yeltsin objected to the Poles’ demands for an apology and for compensation for the victims, although he did agree that a memorial should be built at Katyn. This memorial would be created to include all the innocent victims of totalitarianism and Nazism within the framework, of which there should be a dignified memorial to the Polish officers.<sup>57</sup>

The Soviet version of events became so embedded in Russian historical memory that there was still reluctance to acknowledge the injustice done to the Poles in the name of Soviet communism. A Polish-Russian agreement was signed in 1994, in which the Poles agreed to maintain Russian war graves in Poland and vice versa, and a Polish-Ukrainian agreement was signed which led to the opening of three cemeteries in 2000 at Kharkov, Katyn, and Miednoye (the burial sites of the executed officers).<sup>58</sup>

The importance of being able to visit the mass graves is highlighted by Ewa Leśnik whose father was buried at Katyn. She says, “For me the necropolis in Katyn Forest, Kharkov and Miednoye are components in the re-attainment of Polish spiritual sovereignty”.<sup>59</sup> She is thus alluding to the fact that Polish mourning rituals are informed by a Catholic discourse. Brian Porter, a Polish-American historian, argues that, “It is almost universally accepted, in English as well as Polish language texts, that Catholicism in Poland ‘is a question of national identity.’”<sup>60</sup> It is therefore important not just to be able to visit the graves as sites for remembrance and shared memory, but to be able to partake in mourning rituals specific to Polish Catholicism (such as All Souls’ Day).

Leśnik quotes from a publication of the Council for the Preservation of the Memory of Struggle and Suffering: “Historical memory does not mean historical justice. It is, however, a condition for the normalization of social and national life. The collective cemeteries are ‘our contact with an undying past’.”<sup>61</sup> Leśnik emphasises that while memory is not the same thing as justice, historical memory is what sustains national identity after a traumatic event such as Katyn, and it is mourning which provides a significant connection with the past. Thompson suggests that, “memories start with the place where the event giving rise to

memory happened”.<sup>62</sup> While it is important that the Poles are now able to visit the places of burial, it is interesting to note that after the collapse of Soviet communism, a series of monuments dedicated to the victims of Katyn have not only been placed throughout Poland, but the world. There are now monuments in Toronto, Johannesburg, Baltimore, Canberra, and Budapest (to name a few).

Thompson suggests that this “indicates that the Katyn trauma has sunk deeply into the collective memory”.<sup>63</sup> She notes, perhaps ironically, that “of all the murders of Poles by the Soviets this one is best remembered”.<sup>64</sup> Despite the efforts to erase the crime from Poland’s official history, Katyn “could not be erased from historical memory”.<sup>65</sup> As Derrida tells us in *Memoires for Paul de Man*, memory stays with traces in order to preserve them, traces of a past which always remain to come.<sup>66</sup> While public spaces were used by the Soviet government to rewrite historical narratives, the trace of the event remained not only in the memory of individual Poles, but also in public memory, as these memorials demonstrate.

## Conclusion

The role of commemoration in restructuring historical narratives and national identity after traumatic events is crucial. In post-World War II Poland, this practice was prevented by Soviet control of the Katyn story in historical narratives and public memorials. This article has drawn on Derrida’s work on mourning to highlight the importance of mourning rituals to this memory work. Derridean mourning differs from Freud in that the work of mourning does not end by finding a replacement for the lost other. It involves a continued conversation with the other that has passed. This is essentially a work of responsibility and responsivity. After 50 years of silence, the Poles are now able to negotiate national identity via commemoration and memorials as a future-oriented dialogue with the dead. The significance of this work of memory is articulated by Derrida who once wrote, “You must answer for the dead, you must respond to them here and now.”<sup>67</sup>

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>See, for example, Paul Connerton’s study of the ways collective memories are sustained by ritual performance. Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>2</sup>For a detailed insight into the mechanisms of censorship in post-war Poland, see Oskar Stanislaw Czarnik, “Control of Literary Communication in the 1945-1956 Period in Poland,” *Libraries and Culture* 36(1), (2001): 104-15

<sup>3</sup>Benjamin B. Fisher, “Stalin’s Killing Field,” *Studies in Intelligence* 43(3), (1999-2000): 65.

<sup>4</sup>Wesley Adamczyk in Teresa Kaczorowska, *Children of the Katyn Massacre: Accounts of Life After the 1940 Soviet Murder of Polish POWs*, trans. Frank Kujawinski

(Jefferson, North Carolina, and London: McFarland and Company Inc Publishers, 2006), 4.

<sup>5</sup>For example, a court in Łódź sentenced film student, Zofia Dwornik, to a year in prison in 1951 for telling her friends that the NKVD had murdered her father and her brother-in-law who were prisoners in Kozelsk. George Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre of 1940: Truth, Justice and Memory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 208.

<sup>6</sup>Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre of 1940*, 210.

<sup>7</sup>Tina Rosenberg, *The Haunted Land: Facing Europe's Ghosts After Communism* (New York: Vintage, 1996), xvi.

<sup>8</sup>Rosenberg, *The Haunted Land*, xvi.

<sup>9</sup>Institute of National Remembrance, accessed on May 4, 2011, [http://www.ipn.gov.pl/portal/en/1/2/Institute\\_of\\_National\\_Remembrance\\_\\_Commission\\_for\\_the\\_Prosecution\\_of\\_Crimes\\_agai.html](http://www.ipn.gov.pl/portal/en/1/2/Institute_of_National_Remembrance__Commission_for_the_Prosecution_of_Crimes_agai.html)

<sup>10</sup>Institute of National Remembrance, accessed on May 4, 2011, [http://www.ipn.gov.pl/portal/en/35/1/Brief\\_history.html](http://www.ipn.gov.pl/portal/en/35/1/Brief_history.html)

<sup>11</sup>Anna Maria Orla-Bukowska, “New Threads On An Old Loom: National Memory and Social Identity in Post-war and Post-Communist Poland,” in *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe*, eds. Richard Ned Lebow, Wulf Kansteiner and Claudio Fugo (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 178.

<sup>12</sup>Orla-Bukowska, “New Threads On An Old Loom,” 200.

<sup>13</sup>Orla-Bukowska, “New Threads On An Old Loom,” 200.

<sup>14</sup>Orla-Bukowska, “New Threads On An Old Loom,” 200.

<sup>15</sup>Benjamin Forest, Juliet Johnson and Karen Till, “Post-totalitarian National Identity: Public Memory in Germany and Russia,” *Social & Cultural Geography*, 5(3), (2004): 358.

<sup>16</sup>Ewa M. Thompson, “Ways of Remembering: the Case of Poland,” *Toronto Slavic Quarterly* 12 (2005): 2, accessed May 4, 2011, <http://www.utoronto.ca/tsq/12/thompson12.shtml>

<sup>17</sup>Fisher, “Stalin’s Killing Field,” 64.

<sup>18</sup>Adamcyk in Kaczorowska, *Children of the Katyn Massacre*, 4.

<sup>19</sup>Mariya Melentyeva, “The Katyn Case in Russian-Language WebPages,” *Past Imperfect*, 15 (2009): 194.

<sup>20</sup>Thompson, “Ways of Remembering,” 2.

<sup>21</sup>Melentyeva, “The Katyn Case in Russian-Language WebPages,” 194.

<sup>22</sup>Philosopher, Peter Steeves, for example, has argued that mourning is always collective, always communal: “To be sad is to be within a community of those who recognize sadness and who are capable of echoing it back to us, tear for tear.” Peter Steeves, “There Shall Be No Name,” *Mosaic* 40(2), (2007), 190.

<sup>23</sup>Jacques Derrida, *Aporias*, trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 43.

<sup>24</sup>Joanna Niżyńska, “The Politics of Mourning and the Crisis of Poland’s Symbolic Language after April 10,” *East European Politics and Societies* 24(4), (2010): 468, 471-72.

- <sup>25</sup>Cited in Kaczorowska, *Children of the Katyn Massacre*, 150.
- <sup>26</sup>Sigmund Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” in *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia* (London: Penguin, 2005), 200.
- <sup>27</sup>Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 41.
- <sup>28</sup>Jacques Derrida, *Memoires for Paul De Man*, trans. Cecile Lindsay, Jonathan Culler, Eduardo Cadava and Peggy Kamuf (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 58.
- <sup>29</sup>Roger Starling, “Addressing the Dead: Of Friendship, Community and the Work of Mourning,” *Angelaki* 7(2), (2002), 110.
- <sup>30</sup>Joan Kirkby, “Remembrance of the Future: Derrida on Mourning,” *Social Semiotics* 16(3), (2006), 467.
- <sup>31</sup>Rosenberg, *The Haunted Land*, xviii.
- <sup>32</sup>Freud writes, “We know that mourning, however painful it may be, comes to an end of its own accord,” in Sigmund Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” 199.
- <sup>33</sup>Derrida, *Aporias*, 61.
- <sup>34</sup>Orla-Bukowska, “New Threads on an Old Loom,” 186.
- <sup>35</sup>Thompson, “Ways of Remembering,” 4.
- <sup>36</sup>Thompson, “Ways of Remembering,” 4.
- <sup>37</sup>See Jean-François Lyotard, *Heidegger and The Jews*, trans. Andreas Michel and Mark Roberts (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990).
- <sup>38</sup>Anna M. Cienciala, Natalia S. Lebedeva and Wojciech Materski eds., *Katyn A Crime Without Punishment* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), 241.
- <sup>39</sup>Cienciala et al., *Katyn*, 241.
- <sup>40</sup>Fisher, “Stalin’s Killing Field,” 65.
- <sup>41</sup>Cienciala et al., *Katyn*, 242.
- <sup>42</sup>Cienciala et al., *Katyn*, 241.
- <sup>43</sup>Fisher, “Stalin’s Killing Field,” 64.
- <sup>44</sup>Fisher, “Stalin’s Killing Field,” 64.
- <sup>45</sup>Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre of 1940*, 196.
- <sup>46</sup>Specifically, Zawodny’s book, *Death in the Forest*, published in the United States in 1963, and Louis Fitzgibbon’s book, *Atyn: A Crime Without Parallel*, published in England in 1971.
- <sup>47</sup>Louis Fitzgibbon, *Katyn Memorial* (London: SPK/Gryf, 1977), 12.
- <sup>48</sup>Fitzgibbon, *Katyn Memorial*, 13.
- <sup>49</sup>The speech was delivered by Lord St. Oswald, a British soldier and conservative politician.
- <sup>50</sup>Louis Fitzgibbon, *Katyn Memorial*, 40.
- <sup>51</sup>Cienciala et al., *Katyn*, 249-50.
- <sup>52</sup>Cienciala et al., *Katyn*, 250.
- <sup>53</sup>Melentyeva, “The Katyn Case in Russian-Language WebPages,” 195.
- <sup>54</sup>Melentyeva, “The Katyn Case in Russian-Language WebPages,” 195.
- <sup>55</sup>Cited in Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre of 1940*, 203.

- <sup>56</sup>Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre of 1940*, 203.
- <sup>57</sup>Cienciala et al., *Katyn*, 257.
- <sup>58</sup>Cienciala et al., *Katyn*, 258.
- <sup>59</sup>Cited in Kaczorowska, *Children of the Katyn Massacre*, 90.
- <sup>60</sup>Brian Porter, “The Catholic Nation: Religion, Identity, and the Narratives of Polish History,” *The Slavic and Eastern European Journal* 45(2), (2001), 289.
- <sup>61</sup>Cited in Kaczorowska, *Children of the Katyn Massacre*, 90.
- <sup>62</sup>Thompson, “Ways of Remembering,” 3.
- <sup>63</sup>Thompson, “Ways of Remembering,” 5.
- <sup>64</sup>Thompson, “Ways of Remembering,” 5.
- <sup>65</sup>Fisher, “Stalin’s Killing Field,” 65.
- <sup>66</sup>Derrida, *Memoires for Paul De Man*, 58.
- <sup>67</sup>Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (London and New York: Verso, 1997). 94.

## Bibliography

- Cienciala, Anna M., Natalie S. Lebedeva and Wojciech Materski eds., *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007).
- Connerton, Paul, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press), 1989.
- Czarnik, Oskar Stanislaw, “Control of Literary Communication in the 1945-1956 Period in Poland,” *Libraries and Culture*, 36(1), (2001): 104-15.
- Derrida, Jacques, *Memoires For Paul De Man*, trans. Cecile Lindsay, Jonathon Culler and Eduardo Cadava (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).
- Derrida, Jacques, *Aporias*, trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).
- Derrida, Jacques, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995).
- Derrida, Jacques, *The Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (London and New York: Verso, 1997).
- Derrida, Jacques, *The Work of Mourning*, eds. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001).
- Fisher, Benjamin B, “Stalin’s Killing Field,” *Studies in Intelligence*, 43(3), (1999-2000): 61-70.
- Fitzgibbon, Louis, *Katyn: A Crime Without Parallel* (London: Tom Stacey, 1971).



Fitzgibbon, Louis, *Katyn Memorial* (London: SPK/Gryf, 1977).

Forest, Benjamin, Juliet Johnson and Karen Till, "Post-Totalitarian National Identity: Public Memory in Germany and Russia," *Social & Cultural Geography* 5(3), (2004): 357-80.

Freud, Sigmund, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia* (London: Penguin, 2005): 201-18.

Institute of National Remembrance, accessed May 4, 2011, <http://www.ipn.gov.pl/portal/en/>

Kaczorowska, Teresa, *Children of the Katyn Massacre: Accounts of Life After the 1940 Soviet Murder of Polish POWs*, trans. Frank Kujawinski (Jefferson, North Carolina and London: McFarland and Company Inc Publishers, 2006).

Kirkby, Joan, "Remembrance of the Future: Derrida on Mourning," *Social Semiotics*, 16(3), (2006): 461-72.

Liotard, Jean-François, *Heidegger and "The Jews"*, trans. Andreas Michel and Mark Roberts (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990).

Melentyeva, Mariya, "The Katyn Case in Russian-Language WebPages," *Past Imperfect*, 15 (2009): 193-222.

Niżyńska, Joanna, "The Politics of Mourning and the Crisis of Poland's Symbolic Language after April 10," *East European Politics and Societies* 24(4), (2010): 467-79.

Orla-Bukowska, Anna Maria, "New Threads On An Old Loom: National Memory and Social Identity in Post-war and Post-Communist Poland," in *The Politics of Memory in Post-war Europe*, eds. Richard Ned Lebow, Wulf Kansteiner and Claudio Fugo (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 177-209.

Porter, Brian, "The Catholic Nation: Religion, Identity, and the Narratives of Polish History," *The Slavic and Eastern European Journal*, 45(2), (2001): 289-99.

Rosenberg, Tina, *The Haunted Land: Facing Europe's Ghosts After Communism* (New York: Vintage, 1995).

Sanford, George, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre of 1940: Truth, Justice and Memory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005).

Starling, Roger, "Addressing the Dead: Of Friendship, Community and the Work of Mourning," *Angelaki Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, 7(2), (2002): 107-24.

Steeves, Peter, "There Shall Be No Name," *Mosaic*, 40(2), (2007): 189-98.

Thompson, Ewa M. "Ways of Remembering: The Case of Poland," *Toronto Slavic Quarterly* 12 (2005), accessed June 20, 2010, <http://www.utoronto.ca/tsq/12/thompson12.shtml>

Zawodny, Janusz K., *Death in the Forest* (Indiana: South Bend, 1963).

### Biographical note

Vanessa Fredericks is a PhD candidate in the department of Critical and Cultural Studies at Macquarie University in Australia. The focus of her research is the construction of Polish historical narratives during and after World War II, specifically how they pertain to the issues of mourning, memory, national identity, martyrdom, justice, and forgiveness.

Email: [vanessa.fredericks@mq.edu.au](mailto:vanessa.fredericks@mq.edu.au)

---

# Memory, Myth, and Monuments: The Commemoration of a Contested Past in Western Ukraine

John Lehr and Natalia Aponiuk

---

## Memory, Myth, and Monuments: The Commemoration of a Contested Past in Western Ukraine

John Lehr and Natalia Aponiuk

---

### Abstract

In 2010, President Viktor Yushchenko's posthumous award of the title 'Hero of Ukraine' to Stepan Bandera ignited a debate that threw memory and history into conflict. Bandera was the founder of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) whose military arm, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), or *Ukrayins'ka Povstans'ka Armiya*, fought for Ukrainian independence from 1942–1952. Initially it opposed German occupation forces in Ukraine, but following the German retreat it fought Soviet troops, at times controlling considerable territory in Western Ukraine. The UPA hoped to achieve an independent Ukrainian state and continued to conduct guerrilla warfare against the Soviets until 1952. A second arm of the OUN joined the German cause as a route to Ukrainian independence, enlisting in the Waffen-SS Division *Halychyna*. The UPA received strong support from the Ukrainian population, which regarded it as a liberating national organisation. Its opponents allege that it engaged in ethnic cleansing of Poles, and during the Nazi occupation actively collaborated in the murder and deportation of Jews. Many Western Ukrainians also fought as soldiers of the Soviet Red Army, playing a role in the liberation of Ukraine from Nazi control. During the period of Soviet administration from 1945 until 1991, when Ukraine achieved independence, an official landscape of commemoration was established that celebrated communist heroes and the sacrifices of the Red Army. Since independence the 'monumental landscape' has been transformed as monuments have been removed, added or altered to reflect the changing political fortunes of this historically contested area. In this landscape of commemoration three collective memories co-exist and compete: memories of the Soviet Red Army, the UPA, and the *Halychyna* Division.

Keywords: Ukraine, memorials, monuments, public commemoration, heritage, UPA, OUN, Soviet

Public landscapes of commemoration evolve through a complex interplay of social and political forces. In democratic societies, even though special interests may promote their own agendas, there is a measure of consensus involved in acts of public commemoration. Statues are raised in response to popular sentiment and often funded through public subscription. In authoritarian states the governing party determines who and what should be memorialised and celebrated as well as determining the size, location, and design of all memorials. In the latter case, memorials reflect the vision and ideology of the governing authority and not necessarily the sentiments of the population. Thus, when shifts in policy cause the past to be reappraised or contested, movements in the political landscape are quickly reflected in the commemorative landscape.

The historical memories of nations are seldom static. Many historians have noted that history is a process of reappraisal of the past and is constantly rewritten. As David Lowenthal states, individuals may have more than one identity, and so do social organisations and political entities.<sup>1</sup> As social attitudes, political perspectives and social orders shift, identities evolve. The past is then reassessed and reinterpreted, history is (re)written, and myths are created.

The relationship between memory, history, and myth is central to an understanding of the process of memorialisation. History is a discourse that involves debate and criticism; memory, on the other hand, is a process of selection, omission, and construction. Memory evolves and changes over time, repositioning events and actions to accord with the desired narrative. It can justify the past in a way that history cannot, for the shackles of evidence and the scrutiny of scholarship burden history. Memory is seldom challenged in the same way because it selects its own ‘facts’.

A consensus of memory constitutes the foundations of mythology. National and regional identities are constructed and closely intertwined with memory and mythology. The over-arching meta-narratives that provide the foundations of national myths may be challenged or supported by history, but they are built on memory. Memory selects and exaggerates to support a fixed way of looking at the world that is a core characteristic of the myth. As Edward de Bono has noted: *A myth is a fixed way of looking at the world which cannot be destroyed because, looked at through the myth, all evidence supports that myth. Any fixed idea may seem nonsense to someone outside it, but it does absolutely nothing to alter the complete truth of that point of view to the person inside it.*<sup>2</sup>

If a situation is viewed only from an established vantage point, nothing will provide a new vista. The field of vision determines its boundary and the answer will lie only within its confines.<sup>3</sup> Put simply, this means that if we always think the way we have thought we will always do the things that we have done. Thus myths will endure, even when contradicted by the ‘facts’ of history.

The meaning ascribed to monuments therefore varies according to the perspectives of the observer and the social, economic, and political contexts of the day. Since these cannot be fixed, time becomes a critical element affecting the way

in which society, in a broad sense, perceives any monument.<sup>4</sup> If left in place, they become a physical record of the dominant political perspectives prevailing at any given time, and their removal, relocation or reconfiguration similarly records the shifting sands of memory and political orthodoxy.

### Ukraine: identity and memory

This article examines the complex and often confusing relationship that Western Ukraine retains with its turbulent history, a relationship that is contained in its evolving landscapes of memory. Ukraine's lack of easily defendable borders and its productive agricultural lands have made it a prize coveted by a host of powers. Many countries, including Turkey, Sweden, Russia, Austria, Germany, and Poland, have claimed all or parts of the country as part of their imperial territories. Ukraine's western provinces of Galicia and Bukovyna have been especially contested and since 1914 have fallen under Austrian, Polish, Romanian, German, and Soviet control.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps because of exposure to western concepts of nationalism in the latter half of the nineteenth century while under Austrian control, Western Ukraine became noted for its fervent Ukrainian nationalism.

At the end of World War I, and the resulting collapse and break-up of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Ukraine enjoyed a brief period of independence. By 1922, the Red Army had regained control of Greater Ukraine, Poland had assumed control of Galicia, and Romania took control of Bukovyna. In Galicia, Ukrainian nationalism smouldered under Polish occupation for two decades. During this time Stefan Bandera founded the OUN with the objective of securing Ukrainian independence.<sup>6</sup> When Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union occupied Poland in 1939, Galicia fell under Soviet control, becoming a part of the USSR under the terms of the Nazi-Soviet pact.

Nationalist sentiments in Galicia were ruthlessly suppressed by the Soviets. Thousands were arrested, tortured, murdered, or deported to Siberian prison camps. Western Ukrainians were filled with revulsion for the Soviets and maintained a deep conviction that they were, and always would be, "their worst enemy".<sup>7</sup> The invasion of the Soviet Union by Germany in 1941 brought the promise of Ukraine's liberation from Soviet tyranny. Many in Western Ukraine thus initially welcomed the Nazis, hoping that the expulsion of the communist regime would pave the way for the creation of a Ukrainian national state.

A sovereign Ukrainian state was declared in L'viv on 30 June 1941, but Nazi authorities arrested its supporters and suppressed the movement. Ukrainians who hoped for a degree of independence under German rule were soon disillusioned by Nazi policies.<sup>8</sup> In 1942, this spawned the appearance of a military formation, the UPA, a guerrilla army that at its height fielded some 50,000 men armed with captured German and Soviet weapons. The UPA operated principally in the mountainous and forested regions of Western Ukraine where the population was

overwhelmingly supportive of its political aims. The UPA fought German troops, engaging and repelling the *Wehrmacht* and SS units at the battalion and regimental level. Soviet partisans were also engaged and pushed out of UPA territory.

Thousands of Ukrainians from Galicia, as well as members of the OUN, volunteered to serve with the 14<sup>th</sup> Grenadier Waffen-SS Division *Halychyna* after its establishment in 1943.<sup>9</sup> The creation of the division was supported by many Ukrainians who saw potential for the formation of a Ukrainian national army, one that would fight Bolshevism and work towards national liberation. Many joined the division hoping that Soviet defeat would lead to an independent Ukraine. Others simply sought military training with the view to uniting with the UPA to expel foreign forces from Ukrainian territory. The division was decimated when surrounded by numerically superior Soviet forces at the battle of Brody in 1944. Reformed, and renamed the 1<sup>st</sup> Ukrainian Division, it fought rearguard actions in Czechoslovakia and Austria before surrendering to the British in 1945. This unit fought only on the Eastern front against Soviet Army units and communist partisans. In contrast, UPA units saw Soviet Ukrainian soldiers as potential recruits to the cause and, whenever possible, they directed their activities against the mostly Russian NKVD troops.

Following the retreat of German forces from Western Ukraine, the UPA fought incoming Soviet forces in pitched battles and conducted guerrilla warfare throughout Galicia until the early 1950s.<sup>10</sup> At times the UPA maintained de facto control of large tracts of Pollisia, Volhynia, and Galicia, providing school and hospital services and even publishing several newspapers for some years. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, despite the commitment of 70,000 NKVD troops to the conflict, Soviet authorities were unable to contain UPA activities in Western Ukraine. To deprive the UPA of its base of support in the countryside, millions of Ukrainians were deported from Western Ukraine to areas firmly under Soviet control in Eastern Ukraine and Kazakhstan.

After the pacification of Western Ukraine in 1952, a positive memory of the OUN and UPA lingered only in the minds of the Western Ukrainian population and in the collective consciousness of Ukrainians abroad. Soviet authorities portrayed OUN members and UPA fighters as Nazi sympathisers and collaborators who aided the Nazis in their campaigns against the Jews. The UPA and the SS Division *Halychyna* were conflated in Soviet propaganda; no mention was made of UPA actions against Nazi occupation forces. UPA units were alleged to have participated in the ethnic cleansing of Poles from areas that the UPA considered ethnically Ukrainian territory.

In the war to discredit the UPA, Soviet NKVD units dressed in UPA uniforms committed atrocities against Ukrainian villagers; an unconvincing tactic since few Ukrainians believed that the UPA would alienate its own supporters. The degree of popular support for the UPA was sufficient for Soviet authorities to resort to mass deportations of the peasantry from areas where they operated. This heavy-handed attempt to eliminate the UPA's support base further alienated those left in

the region and constituted a powerful component of collective memory that was geographically and socially contained. It is often forgotten that the UPA drew its membership from all parts of Ukraine and many Red Army soldiers also became UPA members.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, the commitment of Western Ukrainians to the idea of national sovereignty, and their readiness to challenge the Soviet Union, distinguished them from their countrymen in Eastern Ukraine who had been under Russian rule since the eighteenth century.<sup>12</sup>

After the UPA demobilised, the official Soviet heroes were the founding members of the Communist Party and Red Army soldiers who fell during the Great Patriotic War. Memory of the UPA was suppressed or distorted in official Soviet histories, while in the Ukrainian diaspora memory of the SS Division *Halychyna* was suppressed. The myth of the UPA as the true heroes survived in the consciousness of Western Ukrainians alone.

### Landscapes of memory in Western Ukraine

In the former Soviet Union memorials commemorating Soviet combatants killed during World War II were intended to frame the conflict in terms of a struggle for national survival. It was the Great *Patriotic* War. For political reasons the concepts of ‘Soviet’, ‘nation’, and ‘Russian’ were frequently conflated. In the post-war Soviet discourse, losses suffered from 1941–1945 validated the legitimacy of the system. Its memorials were vital political tools in the execution of this policy.<sup>13</sup>

These concepts are all germane to the thesis of this article: that the new landscapes of commemoration now emerging in Ukraine are both the visible manifestation of contested memory and vital weapons in the struggle for the dominance of rival mythologies of national identity. Heritage revisionism, as seen in the landscapes of the Cheremosh and Prut Valleys in Western Ukraine, is used as a broadly representative example of this process of contested memory in post-communist Ukraine. There is a highly complex landscape of memory and mythology contained within its memorials and monuments. It reflects a convoluted political history and 40 years of conflating Ukrainian nationalism with Ukrainian communism by the Communist Party.

### Monuments in Western Ukraine during the Soviet era

Regimes appropriate space through placement of their symbols and icons in the landscape, through control of toponymy, and the fabrication of national myths. In the towns and villages of Western Ukraine, as elsewhere in the Soviet Union, the communist regime placed statues of Lenin in prominent positions, usually in front of the local administration building or, in the smaller centres, before quasi-official buildings such as the Palace of Culture. As often as not, such statues were set in



squares or boulevards that bore Lenin's name. As the founder of the Soviet state, Lenin represented both Soviet homogeneity and communist orthodoxy. His presence, even if purely symbolic, was an affirmation of Soviet and communist authority and a symbolic denial of Ukrainian national aspirations.

In the 1960s, during the Brezhnev era, the Soviet Union erected thousands of memorials to commemorate members of the Soviet army killed during the Great Patriotic War. Scarcely a village in Ukraine lacks some sort of Soviet memorial, either to the army units that drove out the German occupation forces or to its community members who died serving with the Red Army. Ukraine was not unusual since in the mid-1960s the Soviet regime created what Nina Tumarkin has called a cult of World War II, and with the 20 million Soviet war dead remembered with "a ritualized epithet that signified the war mythology".<sup>14</sup> Across the Soviet Union memorials celebrated the huge losses endured by its people during the Great Patriotic War.

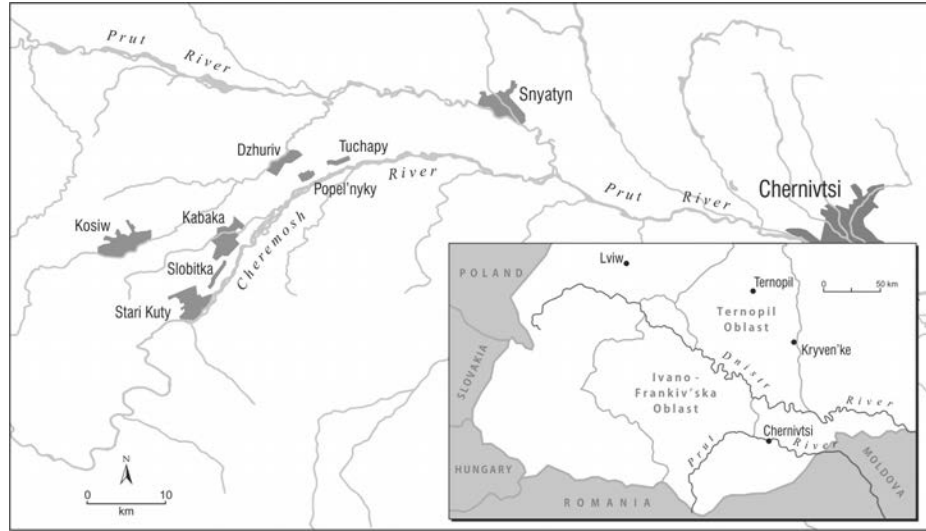
The use of these memorials for obvious political ends backfired to a certain extent in the 1970s when crass official attempts to manipulate emotions and loyalties inspired a callous derision to the cult of sacrifice in war among the young.<sup>15</sup> In Western Ukraine this was exacerbated by the region's convoluted political history and the population's complex relationship with Soviet monuments, for not only did thousands of conscripts from Western Ukrainian villages die fighting in Soviet units, where casualty rates were often horrific, but thousands served in UPA units.<sup>16</sup> Thousands more died serving in the SS Division *Halychyna*.

The attitude of the population of Western Ukraine toward the Soviet Army is thus highly complex. In the village of Kryven'ke, in Ternopil' Oblast, a memorial to local people killed fighting in the Red Army, the UPA, the SS Division *Halychyna* or because they were supporters of OUN, illustrates the conflicts of colliding mythologies where villagers served on all sides of the conflict.<sup>17</sup> The Red Army represented liberation from Nazi oppression, but its victories paved the way for the communist regime that extinguished nationalist aspirations; the UPA and the SS Division *Halychyna* promised different routes to independence.

### The commemorative landscape in 2008

Almost 20 years after the break-up of the Soviet Union and the realisation of Ukrainian independence, a new landscape of commemoration is emerging in Western Ukraine. Following a reconnaissance of Western Ukrainian districts in June-July 2005, June 2006 and July 2008, all memorials along the route from the village of Stari Kuty to the town of Snyatyn in the former province of Galicia (now in Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast in the Cheremosh and Prut Valleys respectively) were surveyed, inventoried, digitally recorded, and categorised by the authors. This route, approximately 32 kilometres in length, passes through several linear villages that sprawl along the road, forming a non-contiguous line of settlement that hosted some 34 monuments and memorials.<sup>18</sup>

Figure 1. The study area.



Information about their dates of placement and modification was sought from local residents, and in some cases was obtained from the memorials themselves. In most instances, although informants were willing to provide what information they could, they did not wish to be identified. The issues embodied in the act of placing a memorial are still highly political; the topic remains very sensitive and the political future unclear.

Four types of monument or memorial were identified in the study transect: nine Soviet war memorials, 15 memorials to the UPA and the OUN, eight monuments celebrating national figures in the arts or pre-Soviet politics, and two protest monuments. Soviet war and UPA memorials were by far the most common.

### *Soviet war memorials*

In the principal cities of the former Soviet Union war memorials are grand affairs, for example, the Soviet war memorial in the provincial city of L'viv. Even though it pales in comparison with the gargantuan memorial in Kyiv that towers over the city, it is an imposing piece of sculpture in the rather formulaic and bombastic style favoured by the Soviet bureaucracy. In rural areas Soviet memorials are generally simpler, ranging from a single column to a plinth bearing a statue of a Soviet soldier in a heroic pose, brandishing a sub-machine gun. The names of those killed in action are inscribed below.

Figure 2. Soviet war memorial, Dzhuriv, Ivano-Frankiv'ska Oblast.



Other memorials are simple red granite walls with the names of the fallen inscribed in gilded letters and surmounted with the inscription: “Eternal Glory to the Heroes”. Before the wall the apparatus for an eternal flame, ironically no longer burning, stands as a silent reminder that times have changed.

Figure 3. Soviet war memorial near Kabaka, Cheremosh Valley.



Many Soviet era memorials are contested. The Ukrainian Catholic Church, suppressed during that period, has sought to appropriate Soviet space by placing a cross atop or in front of Soviet memorials. In Slobitka in 1992, according to a local informant, immediately after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, villagers wanted a celebratory church service to be held at the war memorial. However, the priest refused to hold a religious service in a non-consecrated place. A cross was hurriedly placed in front of the memorial and the location sanctified by the priest.

Figure 4. Christianised Soviet war memorial Slobitka, Ivano-Frankiv'ska Oblast.



Flanking the memorial, a new low circular wall of grey stone commemorates those who fell during the conflict that lasted in this area from 1941 until 1952. While a Soviet star is etched above the names of the Red Army soldiers; there is no emblem above the names of the UPA soldiers. No attempt has been made to segregate the names of the Soviet fallen from the names of the UPA dead. In other locations, Soviet memorials have been appropriated through the addition of Christian symbols such as crosses and angels, which have been placed around the memorial site or on the memorial.

Figure 5. Soviet war memorial in Tuchapy, Ivano-Frankiv'ska Oblast. The Christian symbols were added after 1991.



### *Memorials to the UPA*

Almost immediately after Ukraine became independent in 1991, Soviet symbols were removed from official buildings and replaced with the national insignia of the country. Monuments to those who fell serving with the UPA, or who were killed because Soviet authorities suspected them of being UPA or OUN supporters, were erected in 1992 and thereafter. UPA monuments are almost always in the form of a high mound, replicating the burial mounds of the Cossacks and linking the UPA with the age-old struggle for Ukrainian independence.

The mound is surmounted with a cross and the Ukrainian trident. Every Soviet memorial inventoried in the study transect between Kutu and Snyatyn had a UPA counterpart. Not coincidentally they were placed either adjacent to, or opposite, pre-existing Soviet memorials. Names, dates of death, and sometimes photographic portraits of the fallen, are displayed. However, the UPA memorials seemingly avoid any connection with the former regime by eschewing sculptured figures in heroic poses brandishing assault rifles.

In the minds of many Ukrainian nationalists the fight waged by the UPA was simply one element of a longer struggle for national identity and political independence. In the village of Dzhuriv, for example, villagers erected an imposing mound in 1999 that is crowned with the cross and trident placed opposite to and dwarfing an older Soviet war memorial. The mound commemorates the UPA fallen, those who died fighting for an independent Ukraine from 1914 onwards, and the post-war victims of Soviet repression. A plaque at the base of the mound lists the members of the Sich Riflemen (*Sichovi stril'tsi*), soldiers who fought against the Poles in 1919, as well as civilians who were deported by the Soviets and perished in the Gulag.

Figure 6. Memorial to all who fell fighting for Ukraine 1914-1952, Dzhuriv, Ivano-Frankiv'ska Oblast.



As befits its status as a popular movement that drew its strength from local support, the UPA's monuments seldom commemorate a specific individual. Only

one exception to this was encountered: in the town of Snyatyn a large monument specifically identifies a UPA commander who was active within the region.

Figure 7. Monument in Snyatyn to local UPA leader Vasyl' Andusiak, killed in action against Soviet forces in 1946.



### *Memorials to cultural figures*

During the Soviet era, communist authorities erected a number of monuments to Ukrainian national figures who predated the regime. For the most part these were artists and writers who had a connection with Ukraine or the region. The Ukrainian writer and poet, Taras Shevchenko, for example, was a Ukrainian national figure and cultural icon who was acceptable to the regime. His lowly origins as a serf in pre-revolutionary Ukraine made it easy for him to be appropriated as a figure representing the egalitarian ideals of the Communist Party. As such, Soviet administrators saw his presence as apolitical, although among Ukrainians he is generally regarded as a symbol of Ukrainian national identity. Regardless of their origins, Shevchenko memorials can be regarded as expressions of Ukrainian national pride.

### *Protest monuments*

Monuments protesting the crimes of Soviet authorities are now commonly encountered throughout Ukraine. In the parts of the country that were under Soviet rule from the early 1920s, most of these monuments recall the horrors of the artificially induced famine (*holodomor*) that accompanied forced collectivisation in the 1930s. Areas that were under Polish control until 1939 did not experience the famine. Protest monuments in Western Ukraine focus therefore on the harsh treatment meted out by the Soviets to all they suspected of nationalist sympathies. Memorials to the “victims of communist oppression” or to the “children of

Figure 8. Memorial in Tuchapy to the “victims of communist terror” 1939–1991.

Ukraine”, a metaphorical allusion to nationalists who suffered for their devotion to the cause of Ukrainian independence, are placed outside many villages. Occasionally such sentiments are embedded within memorials to the UPA fallen as at Tuchapy. Here a plaque on the mound commemorates “the victims of the communist terror” alongside plaques that list the names of local people killed while fighting as members of the UPA or who were executed for supporting the OUN.



Not all commemoration was through conventional memorials. In the village of Popel’nyky a small, traditional peasant house was converted into a museum as a memorial to all those deported to Siberia for their nationalist sympathies. According to local people, in the 1940s and 1950s the Soviet secret police held people there before deporting them.

Figure 9. This monument in the Cheremosh Valley commemorates members of the OUN and UPA killed 1939–1952. The stela on the left commemorates the “victims of the communist butchers”.



The house, positioned on the principal street of the village, is one of several memorials, all with Ukrainian nationalist themes, which line the street almost without interruption for approximately 200 metres.

Figure 10. The house, now a commemorative museum, where inhabitants of the Tuchapy area were held before deportation to Siberia.



## Conclusion

Throughout Eastern Europe the excision of the communist period has been facilitated by the shallowness of Bolshevism’s own historical roots. Just as Soviet



communism strove to erase Christian temporalities and to replace them with its own rhythms and festivals, it attempted spatial appropriation of Western Ukrainian territory by building its own iconography into the landscape. Memorials may not carry the same emotional weight as a place of burial, but they are still powerful icons, reifying space, nurturing memory, and supporting national myths.

Catherine Wanner has argued that the Ukrainian population has internalised national identity; consequently, violence against Ukrainian culture, and its practises and customs, is commonly equated with violence against the self.<sup>19</sup> From this it follows that the population more strongly rejects those regimes that offered violence to the nation than it does those that simply projected violence against the individual. Soviet campaigns of “Russification” aimed at homogenisation of the Soviet Union’s peoples were thus interpreted by Ukrainian nationalists as direct attacks on the ethnic integrity of Ukraine, aimed at erasing the country’s national identity. Removal of Soviet political symbols contrasts with the respect shown to Soviet war memorials. It is this that makes the process of rewriting Western Ukraine’s commemorative landscape unusual. There was no concerted effort to obliterate all memorials of the former regime, as occurred in Germany under the Nazis (1933-1945) and the victorious Allies in 1945.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, along the valley of the Cheremosh River the appropriation of Soviet war memorials and the erection of new monuments is both a protest against Soviet memory and a rejection of their historiography.

This silent protest is made more powerful by the respect shown by the local population to the war memorials of the former regime that are still accorded the status of sacred places.<sup>21</sup> This stands in stark contrast to the contempt shown to the secular symbols of the Soviet regime, whether they are communist insignia or monuments to its political heroes. All that now remains of the statue of Lenin that stood since the 1950s outside the Palace of Culture in the village of Kabaka is a plinth of red granite.

Figure 11. Until 1991 Lenin stood on this plinth outside the Palace of Culture in Kabaka, Ivano-Frankiv’ska Oblast



It is a telling metaphor, reminding all that, like the figure that once stood there, the Soviet regime is no more.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup>David Lowenthal, “Is Identity a Useful Cross-Cultural Concept?,” in ed. John R. Gillis, *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 31.
- <sup>2</sup>Edward de Bono, *PO, Beyond Yes and No* (London, Penguin Books, 1990), 117.
- <sup>3</sup>de Bono, *Beyond Yes and No*, 100.
- <sup>4</sup>Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).
- <sup>5</sup>Paul Robert Magocsi, *Ukraine: A Historical Atlas* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1985).
- <sup>6</sup>For a further discussion of Bandera and the OUN-Bandera see David Marples, “Stepan Bandera: The Resurrection of a Ukrainian National Hero,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 58 (2006): 555-66.
- <sup>7</sup>Orest Subtelny, “The Soviet Occupation of Western Ukraine, 1939-41: An Overview,” in *Ukraine During World War Two: History and Its Aftermath*, ed. Yury Boshyk, (Edmonton, Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta, 1986), 5-14.
- <sup>8</sup>Ihor Kamenetsy, *Hitler’s Occupation of Ukraine: A Study of Totalitarian Imperialism* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1956); Bohdan Krawchenko, “Soviet Ukraine Under Nazi Occupation, 1941-44,” in *Ukraine During World War Two: History and Its Aftermath*, ed. Yury Boshyk, (Edmonton, Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta, 1986), 16-38.
- <sup>9</sup>OUN’s members were split between followers of Bandera (OUN b) and those of Melnyk (OUN m). During the war Melnyk’s supporters advocated collaboration as the road to achieving their political aims and Bandera’s supporters favoured independent action. Both were strongly anti-Soviet.
- <sup>10</sup>Vasyl Humeniuk, *Yavoriv’skyi fotoarkhiv UPA* (L’viv: “SPOLOM”, 2005).
- <sup>11</sup>Peter J. Potichnyj, “Ukrainians in World War II Military Formations: An Overview,” *Ukraine During World War Two: History and Its Aftermath*, ed. Yury Boshyk, (Edmonton, Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta, 1986), 65.
- <sup>12</sup>Myroslav Yurkevich, “Galician Ukrainians in German Military formations and in the German Administration,” in *Ukraine During World War Two: History and Its Aftermath*, ed. Yury Boshyk, (Edmonton, Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta, 1986), 67.
- <sup>13</sup>Nina Tumarkin. *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (New York, Basic Books, 1994).
- <sup>14</sup>Tumarkin. *Living and the Dead*, 135.

<sup>15</sup>Tumarkin, *Living and the Dead*, 156-57.

<sup>16</sup>Auguste Guillaume, *The German Russian War 1941-45* (London, The War Office, 1956); Catherine Merridale, *Ivan's War: Life and Death in the Red Army, 1939-1945* (New York, Metropolitan Books, 2006).

<sup>17</sup>Professor Andriy Hornjatkevič, 26 February 2001, University of Alberta, Edmonton Alberta, Canada, personal communication to John Lehr.

<sup>18</sup>The terms “memorial” and “monument” are generally considered synonymous. The two terms are used here to differentiate between *memorials* commemorating victims of war or political oppression and *monuments* celebrating political or cultural achievements.

<sup>19</sup>Catherine Wanner, “Crafting Identity, Marking Time: An Anthropological Perspective on Historical Commemoration and Nation-Building in Ukraine,” *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 23.3-4 (1999), 106-10.

<sup>20</sup>Rudy Koshar, *From Monuments to Traces: Artifacts of German Memory 1870-1990* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2000), 123.

## Bibliography

de Bono, Edward, *PO, Beyond Yes and No* (London, Penguin Books, 1990).

Guillaume, Auguste, *The German Russian War 1941-45* (London: The War Office, 1956).

Humeniuk, Vasyly, *Yavoriv's'kyi fotoarkhiv UPA L'viv: "SPOLOM"* (2005).

Kamenetsy, Ihor, *Hitler's Occupation of Ukraine: A Study of Totalitarian Imperialism* (Milwaukee: The Marquette University Press, 1956).

Koshar, Rudy, *From Monuments to Traces: Artifacts of German Memory 1870-1990* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

Krawchenko, Bohdan, “Soviet Ukraine Under Nazi Occupation, 1941-44,” in ed. Yury Boshyk, *Ukraine During World War Two: History and Its Aftermath* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta, 1986), 16-38.

Magocsi, Paul Robert, *Ukraine: A Historical Atlas* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985).

Marples, David, “Stepan Bandera: The Resurrection of a Ukrainian National Hero,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 58 (2006).

Merridale, Catherine, *Ivan's War: Life and Death in the Red Army, 1939-1945* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006).

Nora, Pierre, *Realms of Memory, Rethinking the French Past*, trans. Arthur

Goldhammer, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

Potichnyj, Peter J., “Ukrainians in World War II Military Formations: An Overview,” in ed. Yury Boshyk, *Ukraine during World War Two: History and Its Aftermath* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta, 1986).

Subtelny, Orest, “The Soviet Occupation of Western Ukraine, 1939-41: An Overview,” in ed. Yury Boshyk, *Ukraine During World War Two: History and Its Aftermath* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta, 1986), 5-14.

Tumarkin, Nina, *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

Wanner, Catherine, “Crafting Identity, Marking Time: An Anthropological Perspective on Historical Commemoration and Nation-Building in Ukraine”. *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 23.3-4 (1999), 106-10.

Yurkevich, Myroslav, “Galician Ukrainians in German Military Formations and in the German Administration,” in ed. Yury Boshyk, *Ukraine During World War Two: History and Its Aftermath* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta), 1986.

### Biographical notes

John Lehr is a Professor in the Department of Geography at the University of Winnipeg. He is a historical geographer whose research has focused on pioneer agricultural settlements and memory and meaning in cultural landscapes. He maintains regional research interests in western Canada, Brazil, Israel, and Ukraine.

Email: [j.lehr@uwinnipeg.ca](mailto:j.lehr@uwinnipeg.ca)

Natalia Aponiuk is Senior Scholar in the Department of German and Slavic Studies at the University of Manitoba. She is a specialist in Russian, Ukrainian, and Ukrainian Canadian literature. Her research interests also include ethnic identity in minority groups. She is editor of *Canadian Ethnic Studies/Etudes Ethniques au Canada*.

Email: [aponiuk@cc.umanitoba.ca](mailto:aponiuk@cc.umanitoba.ca)

5.

---

## SITING MEMORY

---

## Hazard Figures: Heritage, Memorial, and Wasting in Appalachia

Maria McVarish

---

## Hazard Figures: Heritage, Memorial, and Wasting in Appalachia

Maria McVarish

---

### Abstract

At approximately 3:00 p.m. on 5 April 2010 a cloud of methane gas exploded in a mine near Montcoal, West Virginia. Twenty-five miners died instantly, and for the next five days national and international news associations tracked efforts to rescue four miners believed to have sought refuge in a nearby air pocket. It was a familiar story... heard last year in China, five years ago in Kentucky. Judging from reports of survivors and family members the miners had understood that where they live injury, asphyxiation, and death are the conditions of employment. In this article, I explore concepts of value and productivity in close thematic relationship with ideas of 'wasting': literal and metaphoric, human and environmental. Drawing from photographs and news stories, I argue that for Appalachian mining communities the wish for "contained memory" emerges within a context of uncontained toxicity and danger. A discussion of issues connecting cultural heritage sites in Appalachia with the necessity for mourning and memorial provides the backdrop for my scrutiny of these terms. Efforts to contain cultural memory in Appalachia are complicated by an *identity* of environmental and cultural degradation—the direct legacy of the coal industry and its decline. Indeed, this wasted identity persists in two of the region's "growth industries": filling un-reclaimed mine sites with garbage imported from New York and building and managing federal prison facilities. The wasting of the mine region's society and landscape is thus reified in its use as a receptacle for out-of-state "refuse".

Keywords: forgetting, waste, figure, identity, memorial

## Introduction

This article explores the idea of memory as *economy*, with particular emphasis on *forgetting* as a correlate to the wasting that is endemic to any economic system. Using Sigmund Freud’s ideas regarding the individual’s psychic economy as a point of departure, I examine the range of meanings and uses of this word “economy” in the context of public memory. If public memory balances what is culturally or politically expedient now against what might return as a haunting cost later, what happens when we think about it in relation to the more familiar economic ideas of exchange and value? Specifically, I will examine the perhaps symptomatic memory economy of the Appalachian coal-mining region of the U.S., and attempt to link metaphoric and everyday ideas of value there to enactments of waste.

Figure 1. Maria McVarish. West Virginia Coal Road. 2004.



While today “economy” is most often understood as a noun for the organisation and exchange of resources (as a system or structure infinitely scaleable), its etymological root lies in the Greek word *oikos*, meaning the balanced management of a household or domestic locus. In common parlance “economy” is also a practice we resort to during hard times, the scrimping and belt-tightening we impose when our finances or systems fall out of balance.

In the context of an ongoing and more or less global recession, we know these meanings of the word “economy” almost too well. Its meanings within psychoanalytic theory, however, may be less familiar. At various times in his seminal writings, Freud explicitly characterised the mental processes as an economy of forces regulating the increase and reduction of *quantities* of “excitation”.<sup>1</sup> In his earlier texts, this regulation functioned between “wishes” and “prohibitions”. Later, it served in relation to the production of pleasure and



the “avoidance of unpleasure”, re-centring the psychic economy in a dynamic of countermining “drives”.<sup>2</sup>

Within Freud’s economic model of the psyche, memory provides the material for exchange between consciousness and the unconscious, remembering and forgetting. In a slightly different sense, memory also motivates what we are *able* to remember from what we would otherwise forget and, conversely, what we are able to *forget* from what we might too vividly remember.<sup>3</sup> Memory therefore resembles an *oikos*—a locus in which various desires, rendered as “quantities”, are sized against countervailing “quantities” of exigency or risk. In other words it is a topos where energies circulate, deviate, overflow, and dissipate—aiming in the overall scheme of things for a tolerable balance.

Yet memory also complicates this analogy between an economy of psychic forces and an economy of home or market. Freud proposed that memory is not simply a tool in the service of consciousness, but a rich if ambiguous cipher for the ongoing drama of our mental regulation. Nor is memory the only record of this drama. When an inassimilable or disturbing experience *cannot* achieve the status of memory—its links with the past not yet known or knowable—it will likely be enacted (and then re-enacted) in a transmuted form.<sup>4</sup> The original experience, buried in our mental archive and compelling these enactments, cannot properly be said to be forgotten since it resurfaces through repetition and displacement.<sup>5</sup>

Figure 2. Maria McVarish. Mine headhouse, Kaymoor, West Virginia. 2004.



## Disaster loops

In the following example, I will attempt to trace one particularly charged instance of public “memory” through various forms of enactment, obfuscation, and idealisation—each being variations of the phenomena of repetition and displacement as they occur within what we might call the public psyche.

At approximately 3:00 p.m. on 5 April 2010 a cloud of methane gas exploded in an underground mine near Montcoal, West Virginia. The initial reports confirmed the death of at least 25 miners, while four more remained trapped in the mine, possibly alive. Access to the area proved unsafe in the explosion’s aftermath with loose rubble obstructing egress; rescue crews clamoured to reach the missing miners. For five days and nights the crews drilled down, and accounts of their slow progress gripped the news. Amidst hourly updates, reports emerged that the mine ownership’s parent company, Massey Energy, and the mine facility itself had been cited for multiple and repeated safety violations before the blast.<sup>6</sup> When the rescuers finally located the four miners they learned that, like the 25 previously confirmed casualties, the men had died in the initial explosion.

Taking note of the level of interest generated by this story, the media turned its attention from sustaining hope to portraying the grief of the miners’ families. A memorial service was planned; both President Obama and Vice President Joseph Biden would speak there, with Obama delivering the eulogy. Still more news stories emerged after the memorial service, exposing lax regulation of the mining industry at both state and federal levels and the U.S. government’s failure, particularly under the Bush administration, to follow through on mine inspections let alone enforce penalties for known infractions.<sup>7</sup>

Massey Energy was reported in this context to be one of the nation’s most profitable mining companies, clearing \$104 million in 2009 alone (a year during which Republican senators had blocked incoming president Obama’s appointment of a new Mine Safety and Health Administration director).<sup>8,9</sup>

Figure 3. Rob Dinsmore, Project Designer, Chapman Technical Group. Upper Big Branch Miners Memorial. 2011.



As the tragedy unfolded on the news, I tried to remember the last time I had heard this narrative of underground explosion with trapped miners before. Failing to recall the specifics, I resorted to Google and was able to revive the chronicle of events in Sago, Kentucky in January 2006. My haunted feeling did not subside, however, with this confirmation as I felt I had heard some variation of the story since then. A further Google search indicated that in the last 10 years there have been scores of large-scale mining disasters in China alone—thousands dead with few survivors—and many more in other parts of the world.<sup>10</sup>

In the year since the Montcoal explosion, large-scale mining disasters have taken place again in China, Russia, Colombia, Chile, and New Zealand. The U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) defines “disaster” as an incident in which at least five people are killed. Internationally dozens, if not hundreds, of fatalities from mining accidents occur monthly without entering public awareness because they fall below this threshold. For instance, since April 2010 there have been at least as many known deaths collectively in American coalmines as there were in the Montcoal disaster.<sup>11</sup>

The story seems to repeat itself at nearly regular intervals—both within my country and in coalmines around the world—and I am interested in how it appears to fascinate the public anew each time. A lulling ignorance contributes to this cycle of forgetfulness and re-fascination. It is as if the general public cannot *think* the underground cavities of the mines—the spaces themselves—let alone imagine the work that takes place in them. The darkness, the shifting limits, and the interiority of the underground mines come to stand in for the un-image-able edges of popular consciousness. Ultimately they carve an absence within our national memory. In turn, they may contribute to government agencies’ lax enforcement of safety requirements and, likewise, to mine companies’ lack of strict and consistent precautions against accident.

### A political economy of memory

A striking quality to the repeating disaster stories is the extent to which both miners and non-miners (including the highest level of federal leadership) seem to understand and accept the risks of mining.<sup>12</sup> It is as if the necessity for coal were beyond scrutiny, an issue of national security and economic vitality, and as if its dangers were inevitable.<sup>13</sup> Subtending this lies the problem that for miners the perils experienced underground are the conditions not only of employment but of cultural relevance and value. Forgetfulness shrouds the hazards which underwrite our consumption of “cheap” fuel. Thanks to miners, we do not have to know the dangers and costs of our vast and growing need for “affordable” and “independent” energy.<sup>14</sup>

In what ways does this national memory problem complicate the mining community’s sense of its heritage and its grief—its regional memory? Historical

monuments pay tribute to the generations of miners who have given their lives to “fuel America’s great Industrial Revolution”—or in more contemporary terms to fuel “our way of life”.<sup>15,16</sup> However this image of the heroic miner implicitly belies an otherwise conspicuous wasting of the region’s individual, cultural, and environmental resources.<sup>17</sup>

Figure 4. Kim I. Hartman. Coal Miner Memorial Statue at the Capitol Building, Charleston, West Virginia. 2010.



The miners’ social value appears irreconcilably ambiguous as two kinds of “economies” diverge around their work. Within the short-term memory economy of the public they are heroic figures; within the scrimping economy of fuel prices they are evidently disposable.

Figure 5. Maria McVarish. Near Fayette, West Virginia. 2004.



In Marxian terms, the economy enjoyed by a company like Massey Energy is predicated on an outbound spiral of surplus value (witness this company's profit in the year before the Montcoal explosion), while the economy experienced by miners is an ever-closing and sometimes surpassing loop of costs.<sup>18</sup>

Figure 6. People Incorporated of Virginia. Miner's Pay Sheet. 1938.

CLINCHFIELD COAL CORPORATION			
Transfer No.	House No.		
Period ended on date shown by P-R No.			
<b>EARNINGS</b>			
xx	Tons Coal @		
	Tons Coal @		
	Tons Coal @		
	Cars Slate @		
	Yardage @		
	21 Hrs. Labor @ 80		16.80
	Hrs. Labor @		
	Hrs. Labor @		
	Extra Compensation		
	<b>TOTAL GROSS EARNINGS</b>		16.80
	<b>NET EARNINGS</b>		
	Cash Credit		
	<b>TOTAL CREDIT</b>		
<b>DEDUCTIONS</b>			
	Rent		
	Lights		
	Smithing		
	Doctor	1.0	
	Benef. Ass'n. Dues	60	
IEE	Insurance	2	
Account	Overdraft		
	Installment A/c		
	Emp. Ass'n. Dues	20	
	Baseball		
	Heat	1.40	
	<b>TOTAL</b>		8.00
	Ledger A/c		
	Mdse. Orders		
	Coal		
	Board		
	Cash		
	Credit Checks	3	
	Checkweighman		
	Federal P R Tax	17	
	<b>TOTAL DEDUCTIONS</b>	xxxx	8.00
	<b>BAL. DUE EMPLOYEE</b>	xxxx	xxx
	<b>BAL. DUE CORPORATION</b>		xxxxx xxx

Courtesy of Louise Johnson Fields.

This corresponds roughly to what Marx might call the spoliation<sup>19</sup> of labour (meaning labour's incremental and corporeal loss during the production of surplus value).<sup>20</sup> What I am particularly interested in is the notion of entropy in this spoliation process.<sup>21</sup> In other words, I am interested in conceiving of the loss or wastage that is intrinsic to the coal company's system of production<sup>22</sup> and the visible, physical and human ways in which the system's accumulation of loss becomes manifest.

The entropy of coal mining, the other side of the company's production and export of value, is evident in the environments the industry has ravaged

and equally in the deaths, physical health problems, and social costs borne by the mining communities directly. We must measure the economic and social containment of miners against the enduringly uncontained toxicity of their environment, and the evidently unmanageable occupational hazards that contribute to their social value.

Figure 7. Maria McVarish.  
Creek near Montcoal, West  
Virginia. 2007.



### Cultural entropy

From a memory perspective, there is a problem of temporal containment as well. Just as the environmental effects of this entropy are not limited to the periods of active mining, we can see their persistence at the level of the coal region’s cultural identity. Since the underground mining industry’s virtual dissolution in the last few decades (very large underground mining companies like Massey Energy aside), its legacy of wasting has surfaced like toxic sludge in some of the region’s recent “growth industries”. These include filling un-reclaimed mine sites with garbage imported from New York and building and managing federal prison facilities.<sup>23,24</sup> The wasting of the mine region’s society and landscape is reified in its use as a receptacle for different forms of imported “refuse”.

I want to be very clear that this economic by-product—of degradation or waste—is not necessarily internalised by miners. If anything, miners show a fierce pride in their work and align themselves with the image of heroic figures who makes sacrifices for others. Wasting is therefore more of a regional “identity”<sup>25</sup> in the Lacanian<sup>26</sup> sense of an image-based (or image-oriented) unity of associated signifiers (an idea I will develop below). If we can locate it at all, the identity resides in a more broadly popular unconscious.

## Mining figures

Figure 8. Maria McVarish.  
Sign near Bobtown,  
Pennsylvania. 2007.



This distinction—between a *figure* and an *identity*—is of crucial importance to understanding something of the means by which ideas of social value are transmitted *between* individuals who, while sharing a certain level of experience or belief through their identification with a figure, co-exist in quite different economic circuits. This, in turn, can result in divergences in their “memories”, or in their relationships to what can be remembered and what must be forgotten. A figure is not a person, but a kind of three-dimensional image produced culturally by various modalities of discourse, but equally by the “needs”, stories, and myths that belie cultural operations.

Figures serve socially prescribed *functions*. It is for this reason that we may think critically and politically *through* figures when we interrogate cultural operations that appear “natural”. To think through the figure of the miner, we must examine the ‘ground’ against which he is seen (in the “figure/ground” parlance of conventional pictorial analysis).<sup>27</sup> The movements and specific efforts of the miner-figure’s labour process, the technologies that engage and support this

process, the network of other working and consuming figures linked to him, and the environment in which he works all constitute the miner's ground. All of these factors contribute to the idea and role of the figure the miner cuts.

If a *figure* is produced within and operates at a purely social level, an *identity* by contrast works on two planes. It links individuals to society as a whole, often *through* identification with a socially understood figure. It also aligns individuals to other individuals (particular people) and to specific places.

Figure 9. George Bragg Collection. Miners walking to work in Glen Jean. 1900.



In the monuments to martyred miners the miner-figure is often imagined in isolation; culturally-produced figures, while conceptually set-off by a ground (or setting), are in practice severable from the specifics of that ground (identities are not).

Figures are therefore a social means of inscribing individuals with culturally *shared* symbolic meanings, phantasies, and demands and they exclude some attributes or associations in favour of others. The overlooked or excluded parts are real, however, and for as long as what is positively delineated by a figure is socially affirmed the rest—the parts that do not fit which I am calling the waste—will accumulate elsewhere in quantity and form. Like traumatic experiences that, while not ‘remembered’ cannot yet be said to be forgotten, these unassimilated and abjected aspects (in this case of mining) find expression repeatedly in displaced ways.

In the example explored here the miner as a body and as a real person is marked by a socially disavowed identity, the by-product of his status as a working figure in the split (company/miner) economies of mining. As an instrument of the



coal company, the miner is implicated in the toxicity, degradation, and corruption generated by coal extraction. Although the wasting of the mining landscape is explicitly disavowed by mining companies (and all too often by government agencies and the general public), those who live or work in the vicinity of coal mines, even abandoned ones, are statistically more likely to develop life-threatening or chronic health conditions.<sup>28</sup>

The disproportionate incidence of health problems amongst miners is the consequence of environmental toxins, inadequate healthcare, drug and substance addiction, and poor education outside the mine shafts as much as it is a result of their exposure to dangers within the mines. Rates of systemic political and judicial corruption are also notably higher in coal mining areas.<sup>29</sup> These entropic facets of the coal economy are alternately conspicuous and subtle. As the backdrop to their daily life they contiguously link the *real* miners, as distinct from the *heroic* figures, to the waste produced by coal mining.

Figure 10. Maria McVarish. Huber Breaker near Ashley, Pennsylvania. 2007.



### Memory markers

The preceding discussion of the social function of figures and identities bears relevance to James E. Young's lengthy apologia for the necessity of figuration in what he calls countermemorials.<sup>30</sup> As he concedes, people need an identificatory entry point to public memory and a means by which to understand their own relationship to the loss memorialised.<sup>31</sup> This is especially true when the people who have died, the environment that has been disfigured, and the community that has been abjected exist outside of one's direct experience.

As already implied, figures may play an important role in affording us, as individuals, a means for understanding and laying claim to social value (in the sense of worth), meaning, and relevance. Produced culturally, shaped by palpable forces within specific economies and marked out through embodied practices, they leave traces in the environments they create.<sup>32</sup> Figures may be conjured by their *grounds* or places and particularly through a perception of the *absence* these grounds still evoke.<sup>33</sup>

Figure 11. Maria McVarish. Company town now covered in kudzu, Kaymoor, West Virginia. 2004.



Abandoned work sites of the underground mining industry tell stories explicitly within a language of presence and absence, memory, and loss. The visible, above-ground mining buildings describe their use, material history, and position in the progress of technology. They show us how work was done—from the large scale of labour organisation and differentiation all the way down to the specific movements, actions, efforts, and appendages of individual miners. They evoke the real bodies that worked in them, just as they record the specific ingenuity and effort these workers expended. All of which argues strongly for the preservation of what remains of underground coal mining facilities as *countermonuments*, with special emphasis on the critical curation of the meanings and causes for what remains and what is gone.

Figure 12. Laura Hartman. window repair at miner's outbuilding, Eckley Village, Pennsylvania. 2005.



Young reminds us that public memory must be selected, organised, and interpreted whenever it is given form. In Appalachia, the very question of giving memorial or monumental form to a contested heritage/memory may itself serve to focus the mining communities, and even outside stakeholders, on the complications involved in their ambivalent or polyvalent histories.<sup>34</sup> Memory sites in these mining areas must serve disparate and possibly competing interests: government, industry, national consumers, tourists, local communities, and (not least) the survivors and heirs of those lost or injured in the mines.

Figure 13. Maria McVarish. Mine conveyor, Nuttallburg, West Virginia. 2006.



The preservation and curation of surviving mine structures would provide an alternative to the kinds of demurring and understated yet glorifying monuments to the miner’s “sacrifice” referred to earlier. The buildings offer no easy containment to the work, meaning, history, and loss of value borne disproportionately by mining communities. Certainly, in the hands of the wrong curators, they may be prone to the same “forgetful” and disingenuous glossing over of social tensions and conflicts that existing memorials to miners exemplify. But such glossing is less tenable when the marker comes with its own palpable and perceptible connection with the history in question. The structures do not cease to evoke the expenditures of real people, the losses, and wasting that paralleled the growth and glory of the underground coal mining industry.

The layers of materiality, technological innovation, use history, and bricolage still evident in surviving structures have the potential to convey the rich and contradictory effects of the industry’s history here. These places act not as unifying vehicles for pat identifications, but in the spirit of James Young’s countermonuments. The buildings continue to confront their visitors with the figure of the miner—one whose constitution implicates all of us. The enduring production of this figure is contrasted by the absence of real people to serve the functions it prescribes. This absence of the particular person may in turn serve as a vehicle precisely for the re-membering of what has been paid or lost here, and the working-through of meanings that build and bind communities.

Figure 14. Maria McVarish.  
Miners’ changing room,  
Bobtown, Pennsylvania. 2007.



## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton Inc, 1961), 1.

<sup>2</sup>Freud uses the terms “wishes” and “prohibitions” in his first major published works. See Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Avon Books, 1968). See also Chapters III and IV in Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* for examples of his later terminology of drives and the “avoidance of unpleasure”.

<sup>3</sup>“In the unconscious nothing can be brought to an end, nothing is past or forgotten ... For the fading of memories and the emotional weakness of impressions which are no longer recent, which we are inclined to regard as self-evident ... are in reality... brought about by laborious work” in Freud, *Dreams*, 617.

<sup>4</sup>Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 12.

<sup>5</sup>This is the fundamental theory behind effects of traumatic memory. See, for example, Francoise Davoine and Jean-Max Gaudilliere, *History Beyond Trauma* (New York: Other Press, 2004).

<sup>6</sup>See [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/04/06/west-virginia-mine-explos\\_n\\_526810.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/04/06/west-virginia-mine-explos_n_526810.html) accessed April 25, 2010.

<sup>7</sup>See <http://blog.aflcio.org/2010/06/28/mine-blast-probe-moves-forward-massey-energy-sues-msha-over-ventilation-rules/> accessed July 6, 2010.

<sup>8</sup>See <http://www.richmondbizsense.com/2010/04/08/massey-energy-in-the-hot-seat/> accessed October 17, 2010 and <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/apr/07/nation/la-na-massey7-2010apr07> accessed October 17, 2010.

<sup>9</sup>See <http://blog.aflcio.org/2010/06/28/mine-blast-probe-moves-forward-massey-energy-sues-msha-over-ventilation-rules/> accessed July 6, 2010.

<sup>10</sup>See <http://www.usmra.com/china/disasterwatch/> accessed July 13, 2011.

<sup>11</sup>See <http://www.msha.gov/accinj/accinj.htm> accessed October 17, 2011.

<sup>12</sup>See for example <http://www.register-herald.com/disaster/x1687712334/-Dad-died-doing-what-he-loved> accessed April 25, 2010 and [http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2010-04-25-miners\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2010-04-25-miners_N.htm) accessed October 17, 2011.

<sup>13</sup>Yet, according to a Preliminary Report issued by the MSHA, “When methane and coal dust levels are controlled, explosions from these sources can be prevented. Explosions in coal mines are preventable.” See [http://www.msha.gov/PerformanceCoal/DOL-MSHA\\_president\\_Report.pdf](http://www.msha.gov/PerformanceCoal/DOL-MSHA_president_Report.pdf) accessed October 17, 2011.

<sup>14</sup>At the consumer end, coal was used as a fuel and heat source both domestically and industrially, particularly in the steel industry, beginning with its first extraction and continuing through World War II. Since then, it has become America’s primary source of electricity.

<sup>15</sup>See <http://www.angelfire.com/pa3/statue/> accessed September 2, 2010.

<sup>16</sup>This unquestioning attitude (that coal is necessary to our way of life) may be found, for example, in <http://news.discovery.com/earth/what-caused-the-deadly-coal-mine-explosion-in-west-virginia.html> accessed October 17, 2011.

<sup>17</sup>For more on the correlations between the coal industry and the systemic social, infrastructural, juridical, and environmental problems evidenced in coal mining areas see John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence & Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1982) and Ronald D. Eller, *Uneven Ground: Appalachia Since 1945* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008).

<sup>18</sup>“A miner’s wages depended upon how much coal he could harvest daily from the mine, but management’s expectations differed sharply from the realities experienced by laboring miners. In 1888, an anthracite miner could generally fill two carts of coal each day. Average daily earnings across forty-five anthracite mines varied from \$1.31 to \$4.08, with the bulk of men earning between \$2.00 and \$3.50. In that same year, however, Eckley Coxe testified that the Coxe company assumed that a miner produced five carloads each day, at 87 cents/load. Eckley calculated that, from the resulting \$4.35, a miner could pay his assistant \$1.80, plus a portion of various local and school taxes amounting to about \$3.90/year. Coxe miners were then docked at the breaker for the amount of slate mixed with each cartload, and in addition, miners were charged for their own ‘powder and oil, blasting barrel, cotton, and squib’”, <http://www.hsp.org/default.aspx?id=506> accessed July, 13 2011.

<sup>19</sup>Karl Marx, “The Limits of the Working Day” in Section 1 of Chapter 10, *Capital, Volume One*, accessed October 17, 2011, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch10.htm>: “By an unlimited extension of the working-day, you may in one day use up a quantity of labour-power greater than I can restore in three. What you gain in labour I lose in substance. The use of my labour-power and the spoliation of it are quite different things.”

<sup>20</sup>“(S)urplus value, that part of the value of the results of human labour which accrues beyond the amount needed to reproduce the initial labour power.” *Oxford English Dictionary*, accessed October 17, 2011, <http://www.oed.com.proxy.cca.edu/view/Entry/194992?redirectedFrom=surplus%20value#eid19788289>

<sup>21</sup>I am borrowing something of the sense that Jacques Lacan lends this term in his seventeenth seminar: Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XVII*, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007).

<sup>22</sup>If we think of the coal company as a production circuit in which, following the logic of basic thermodynamics, the energy consumed in the mining and distribution process is conserved elsewhere, at least at a numeric level, we know that the law of entropy will modify this equation by a measure of loss. “Loss” in this context means that (energy) which is dissipated, absorbed or emitted along the way and is thus not available to re-enter the system or circuit.

<sup>23</sup>See <http://hamptonroads.com/2011/06/trash-imports-virginia-increase-report-says> accessed October 17, 2011.

<sup>24</sup>See [http://articles.philly.com/2010-06-27/news/24965186\\_1\\_state-prison-populations-inmate-population-prison-costs](http://articles.philly.com/2010-06-27/news/24965186_1_state-prison-populations-inmate-population-prison-costs) accessed July 6, 2010.

<sup>25</sup>Identity (noun) “1. a. The quality or condition of being the same in substance, composition, nature, properties, or in particular qualities under consideration; absolute or essential sameness; oneness.” *Oxford English Dictionary*, accessed October 17, 2011, [http://0-dictionary.oed.com.library.cca.edu:80/cgi/entry/50111220?query\\_type=word&queryword=identity&first=1&max\\_to\\_show=10&sort\\_type=alpha&result\\_place=1&search\\_id=qCDn-HpnwBU-8960&hilite=50111220](http://0-dictionary.oed.com.library.cca.edu:80/cgi/entry/50111220?query_type=word&queryword=identity&first=1&max_to_show=10&sort_type=alpha&result_place=1&search_id=qCDn-HpnwBU-8960&hilite=50111220)

<sup>26</sup>“Lacan places a special emphasis on the role of the image, defining identification as ‘the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image’.... To ‘assume’ an image is to recognise oneself in the image, and to appropriate the image as oneself.” Dylan Evans, *Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 81. I am implicitly including symbolic aspects of the environment in Lacan’s “image”. At this symbolic level, the identification is with the signifier “waste”.

<sup>27</sup>In the U.S., the coal mining work force is 94% male. See <http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat18.pdf> accessed October 17, 2011. In Appalachia, the miner is, almost without exception, figured as male in memorials commemorating mining disasters.

<sup>28</sup>See <http://www.dailyyonder.com/poverty-worsens-appalachia-so-do-drug-abuse-and-depression> accessed November 5, 2010; <http://www.drugfree.org/join-together/addiction/appalachia-besieged-by> accessed November 20, 2010; <http://www.mountainpeeksmag.com/salobstudy.htm> accessed November 5, 2010; <http://www.dailyyonder.com/what-happens-when-you-dont-own-land/2009/07/03/2205> accessed November 5, 2010; and <http://appalshop.org/ami/issues.htm> accessed April 25, 2010.

<sup>29</sup>Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness*. See also <http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/ConductUnbecoming/story?id=6998390&page=1> accessed April 25, 2010.

<sup>30</sup>James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1993), 6-15.

<sup>31</sup>“It is as if figurative sculpture were needed to engage viewers with likenesses of people, to evoke an empathic link between viewer and monument that might then be marshaled into particular meaning.” Young, *Texture of Memory*, 10.

<sup>32</sup>In 2007, I visited the Upper Big Branch Mine during the course of a research project I had been conducting with a colleague and fellow architect, Laura Hartman. Over the last seven years, we have been looking at and engaging with coal mining structures in the Appalachian mountain areas of the north-eastern U.S., approaching the structures directly and documenting or re-envisioning them through photography and video. In our work, the photograph has provided a surface, or place, for binding memories—our own and the mining communities’—in the visible. I use the term “memory image” as an extension of Walter Benjamin’s “dialectical image” to delineate a temporal plane which links meaning between past wishes and present “dangers”. See Walter Benjamin, “Convolute N – On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress,” in *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 456-88.

<sup>33</sup>As an architect and visual researcher, I am particularly interested in the role that places, memory sites and images may play in shaping the memory-work of a community (or a “public”). My research trips to the Appalachian underground mine regions have afforded me the opportunity to document a range of mine sites, and made me aware of the very rapid pace at which above-ground (visible) reminders of the industry’s heyday are being destroyed and removed. This active erasure and forgetting has its origins in what I am calling the political economy of public memory. The coal economy is founded on non-homogenous and divergent financial *and* memory economies. This has had an insidious effect when it comes to public consensus about (let alone funding for) heritage, preservation, and memorial projects.

<sup>34</sup>For a good example of one community’s efforts in navigating these disparate interests (to date only modestly successful), see <http://citizensvoice.com/news/huber-breaker-preservation-society-has-plans-for-park-1.604113> accessed July 6, 2010 and “Huber Happenings – The Newsletter of the Huber Breaker Preservation Society,” 1(1): March 2002 <http://huberbreaker.org/home/?p=95> accessed April 25, 2010.

## Bibilography

### *Books and articles*

Benjamin, Walter, “Convolute N – On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress,” in *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999).

Davoine, Francoise and Jean-Max Gaudilliere, *History Beyond Trauma* (New York: Other Press, 2004).

Eller, Ronald D, *Uneven Ground: Appalachia Since 1945* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008).

Evans, Dylan, *Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

Gaventa, John, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence & Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1982).

Freud, Sigmund, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton Inc, 1961).

Freud, Sigmund, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Avon Books, 1968).

Lacan, Jacques, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XVII*, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007).



Young, James E., *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1993).

*Internet sources*

Bishop, Bill, *Daily Yonder*, “As Poverty Worsens in Appalachia, So Do Drug Abuse and Depression,” <http://www.dailyyonder.com/poverty-worsens-appalachia-so-do-drug-abuse-and-depression> accessed November 5, 2010.

Dorell, Oren, *USA Today*, “Obama Eulogizes 29 W.Va. Miners,” [http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2010-04-25-miners\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2010-04-25-miners_N.htm) accessed October 17, 2011.

Golias, Paul, *The Citizen’s Voice*, “Huber Breaker Preservation Society Has Plans for Park,” <http://citizensvoice.com/news/huber-breaker-preservation-society-has-plans-for-park-1.604113> accessed July 6, 2010.

Harper, Scott, *The Virginia-Pilot*, “Trash Imports Into Virginia Increase, Report Says,” <http://hamptonroads.com/2011/06/trash-imports-virginia-increase-report-says> accessed October 17, 2011.

Harris, A., *Richmond BizSense*, “All Eyes On Massey Energy,” <http://www.richmondbizsense.com/2010/04/08/massey-energy-in-the-hot-seat/> accessed October 17, 2011.

Heller, Karen, *The Inquirer*, “Karen Heller: In Pennsylvania, Prison Still a Growth Industry,” [http://articles.philly.com/2010-06-27/news/24965186\\_1\\_state-prison-populations-inmate-population-prison-costs](http://articles.philly.com/2010-06-27/news/24965186_1_state-prison-populations-inmate-population-prison-costs) accessed July 6, 2010.

Holt, Sharon Ann, *Historical Society of Pennsylvania*, “The Life and Labor of Coxe Miners,” <http://www.hsp.org/default.aspx?id=506> accessed October 17, 2011.

*Huffpost Green*, “West Virginia Mine Explosion: Massey Energy Mine Had Scores Of Safety Citations,” [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/04/06/west-virginia-mine-explos\\_n\\_526810.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/04/06/west-virginia-mine-explos_n_526810.html) accessed April 25, 2010.

Jackson, Christopher J, *The Register Herald*, “Dad Died Doing What He Loved – Daughter Tells Miner’s Story,” <http://www.register-herald.com/disaster/x1687712334/-Dad-died-doing-what-he-loved> accessed April 25, 2010.

Levine, Art, *In These Times*, “Six Months After Massey Coal Disaster, Miners Still Dying, Oversight Failing,” [http://www.inthesetimes.com/working/entry/6517/six\\_months\\_after\\_massey\\_coal\\_disaster\\_miners\\_still\\_dying\\_oversight\\_sti/](http://www.inthesetimes.com/working/entry/6517/six_months_after_massey_coal_disaster_miners_still_dying_oversight_sti/) accessed October 17, 2011.

*Los Angeles Times*, “About Massey Energy Co,” <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/apr/07/nation/la-na-massey7-2010apr07> accessed October 17, 2011.

Marx, Karl, *Capital, Volume One*, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch10.htm> accessed October 17, 2011.

*Newsletter of the Huber Breaker Preservation Society, The*, “Huber Happenings”, 1(1): March 2002, <http://huberbreaker.org/home/?p=95> accessed April 25, 2010.

*Oxford English Dictionary*, <http://www.oed.com.proxy.cca.edu/view/Entry/194992?redirectedFrom=surplus%20value#eid19788289> accessed October 17, 2011.

*Partnership at Drugfree.Org, The*, “Appalachia Besieged by Painkiller Addiction,” <http://www.drugfree.org/join-together/addiction/appalachia-besieged-by> accessed October 17, 2011.

Salob, Michelle L, *Mountain Peeks*, “Rural Appalachia: Disparities Within Disparities,” <http://www.mountainpeeksmag.com/salobstudy.htm> accessed November 5, 2010.

Sauer, Maddy and Justin Rood, *ABC News*, “Supreme Court Hears Justice for Sale Case,” <http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/ConductUnbecoming/story?id=6998390&page=1> accessed April 25, 2010.

Shuford, Chuck, *Daily Yonder*, “What Happens When You Don’t Own the Land,” <http://www.dailyyonder.com/what-happens-when-you-dont-own-land/2009/07/03/2205> accessed November 5, 2010.

Symons, Tom, “The Coal Miner – A Tribute to the Anthracite Miner,” <http://www.angelfire.com/pa3/statue/> accessed September 2, 2010.

*United States Mine Rescue Association*, “China’s Worst Mining Disasters,” <http://www.usmra.com/china/disasterwatch/> accessed November 2, 2010.

### Biographical note

Maria McVarish is an architect, artist, and visual researcher practising in San Francisco. She has lectured in architecture at UC Berkeley’s College of Environmental Design and, since 1996, taught interdisciplinary studies, critical theory, and design at California College of the Arts. Recent and upcoming public lectures include: ‘Hazard Figures: Heritage, Memorial and Wasting in Appalachia’ at the Psychoanalytic Institute of Northern California (April 2012); ‘Imaginary Spaces’ at San Jose State University (November 2009); ‘In Visible Memory’ at Syracuse University (October 2008); and ‘Design in the Unconscious’ for the Psychoanalytic Institute of Northern California (June 2007). Her essays, drawings and sculpture have been published in *Diacritics*, *Zyzzava*, *How(ever)*, and *Architecture California: the Journal of the American Institute of Architects*. Her architectural work has been featured in *California Home and Design*, *Southface Journal* and CNN’s television series *Earth-Wise*. For an example of one of her ongoing projects related to memory sites see <http://mnemictrain.com/about/>

Email: [mmcvarish@cca.edu](mailto:mmcvarish@cca.edu)

---

## Containing Marginal Memories: The Melancholy Landscapes of Hart Island (New York), Cockatoo Island (Sydney), and Ripapa Island (Christchurch)

Jacky Bowring

---

## Containing Marginal Memories: The Melancholy Landscapes of Hart Island (New York), Cockatoo Island (Sydney), and Ripapa Island (Christchurch)

Jacky Bowring

---

### Abstract

Contained within tight geographical margins, islands are places where memories are intensified and heightened. The antithesis of the dreamy palm-covered paradises of travel brochures are the urban islands that lurk in blind spots, dark and brooding. Spatially and socially marginalised, such islands become memorials to the shadowy dimensions of civilisation: prisons, landfills, military bases, lunatic asylums, and cemeteries. Hart Island, Cockatoo Island, and Ripapa Island are liminal zones at the edges of our consciousness. There are no permanent residents on them, yet they are replete with cultural memories. Hart Island, despite being the United States' largest cemetery, is practically invisible. Out of bounds to the public, it is a cemetery for the nameless and the homeless, with graves dug by prisoners from Riker's Island jail. The island's ruins include a lunatic asylum, prison, amusement park, and Nike anti-missile base, all dissolving into the picturesque greenery. Cockatoo Island is a wholly transformed landscape with silos, dry docks, and buildings sculpted directly into the sandstone. The infrastructural modifications have housed prisons, reform schools, and shipyards. Ripapa Island is also highly modified, with its defensive opportunities realised in its long history as a pā, a military fort, and a prison, which in the late nineteenth century housed followers of Te Whiti from the passive protest at Parihaka. Bearing their weighty cargo of memories, each island presents a conundrum, a "what now?" dilemma that vexes those charged with their care: to be preserved in a reserve as at Ripapa, or gentrified as a recreational site like Cockatoo, or to remain resolutely off the map as with Hart Island?

Keywords: melancholy, memory, cemeteries, prisons, forts, liminality, heritage

## Introduction

As small, microcosmic landscapes, islands present a distinct condition. Islands are suggestive of a condition redolent with the melancholy of detachment and solitude. The word “isolation” is rooted in the Latin *isola*, meaning island. They have a unique place in our psyche, and John Gillis observes that:

*We attribute to islands atemporal, liminal qualities that we would never associate with mainlands. Despite our efforts to historicize them, to pin them down to our geographical coordinates, islands continue to be projections of the deepest layers of our subconscious.*<sup>1</sup>

Just as much as these projections could be the familiar paradisiacal imagery associated with tropical islands, these pieces of land are also coloured by the darker aspects of the subconscious, as cultural repositories of marginalised memories. In contrast to the mainland, their otherness is amplified by the necessary journeys to reach them, the passage across the limen, as embodied in Arnold Böcklin's *Isle of the Dead* (Figure 1). Böcklin made at least five versions of this painting, which became an iconographic image of mourning that evokes symbolism associated with the passage into death, including the crossing of water, cypress trees, and the idea of a threshold or limen.

Figure 1. Arnold Böcklin Die Toteninsel / Isle of the Dead. 1886. With the permission of bpk | Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig | Ursula Gerstenberger.



Some of the most melancholy of islands are those which exist right at the edge of daily life. These are not the places of remote getaways and adventures, but the poignant repositories of memory that are seemingly moored off cities. Prisons, lunatic asylums, landfills, and cemeteries: all marginal land uses which act as alter egos to the mainlands they hover near. The atmosphere of melancholy which pervades these places is felt mostly by those who do not inhabit them, and in many cases they are not inhabited at all.

Alcatraz (San Francisco's prison island) and San Michele (Venice's cemetery island) are legendary urban islands, celebrated dark spots within their city's psyches. In the case of sites such as Alcatraz, it could be argued that their attraction is motivated by dark tourism, where travellers are drawn to sites of

tragedy.<sup>2</sup> Less well known are the three islands explored in this article, namely New York’s Hart Island, Cockatoo Island in Sydney Harbour, and Ripapa Island in Lyttelton Harbour, Christchurch. The enigmatic presences of these three islands, along with Alcatraz and San Michele, are depicted in Figure 2, a figure-ground drawing which is a projection in both senses of the word. On one hand the shapes are projected, as though in a shadow play, and on the other they are the target for projections of the subconscious, as in Rorschach blots. The place these islands have in the dark realm of the psyche is intensified by the associations and resonances of their forms in this figure-ground image. All manner of thoughts come to mind in observing the islands’ silhouettes, and they seem somehow inherently sinister ... an amputated leg ... a sting ray ... a stealth bomber ....

Figure 2. Island silhouettes.  
Clockwise from top left: Hart Island, Cockatoo Island, Ripapa Island, Alcatraz, San Michele.  
Grid is 500 square metres.

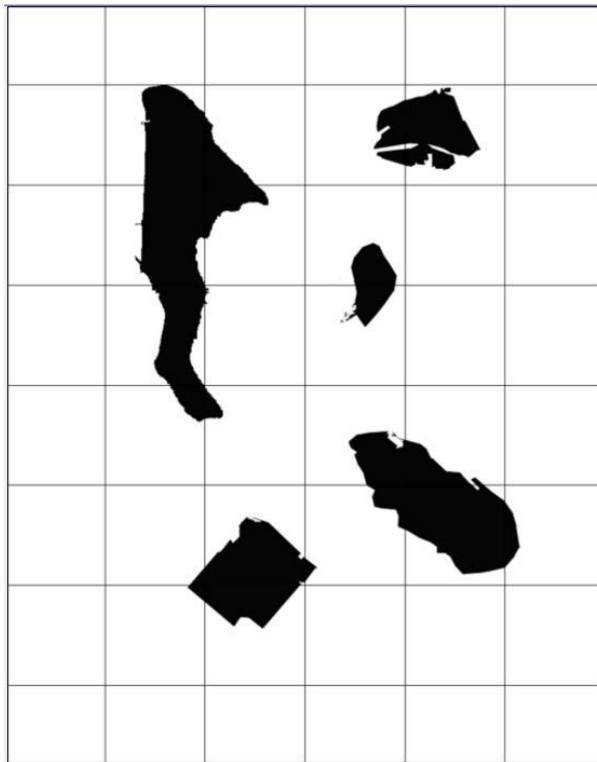
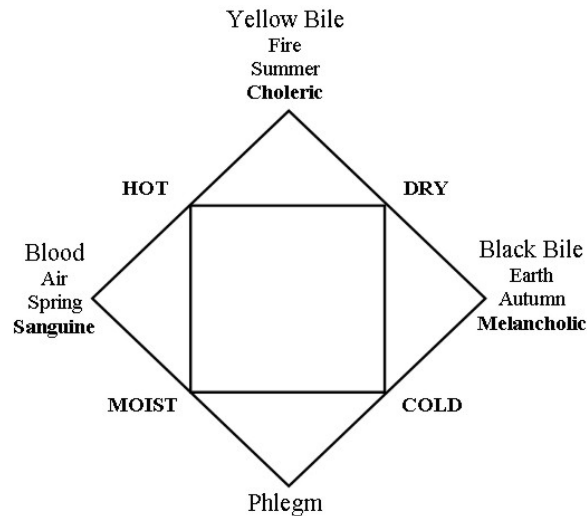


Figure-ground drawings depict solid forms as black and the background or “field” as white, and are often used in massing investigations for urban design. In this case, the seemingly objective outlines aid in subverting the apprehension of islands as benign paradises, revealing the “transformational violence” implicit in their histories. The enigmatic figures of the silhouetted forms evoke palpably poignant landscapes; places that bear scars, and which carry the heavy weight of the emotional cargo of their adjacent cities. While their physical form is wrought from nature, their metaphysical baggage is culturally fraught. The magnitude and intensity of these memories exceeds the capacity of the islands’ small footprints. They are Tardis-like bearers of the weight of memory and emotion, which far exceeds their apparent physical size. These islands are the dark spots in our peripheral vision, the projections of our collective subconscious.

Their melancholy resonates with the subconscious realm of memory and mourning. At the core of this emotion lies the sense of an irresolvable loss, the precise definition of which is elusive. Rooted in the ancient notion of “humours”, melancholy was one of four governing elements, as shown in Figure 3, and was associated with twilight, autumn, earth, the spleen, coldness and dryness, and the planet, Saturn. All of these elements weave in and out of the history of melancholy, appearing in mythology, astrology, medicine, literature, and art. The humours and temperaments were seen as complementary pairs, so that the opposite of one might be introduced as a remedy for an excess of another. In contemporary society the issue of balance is problematic, where the emphasis is firmly on the so-called positive emotions such as happiness and joy, while sadness and melancholy become marginalised. The islands provide a geographical expression of this marginalisation, a simmering reminder of the potential consequences of losing the balance.

Figure 3. The Four Humours.  
Adapted from Henry E Sigerist.  
*A History of Medicine*, 2 vols  
(New York: Oxford University  
Press, 1961) 2: 232.



The ‘problem’ of melancholy was explored in Sigmund Freud’s 1917 essay, *Mourning and Melancholia*, where he related “normal” grief to mourning. Normal mourning sees the individual process the loss, and gradually recover. “Abnormal” grief is the pathological condition he termed “melancholia”, where mourning is arrested and the process of recovery fails to reach completion. In melancholia, the individual, or ego, embeds their sense of loss within themselves, refusing to recover, not willing to let go of the loss, so that it persists as an open wound.

Freud described how the “[t]he shadow of the object fell upon the ego” and “the loss of the object had been transformed into the loss of ego”. The loss of the object, whether it be a person or an idea, therefore becomes the same as the loss of the self, the ego.<sup>3</sup> The islands’ seeming invisibility, their marginalisation, is suggestive of loss. Hovering at the edge of existence their presence is at once an absence, an irreconcilable dimension of life. Even an island which is apparently visible, such as Cockatoo Island, still conceals much of its past. Like Rico Franses’s analysis of memorials, the islands are “strangers” to us, therefore we cannot

properly grieve their absence because we do not know them well enough—thus they persist as melancholy lacunae.<sup>4</sup>

## Hart Island

Hart Island’s melancholy is intensified by its almost mythological existence. Out of bounds to the public, it is the locus of some of the darkest dimensions of New York’s psyche. Although it is home to the largest cemetery in the United States, with some 850,000 interments, no visitors are allowed, apart from in exceptional circumstances. Artist, Melinda Hunt, has made many visits to the island as part of her ongoing project which seeks, in part, to reconnect family members to loved ones buried on it.

Hunt’s access to the island is an exception to the general ruling for the site, allowing her to combine her project which simultaneously investigates the site from an artistic perspective and develops a database of the ‘missing’ as part of the efforts at reconnection. She expressed how difficult it is “to describe the overwhelming sense of anonymity and timelessness that comes from standing next to an open burial trench twenty feet wide, seventy feet long and six feet deep”<sup>5</sup> (Figure 4). As a cemetery without public access, Hart Island is perhaps one of the most melancholy of all the islands. As an institutional symbol of the denial of the “normal” processes of mourning and grief, it is the Freudian “open wound” made manifest.

Figure 4. Joel Sternfeld. James Smith, February 1992. ©1992 Joel Sternfeld courtesy of The Hart Island Project collection, <http://hartisland.net>. The Hart Island Project is a non-profit charitable organisation whose mission is to increase public awareness and access to the public burial ground in New York City.





Far removed from the image of the enigmatic gowned figure crossing the water by boat in Arnold Böcklin's *Isle of the Dead*, or Venice's San Michele where special funeral barges are part of the watery ritual of an island burial, Hart Island resonates with death and water in other ways. It invokes the crossing of the River Styx,<sup>6</sup> as each day inmates from Riker's Island prison cross over to Hart Island to carry out mass burials. As a potter's field<sup>7</sup> since 1869, Hart Island is the final resting place of the destitute and the unknown. Located at the city's margins, this cemetery reflects a "deeper social pattern of hiding [than] that which is socially undesirable in the undeveloped fringes of the city".<sup>8</sup>

Burials on Hart Island began during the American Civil War (1861-1865), when it served as a disciplinary and concentration camp, and both Union and Confederate soldiers were buried there (Figure 5). These burials were later removed to a military cemetery in 1941, but a monument and fenced area remains as a marker of the Union cemetery. However, Confederate soldiers' graves were not marked, setting in train the future of the island as a potter's field of anonymous graves. During the Civil War, over 3,000 prisoners of war were housed on the island in brutal conditions, and it was from this time that its isolation was first experienced. Drew Gilpin Faust explains how the stigma of Hart Island was rooted in the fact that it became a concentration camp for Confederate soldiers captured at Gettysburg. While garden cemeteries became popular elsewhere, the enormous loss of life in the Civil War brought about changes to mourning and caring for the dead, with the result that Hart Island sat stigmatised at the margins.<sup>9</sup>

Figure 5. Page from the New Zealand edition of the Illustrated London News 1865 showing the 'mustering out' of regiments, and engraved from a sketch made from nearby David's Island, copy courtesy of The Hart Island Project.



Not only is the cemetery concealed in the out-of-bounds zone of Hart Island, but a number of other activities have also been based there, beyond the radar of daily life. Following the island's purchase in 1869, "an extension of the House of Refuge, the prison workhouse for delinquent boys on Randall's Island, opened".<sup>10</sup> Later, victims of the yellow fever epidemic were housed on the island, as well as a women's insane asylum. A reformatory school for boys was the centre of the main cluster of buildings on the island. Over time all manner of marginalised members of society were placed on it including the mentally ill, those with tuberculosis, the homeless, criminals, drug addicts, and alcoholics (Figure 6).

An amusement park was begun in 1925, but was forced to close in case it corrupted the inmates by allowing them access to contraband, or by offering them a means of escape. A Nike anti-missile base was then built on the island in 1955, as part of the network of ground-to-air missile launchers developed to shoot down aircraft. The base, known as NY-15, and which housed 20 supersonic missiles, was later abandoned. It has since succumbed to the forces of nature, slowly transforming from the pinnacle of military technology to another of the fragments of this island's repository of shadowy memories.

Figure 6. Melinda Hunt. Hart Island Dormitory. 2004. ©2004 Melinda Hunt/The Hart Island Project, <http://hartisland.net>.



Hart Island's dark history is explored in the ongoing project by Melinda Hunt. Beginning with a collaborative project with photographer, Joel Sternfeld, she has plumbed the depths of the island. Hunt describes the burial ground as "a dark undercoat of a history painting about Hart Island" which witnesses a range of penal institutions, where "the punishment is mild but the backdrop is haunting".<sup>11</sup> Hunt and Sternfeld were intrigued by how the natural landscape of the island "seems to completely mask almost 140 years of burials".<sup>12</sup> As though to reinforce the broader concern with hiding things in the margins, the island is complicit, concealing the cemetery within its landscape. Each of the vast mass graves takes only a season to disappear into the landscape, with only the white concrete

marker posts barely visible (Figure 7). The island is almost mute, quietly brooding in the Long Island Sound. The discordance between the island’s beauty and the dark memories it conceals echoes James E. Young’s observations of the beautiful landscape of the former SS camp at Falstad in Norway. The incongruity of beauty and pain raises a “theological argument”, a questioning of the indifference of god, of nature, in the face of suffering. Young describes this condition as a “pastoral lament”,<sup>13</sup> an eminently suitable phrase for Hart Island’s bucolic, yet brutal, beauty.

Figure 7. Melinda Hunt. New mass grave and mussel shells with pages from the Hart Island burial record books. ©1997 Melinda Hunt/The Hart Island Project, <http://hartisland.net>.



### Cockatoo Island

Cockatoo Island in Sydney Harbour presents a very different face, with its natural appearance almost wholly altered by the overlays of infrastructure. The island is a chimera, a monstrous cyborg made up of prosthetic extensions and modifications for its various utilitarian tasks constructed over and tunnelled into the Sydney sandstone base (Figure 8). The transformation of the island is so absolute that no evidence has been found of pre-European use. Even *Biloela*, the alternative name for the island which is the Aboriginal word for “cockatoo”, is not a relic from a previous era, but was added in the late nineteenth century by Reverend William Ridley.

The first jail buildings were erected in 1839, using prison gangs from nearby Goat Island, followed in 1841 by the sculpting of the stone to construct grain silos and water reservoirs, and docks and other naval facilities in the late 1850s.

Even some of the prison cells were excavated directly into the sandstone, a detention space which, it is suggested, “would not have been approved had it been submitted to the Inspectors of Prisons at the Home Office in London”.<sup>14</sup> Cells constructed later in the nineteenth century had “proper punishment cells”, including two “dark” and three “normal” cells.<sup>15</sup>

Figure 8. Cockatoo Island, a sandstone cyborg.



Figure 9. The trace of a memory – Biloela.



The combined use of the island as both a prison and shipyards continued through the mid-nineteenth century, with the convicts often working on vessels held in the dry dock. There was a shift in focus in 1869 when the prisoners were re-located to the mainland jail in Darlinghurst, Sydney, and in 1871 the facilities found a further use as an Industrial School for Girls, and a reformatory for girls who were convicted criminals. It was at this time that the name was changed to Biloela, in an effort to remove the connotations of the previous prisons (Figure 9).

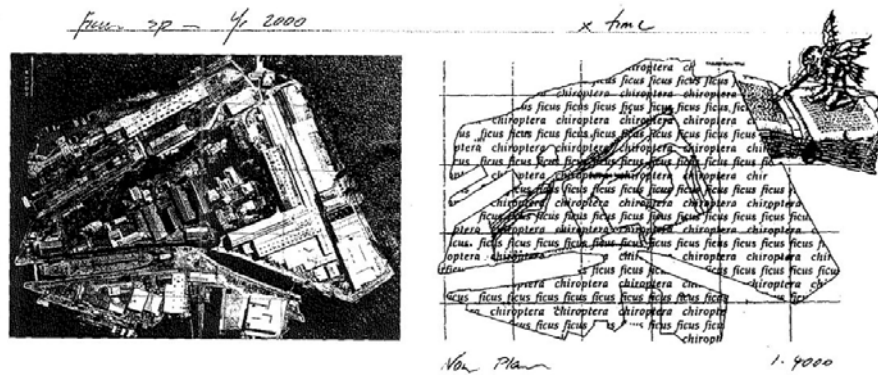
However the island retained the character of a marginal zone, and the behaviour of the institutionalised girls served to reinforce the sense of the island being beyond the pale. This was highlighted in a letter by I.S.V. Mein, the superintendent of the *NSS Vernon*, a training ship for boys moored off the island, who described how, “three girls came down abreast of the ship, in a semi nude state, throwing stones at the windows of the workshops—blaspheming dreadfully and conducting themselves more like fiends than human beings. I was compelled to send all our boys onto the lower deck to prevent them viewing such a contaminatory exhibition”.<sup>16</sup> One last prison phase began in 1888, housing petty criminals. The island’s symbolism as a place for outcasts endured, and given that the petty criminals were of little threat to society the evil was, as James Semple Kerr put it, “more seeming than real”.<sup>17</sup>

In the early twentieth century the focus shifted exclusively onto the shipbuilding yards, and the name reverted to Cockatoo Island. Development of the island’s infrastructure continued, including the intensive period of repairing

ships during World War II. More of the island was carved away to accommodate the additional buildings and facilities. Shipbuilding continued, until 1992. Heavily modified and burdened by its history, Cockatoo Island is a shadow within the bright, sparkling Sydney Harbour.

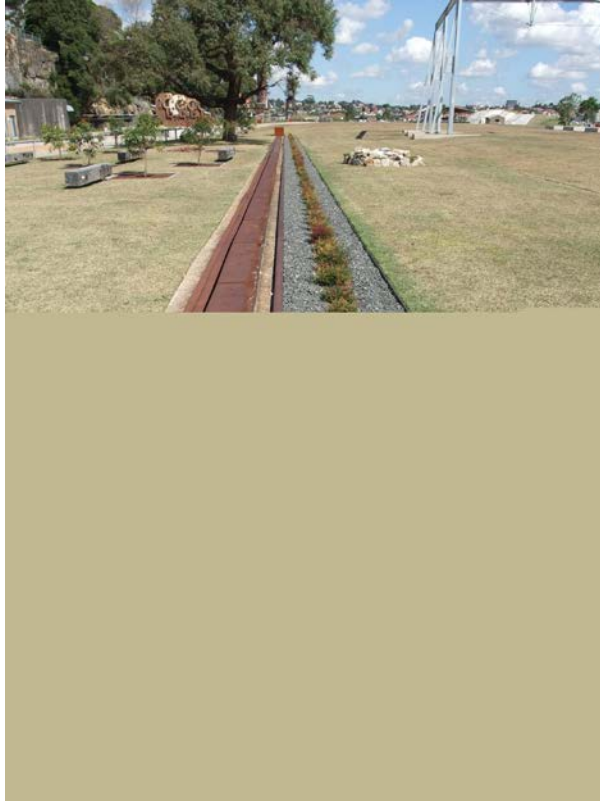
An ideas competition organised in 1996 by landscape architecture students at the University of New South Wales yielded visions such as a return to incarceration,<sup>18</sup> to maritime industry,<sup>19</sup> and a grid of fig trees which would slowly engulf the entire island and provide a habitat for bats.<sup>20</sup> Richard Weller's *Animale Ignoble* proposal is redolent with melancholy. In it, he amplified the liminal nature of the island by suggesting that “fig seeds be scattered randomly over the island and that nobody enter the site for 100 years”.<sup>21</sup> His vision was of the fig trees growing into a massive tangle of dark trees, engulfing the entire island, and also attracting bats. Weller speculates on how the island will become a place of myth, how its memories will be contained within a place “not unlike the Zone in Andrei Tarkovsky's film *Stalker*”—a place on the margins (Figure 10).<sup>22</sup>

Figure 10. Richard Weller. *Animale Ignoble*: Proposal for Cockatoo Island. 1995. Permission granted.



Instead of adopting any of these dark possibilities, the island is undergoing a transformation that involves an ordered re-working of the site, a cleaving of the mess and complexity of history. Again, the insistence on happiness pushes melancholy further into the margins. Now undergoing development as an urban park, Cockatoo Island is described as “big, surprising, entertaining”, and additions include a camping ground, café, and bar.<sup>23</sup> There is an uneasy feeling that in the rush to make the island a pleasant destination the past is becoming eroded, mollified, and suppressed, illustrating the conundrums of heritage in situations where the history is not a positive one (Figure 11). On one hand there is a concern for the safety and comfort of those who visit, but on the other it is critical that these zones of danger and discomfort, sadness and isolation, are not lost in the process.

Figure 11. The sanitised landscape of a “big, surprising, entertaining” Cockatoo Island.



The tension between a site’s dark past and its re-development for tourism is fraught with ethical questions, echoing those in the dark tourism literature. At sites like Alcatraz there is a complexity of history which can become elided, or even obscured, by the ways in which the heritage is packaged for tourists. Strange and Kempa caution that the “refashioning of punishment as a tourism product raises ethical questions about the commodification of suffering and its evident entertainment value”, potentially becoming voyeuristic and more akin to a theme park.<sup>24</sup>

Cockatoo Island signals this very danger, where the reconceptualisation of the island as “big, surprising and entertaining” suggests such threats are imminent. Is it possible that what Strange and Kempa describe as the “murkiest project of all”—to close a site like this to tourism—could afford it a place just below the radar. The island could still be visible to passers-by on the ferries, yet avoid becoming over-exposed to contemporary culture’s desire to commercialise every single thing in the landscape.

### Ripapa Island

The third exemplar of the liminal condition of islands is Ripapa Island in Christchurch’s Lyttelton Harbour. Like Hart and Cockatoo Islands, Ripapa has a complex and dark history. The defensive opportunities of an island form were realised in its long history as a pā, and a walled fort built in 1886 as part of the

defensive network against the “Russian scare”.<sup>25</sup> A series of pā were constructed on the island, with the first built by the tribe Ngati Mamoe.

In the eighteenth century this tribe was unseated by Ngai Tahu, and the chief Te Rangiwhakaputa built another pā, and called the island Ripapa. Subsequently Taununu, a warrior chief of Ngai Tahu, again constructed a pā on the site, the first to be built especially for musket warfare. This pā was fortified with earthen walls, but despite this strengthening it fell during the mid-1820s to another of the sub tribes of Ngai Tahu from Kaiapohia. The pā remnants remained until at least 1872 when they were documented by the architect Frederick Strouts (Figure 12). The only relics of the pā are now believed to be under the wall of the military fort and gun emplacement.<sup>26</sup>

Figure 12. Taununu’s pa, Ripapa Island, Lyttelton Harbour. Copied from plan made by Frederick Strouts in 1872 [c.1910] [copy of ms map]. Reference number MapColl-834.44hkcmf/1872/Acc.5099. Permission of the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, must be obtained before any re-use of this image.



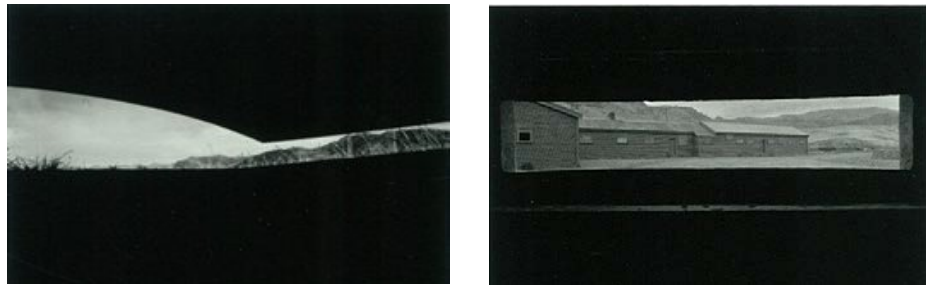
Strouts’s site recording was in order to design the quarantine station that was built on the island in 1873, a purpose for which its isolating qualities were well suited. For many of the immigrants arriving in New Zealand from Britain, the quarantine station was their first experience of the new land, and the island was known for a time as “Humanity Island”.

The quarantine station remained until 1885, but in 1880 it became a temporary prison during the Parihaka incident. Parihaka in the North Island was one of New Zealand’s largest Māori villages in the late nineteenth century, becoming a refuge for those dispossessed of their land from around the country. The leaders of the settlement were two prophets, Te Whiti o Rongomai and Tohu Kākahi, whose governing principles were those of passive resistance, not allowing arms, and

opposing the violence that lay at the heart of the land wars between Pākehā and Māori.<sup>27,28</sup>

Many of those involved in the acts of non-violence were taken from their home and imprisoned elsewhere, including the Ripapa Island quarantine barracks. The Parihaka story remains a significant part of New Zealand culture expressed in music, literature, and art.<sup>29</sup> Photographer, Laurence Aberhart, was commissioned to make a work for the exhibition *Parihaka: The Art of Passive Resistance*, creating the suite of images *The Prisoner's Dream* (1999-2000). Four photographs were shot from inside the jail, where the slit windows looked out to the bare hillsides of Lyttelton harbour, evoking at once a sense of claustrophobia and melancholy liminality, a feeling of being stranded in time and space. These images were contrasted within the suite by a photograph depicting the sublimity of Mount Taranaki, the volcano which is the dominant landscape element of the Parihaka area. This image was made using a long exposure, to create an oneiric feeling, enhancing the otherness of the two sites, of the home landscape and the island exile (Figure 13).

Figure 13. Laurence Aberhart. Details from *The Prisoners' Dream*. 2000. Permission granted.



The construction of Fort Jervis followed the quarantine and prison era, and responded to the seeming imminence of war between Russia and Britain in 1885. As part of the coastal defence system the island fort was fitted out with four large disappearing guns,<sup>30</sup> two of which remain on-site today. The island was substantially modified to accommodate the fort, involving major excavation carried out in part by convicts from the Lyttelton Gaol who were shipped across each day, and at times lived on the island during construction. An escape and a murder occurred during the period the prisoners' workforce was based there.

Prison labour was used through until 1913, when the island again became a temporary prison, this time for the "Ripapa Island Martyrs", defaulters from compulsory military training. During World War I, it reverted to a military installation, and served as a prison to house Lieutenant Commander Count Graf Felix von Luckner of the Imperial German Army. His vessel, the *Seeadler*, was wrecked in the Society Islands in 1917, and he was captured and imprisoned on Motuihe Island near Auckland. After his escape from there he subsequently surrendered on the Kermadec Islands, and was taken to Ripapa, where the fortification of the building was increased in order to contain him.

The island regained its military function in World War II, and was subsequently made a historic reserve under the Scenery Preservation Act 1903. Over the decades



that followed Ripapa was a site of curiosity, and featured in tours of the harbour, which have been suspended owing to damage sustained in the devastating Canterbury earthquakes of 4 September 2010, and 22 February and 13 June 2011. As with other sites with dark pasts, there remains a tension between access for tourists and the ways in which heritage is constructed.

The cultural complexity of islands like Ripapa means to some extent they will always elude the efforts to commodify them as tourist sites. As much as it has entered the public domain, Ripapa remains a place of otherness, holding its store of memories. Beyond the remnants of the physical form of the pā and the military installations are the metaphysical traces, the memories which reside there, most notably in the urupā, the Māori cemeteries. For Māori the island is tāpu, or sacred, following the belief that rather than passing into history, the dead remain ever-present. This threshold condition, a resting at the edge between life and death, resonates with the sense of islands as other-worldly places, hovering at the periphery of vision.

### Conclusion: marginality, liminality, and terrain vague

All three islands persist as liminal zones very close to major settlement areas. Rather than remote oceanic locations, these islands hover near the land, Ripapa even having been connected to the mainland via a footbridge for many years. The islands are loaded with symbolic cargoes, at once heavy with the burdens of society, yet also invisible. Despite Hart Island's proximity to one of the world's biggest cities, and home to that country's largest cemetery, it is in effect written out of the everyday consciousness. Cockatoo Island, although within Sydney's populous harbour, also represented a remote location for undesirables, so that in many ways it might as well have been in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

Their condition as an edge zone, a threshold state, casts islands as the ultimate *terrain vague*. Found at the city edges, or on left-over and abandoned sites, they are spatially and socially marginalised landscapes. As Hunt lamented of Hart Island, the current approach to burial "is the opposite of setting aside bodies in a special place. This is a wasteland".<sup>31</sup> The imprecision of *terrain vague* is both spatial and temporal, often existing at points of transition, where places which were previously assigned to a particular category of occupation (residential or industrial) have, with abandonment, drifted into a state of vagueness. These spaces become stranded in a different time, outside of the city's normal activities. The Zone of Tarkovsky's *Stalker* expresses the spirit of the *terrain vague*, a mysteriously imbricated space which seems to inhabit a different timeframe, an image evoked by Richard Weller in his vision for Cockatoo Island.

Each of these three islands raises questions about the place of melancholy in our contemporary landscapes, and how we deal with memories which are associated with the shadowier side of history. Hart Island continues to fly under the radar as a kind of denial, eluding detection, resisting its place on the map of

New York. The work of artist, Melinda Hunt, and others involved in gaining access for family members seeks to pull the island closer to the mainland, but even so it is becoming much more isolated rather than less.<sup>32</sup> Cockatoo Island, however, is on a different trajectory. The darkness of the island's past is shuffled off, as it becomes gentrified as a new destination in Sydney Harbour. Finally, Ripapa Island contains its memories through its designation as a reserve. Through carefully limiting access, and petrifying the island in its current state, the Department of Conservation has arrested change.

Memory and melancholy are entwined in the islands, but their place within the urban psyche is troubled. Freud's metaphor of memory as a city provides a fitting conclusion to this article, evoking the idea of the mind as a container of memories in much the same way that a city gathers up its sedimented history as ruins from many eras so that the traces of the past all co-exist contemporaneously. While Freud realised that in both the mind and the city *everything* could not be retained, his analogy, his "fantastic supposition", remains a vivid expression of the accumulation of memory in place.<sup>33</sup> Urban islands like Hart, Cockatoo, and Ripapa, are part of this mnemonic metaphor, but they are the dark zones, the memories which trouble the collective psyche.

Decisions that are made about heritage conservation, landscape narratives, and the ways in which we bury the dead, all shape the terrain of memory within culture. There is a treacherous terrain to be negotiated in the area of heritage landscapes, especially for sites with dark pasts which are vulnerable to voyeurism and commodification. To allow them their darkness, without transgressing into a pernicious and unethical response to memory and landscape, is to recognise the place of melancholy within daily life. This is a necessary point of balance, a place for Saturn, a place of twilight amidst the glare of the exhausting hunt for happiness.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>John R. Gillis, "Island Sojourns," *Geographical Review* 97(2), (2007): 274.

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, R. Sharpley, *The Darker Side of Tourism: The Theory and Practice of Dark Tourism* (Bristol: Channel View Publications, 2009); Carolyn Strange and Michael Kempa, "Shades of Dark Tourism: Alcatraz and Robben Islands," *Annals of Tourism Research* 30(2), (2003): 386-405; Carolyn Strange, "Symbiotic Commemoration: The Stories of Kaluapapa," *History & Memory* 16(1), (2004): 86-117; Carolyn Strange, "Holding the Rock: The Indianization of Alcatraz Island, 1969-1999," *The Public Historian* 23(1), (2001): 55-74; J. Wilson, *Prison: Cultural Memory and Dark Tourism* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008).

<sup>3</sup>Sigmund Freud, "On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia," trans. Shaun Whiteside, *Mourning and Melancholia* essay first published 1917 (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 209.

<sup>4</sup>Rico Franses, “Monuments and Melancholia,” *JPCS: Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture and Society* 6(1), (2001): 97-104.

<sup>5</sup>Melinda Hunt, “The Nature of Hart Island,” in *Hart Island*, eds. Melinda Hunt and Joel Sternfield (Zurich: Scalo, 1998), 26.

<sup>6</sup>Hunt described her journeys with the inmates as “like ... crossing the river Styx,” in Melinda Hunt, “The Nature of Hart Island,” in *Hart Island*, eds. Melinda Hunt and Joel Sternfield (Zurich: Scalo, 1998), 25.

<sup>7</sup>‘Potter’s fields’ are cemeteries for the unknown or destitute. The origin of the term is as an area of land for the burial of strangers, as in Matthew 27: 7: “And they took counsel, and brought with them the potter’s field, to bury strangers in.” A potter’s field would have been a place to dig for clay, with the terrain of ditches and excavations providing places for burials.

<sup>8</sup>Melinda Hunt, “The Nature of Hart Island,” in *Hart Island*, eds. Melinda Hunt and Joel Sternfield (Zurich: Scalo, 1998), 20.

<sup>9</sup>Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Knopf, 2008).

<sup>10</sup>Melinda Hunt, “The Nature of Hart Island,” in *Hart Island*, eds. Melinda Hunt and Joel Sternfield (Zurich: Scalo, 1998), 21.

<sup>11</sup>Melinda Hunt, “The Nature of Hart Island,” in *Hart Island*, eds. Melinda Hunt and Joel Sternfield (Zurich: Scalo, 1998), 22.

<sup>12</sup>Melinda Hunt, “The Nature of Hart Island,” in *Hart Island*, eds. Melinda Hunt and Joel Sternfield (Zurich: Scalo, 1998), 20.

<sup>13</sup>“James E. Young, “Interview during his visit to Falstad, Norway in September 2010,” accessed June 25, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=66O4fd6hob0>

<sup>14</sup>James Semple Kerr, *Cockatoo Island: Penal and Institutional Remains* (Sydney: The National Trust of Australia, 1984), 17.

<sup>15</sup>James Semple Kerr, *Cockatoo Island: Penal and Institutional Remains* (Sydney: The National Trust of Australia, 1984), 50.

<sup>16</sup>I.S.V. Mein cited in James Semple Kerr, *Cockatoo Island: Penal and Institutional Remains* (Sydney: The National Trust of Australia, 1984), 11.

<sup>17</sup>James Semple Kerr, *Cockatoo Island: Penal and Institutional Remains* (Sydney: The National Trust of Australia, 1984), 11.

<sup>18</sup>Jason McNamee’s commended entry (see Rod Simpson, “Edge Conditions,” *Architecture Australia*, Jan/Feb (1996), accessed February 12, 2010, <https://www.architecturemedia.com/resources/aa/1996/01/edge.htm>).

<sup>19</sup>Ross Ramus and students from University of New South Wales, first prize (see Rod Simpson, “Edge Conditions,” *Architecture Australia*, Jan/Feb (1996), accessed February 12, 2010, <https://www.architecturemedia.com/resources/aa/1996/01/edge.htm>).

<sup>20</sup>Richard Weller’s commended scheme (see Rod Simpson, “Edge Conditions,” *Architecture Australia*, Jan/Feb (1996), accessed February 12, 2010, <https://www.architecturemedia.com/resources/aa/1996/01/edge.htm>).

<sup>21</sup>Richard Weller, “Animale Ignoble” in *Room 4.1.3: Innovations in Landscape Architecture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 120.

- <sup>22</sup>Richard Weller, “Animale Ignoble” in *Room 4.1.3: Innovations in Landscape Architecture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 120.
- <sup>23</sup>“About Cockatoo Island,” accessed March 12, 2010, <http://www.cockatooisland.gov.au/about/index.html>.
- <sup>24</sup>Carolyn Strange and Michael Kempa, “Shades of Dark Tourism: Alcatraz and Robben Islands,” *Annals of Tourism Research* 30(2), (2003): 402.
- <sup>25</sup>A pā is a fortified settlement built by Māori. Pā often took advantage of topographical opportunities for defensive positions such as cliff tops (for example, Nga Niho, Kaikoura) and peninsulas (such as Onawe, near Akaroa).
- <sup>26</sup>Michael Kelly, *Ripapa Island, Lyttelton Harbour: Concept Plan* (Christchurch: Department of Conservation, 1996), 8.
- <sup>27</sup>Pākehā are European New Zealanders.
- <sup>28</sup>Forms of passive resistance included barricading roads, building fences across the land, removing survey pegs, and “escorting” those involved in gaining possession of the land (such as road workers and surveyors) out of the area.
- <sup>29</sup>See, for example, Dick Scott, *Ask That Mountain: The Story of Parihaka* (Auckland, NZ: Heinemann/Southern Cross, 1975); the music album *Parihaka: The Art of Passive Resistance* (Wellington, NZ: Morrison Music Trust, 2000); and the art catalogue, “Te Miringa Hohaia,” eds. Gregory O’Brien and Lara Strongman, *Parihaka: The Art of Passive Resistance* (Wellington, NZ: Victoria University Press, 2001).
- <sup>30</sup>Disappearing guns were the weapon of choice during the time of the “Russian scare”. After firing, the recoil would push the gun underground, where it could be reloaded under cover. The Fort Jervis installation is one of only five remaining in the world.
- <sup>31</sup>Melinda Hunt, Personal communication, email to Jacky Bowring, July 2011.
- <sup>32</sup>Melinda Hunt, Personal communication, email to Jacky Bowring, July 2011.
- <sup>33</sup>Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989, originally published as *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* in 1930).

## Bibliography

“About Cockatoo Island,” accessed March 12, 2010, <http://www.cockatooisland.gov.au/about/index.html>.

Faust, Drew Gilpin, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Knopf, 2008).

Franses, Rico, “Monuments and Melancholia,” *JPCS: Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture and Society* 6(1), (2001): 97-104.

Freud, Sigmund, “On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia,” trans. Shaun Whiteside, *Mourning and Melancholia* essay first published 1917 (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 209.

Freud, Sigmund, *Civilization and its Discontents* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989, originally published as *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* in 1930).

Gillis, John R., "Island Sojourns," *Geographical Review* 97(2), (2007): 274.

Hunt, Melinda, "The Nature of Hart Island," in *Hart Island*, eds. Melinda Hunt and Joel Sternfield (Zurich: Scalo, 1998).

Kelly, Michael, *Ripapa Island, Lyttelton Harbour: Concept Plan* (Christchurch: Department of Conservation, 1996), 8.

Kerr, James Semple, *Cockatoo Island: Penal and Institutional Remains* (Sydney: The National Trust of Australia, 1984).

O'Brien, Gregory and Strongman, Lara eds., "Te Miringa Hohaia," *Parihaka: The Art of Passive Resistance* (Wellington, NZ: Victoria University Press, 2001).

*Parihaka: The Art of Passive Resistance* (Wellington, NZ: Morrison Music Trust, 2000).

Scott, Dick, *Ask That Mountain: The Story of Parihaka* (Auckland, NZ: Heinemann/Southern Cross, 1975).

Sharpley, R., *The Darker Side of Tourism: The Theory and Practice of Dark Tourism* (Bristol: Channel View Publications, 2009).

Simpson, Rod, "Edge Conditions," *Architecture Australia*, Jan/Feb (1996), accessed February 12, 2010, <https://www.architecturemedia.com/resources/aa/1996/01/edge.htm>.

Strange, Carolyn, "Holding the Rock: The Indianization of Alcatraz Island, 1969-1999," *The Public Historian* 23(1), (2001): 55-74.

Strange, Carolyn, "Symbiotic Commemoration: The Stories of Kaluapapa," *History & Memory* 16(1), (2004): 86-117.

Strange, Carolyn and Kempa, Michael, "Shades of Dark Tourism: Alcatraz and Robben Islands," *Annals of Tourism Research* 30(2), (2003): 386-405.

Weller, Richard, "Animale Ignoble," in *Room 4.1.3: Innovations in Landscape Architecture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

Wilson, J., *Prison: Cultural Memory and Dark Tourism* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008).

Young, James E. "Interview during his visit to Falstad, Norway in September 2010," accessed June 25, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=66O4fd6hob0>

### Biographical note

Dr Jacky Bowring is an Associate Professor, School of Landscape Architecture, Lincoln University, and Editor of *Landscape Review*. Her research investigates the intersection between melancholy and memory. She is author of *A Field Guide to Melancholy* (2008). Jacky has been successful in a number of memorial and cemetery design competitions including finalist Pentagon Memorial (2002), a Cavalier Bremworth Award for a memorial for road workers killed in the Otira Gorge (2000), and the Holy Trinity Cathedral Memorial Garden in Auckland (2007).

Email: [jacqueline.bowring@lincoln.ac.nz](mailto:jacqueline.bowring@lincoln.ac.nz)

---

# Between Remembrance and Recreation: Containing Memory in Urban Landscapes

Russell Rodrigo

---

## Between Remembrance and Recreation: Containing Memory in Urban Landscapes

Russell Rodrigo

---

### Abstract

Throughout the world, communities are increasingly concerned with remembering and documenting their histories. Monuments, memorials, and interpretive sites are being created at an accelerated pace, an international phenomenon of memorialisation which has developed since the 1980s and is unequalled since the decade after World War I. In *Loose Space: Possibility and Diversity in Urban Life*, Karen Franck and Quentin Stevens explore the ways in which urban landscapes, including sites of memory and reflection, are appropriated by the everyday public for uses not originally intended. Increasingly, established public spaces are being utilised as sites for the remembrance of collective trauma, producing challenges to existing understandings of the containment of individual and collective memory and public and private uses of space. In this article I argue that contemporary memorial spaces negotiate, consciously or unconsciously, the looseness of public space and the ways in which memory can be contained within urban landscapes.

Keywords: memory, memorial, public space



## Introduction

Our contemporary landscapes are filled with representations of the past—objects, places, and events that are intended to evoke memory. Memorial spaces are sites where memory is condensed, producing convergences and conflicts in their attempts to define the past in terms of the present. For any society, the construction of memorial spaces is a major cultural and political undertaking. They are potential sources of cultural healing, as well as possible sites of cultural contestation. Using participant observation techniques, this research explores the relationship between public space, trauma, and collective memory in urban landscapes through an examination of the communicative and experiential dynamics of recent memorial spaces located in London’s Hyde Park and Green Park.<sup>1</sup>

## Containing memory/displacing memory

The current worldwide phenomenon of memorialisation in architecture is unparalleled since the decade after World War I. Debate about a memorial on the World Trade Center site, for example, began within days of the tragedy. The private and public need to memorialise has never been stronger. Erika Doss, referring to the American context, calls this “... a national obsession with issues of memory and history and an urgent, excessive desire to claim—and secure—those issues in public culture”.<sup>2</sup>

Collective memory could not be maintained and passed on from one generation to the next were it not able to reside in physical objects of remembrance such as monuments, memorials, museums, archives, and cemeteries. Communities often go to great lengths to create and maintain such sites of memory; a recognition of the understanding that our link with the past is through those physical memory sites that aspire to give permanence to memory.

Acknowledging and demarcating historical moments are phenomena that are common in many cultures. It has been generally understood that memories can be encapsulated in solid objects, which come to represent memories, and because of their durability they preserve their life beyond their pure mental existence. Various physical forms such as objects, texts, and images have the potential to trigger the recollection of events, individuals, and relationships from the past.

The notion of containment is often associated with the idea of memory and hence the ability of memory to be stored or held within a material object. Despite this, a key fate that all monuments and memorials have in common is what Robert Musil describes as their invisibility: “What strikes one most about monuments is that one doesn’t notice them. There is nothing in the world as invisible as monuments.”<sup>3</sup> While monuments are invariably constructed to be the focus of our attention, they inevitably become part of the visual blur of the contemporary cityscape.

Similarly, Pierre Nora argues that rather than holding memory, the monument displaces it. The less that memory work comes from within the individual or the community, the more it exists externally in “exterior scaffolding and outward signs”.<sup>4</sup> The natural memory work of the community is replaced by the material object of the monument. It can be argued that in presenting a resolved and closed past in monuments, as Nora has suggested, there is also the risk of destroying the understanding and connection of the past that an individual has within themselves. The monument has the appearance of permanence, with events fixed in time. However while the movement of time brings about the monument, it also changes how it is understood.

It can therefore be argued that once material form is assigned to memory, the need to remember is no longer required. As authors such as Kirk Savage have noted, in creating monuments and memorials, individuals and communities are relieved of the responsibility to remember. Memorials become self-referential and isolated from our daily lives. In facilitating the making of memorials, we are in danger of being more forgetful. The motivation to remember events through memorialisation can be seen as an equally strong impulse to forget them.

James E. Young argues that the monument has been “reformulated in its function as memorial” and forced to re-evaluate its aesthetic response to events such as the Holocaust, and more recently the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.<sup>5</sup> The traditional monument, with its singular vision of history, is at odds with the contradictions and complexities of contemporary events. The nation’s need to establish a singular memory of the past is increasingly at odds with the response of artists and designers who have become sceptical of the traditional forms and functions of monuments. Monuments are therefore more likely to be the site of contested cultural meanings than of shared national values.

### Containing memory in public space

As authors such as Erika Doss have noted, within the urban landscape, established public spaces are more and more being utilised as sites for the remembrance of collective trauma, producing challenges to existing understandings of the containment of individual and collective memory and public and private uses of space. In *Loose Space: Possibility and Diversity in Urban Life*, Karen Franck and Quentin Stevens explore the ways in which urban landscapes, including sites of memory and reflection, are appropriated by the everyday public for uses not originally intended. Public open space is less defined than private enclosed space and expectations in terms of accepted uses are more inclusive and fluid.

Public space becomes “loose” when it is the location for a rich variety of uses not originally intended:

*Looseness, the appropriation of public space for unplanned uses, results from freedom of choice, but no public space is absolutely free, and some spaces may be too free ... One space is looser than another to the extent to which particular*

*behavioural patterns, controls and expectations are peeled away or resisted and unanticipated activities are pursued ...*<sup>6</sup>

Activities that give space its looseness are generally outside everyday routines—they are opportunities for leisure, social expression, and interaction. They may be planned activities or impromptu, but are invariably temporary activities. By definition, some spaces such as urban park landscapes are looser than others, but it is “people’s actions that make a space loose, with or without official sanction and with or without physical features that support those actions.”<sup>7</sup>

### Loose space and the commemorative landscapes of Hyde Park and Green Park, London

Recreational landscapes such as urban parks and gardens are one form of public space where loose space predominates. London’s Royal Parks, the focus of this study, comprise eight parks covering an area of almost 2,000 hectares. They are relatively undetermined landscapes where people engage in a wide variety of unprogrammed activities. Voluntary actions may range from passive pursuits (such as relaxing, reading, sun-bathing, and eating) to more active (such as ball games, jogging, walking, cycling, or horse-riding).

The eight Royal Parks contain a large variety of historic monuments, including those set aside to the memory of individuals such as queens and kings, as well as those dedicated to the collective memory of war and conflict. Within these recreational landscape spaces are a growing number of sites for the remembrance of collective trauma. Using participant observation techniques, this research investigates the contested nature of these spaces as public recreational spaces and public memorial spaces by focusing on two key parks—Hyde Park and Green Park.

The relationship between public space, trauma, and collective memory in urban landscapes is explored through an examination of the communicative and experiential dynamics of recent memorial spaces such as: the Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand war memorials; the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fountain; and the 7 July Memorial.

### Canada Memorial

In 1992, the Canadian Memorial Foundation invited artists to design a memorial to the memory of over one million Canadians who served with British troops during the two world wars, 110,000 of whom lost their lives. Located in Green Park, close to Canada Gate and Buckingham Palace, the memorial was initiated as a privately-funded project sponsored by the then Canadian media baron, Conrad Black. It was dedicated in 1994.

Designed by Pierre Granche, the memorial is composed of a truncated pyramidal form, appearing to be partially buried while at the same time emerging

from the earth. The pyramidal form is divided into two sections representing Canadian and British joint participation in the two world wars. Bisecting the pyramid is a narrow pathway that encourages visitors to engage closely with the work.

Composed of polished red granite, the form of the tilting pyramid points toward the Canadian city of Halifax, the place of embarkation for soldiers departing to the battlefronts of both wars. The pyramid form sits in a square of paving and a small pool with a set of triangulated stairs that allows visitors to sit and reflect. A slow-moving layer of water flows from the top of the triangular forms, reflecting the sky and surrounding landscape. Embedded in the granite are scattered bronze maple leaves that resemble leaves floating downstream.

The memorial fell into disrepair in 2004 following arguments over maintenance responsibilities between the British and Canadian governments. By this stage, the fountain no longer operated and children and dogs used the site as a play area. Bowing to public pressure, by late 2007 the Canadian government announced it would fund the ongoing maintenance of the memorial.

Currently, the fountain does not operate for most of the time. People are drawn to the polished granite surface and use the sloping form as an opportunity for climbing, running, and sitting. Parents, in particular, encourage children to use the memorial as a play area, climbing it and using it as a vantage point to gain a better view of Buckingham Palace gates. While signage has been retrofitted on and around the memorial stating, “as a mark of respect please keep off the monument”, few people take any notice. When water is flowing over the memorial, however, people do not climb over it.

The slow-moving water suggests a more traditional memorial form and a contemplative engagement with the work. While the Canada Memorial continues to function as a traditional war memorial on official occasions, for most of the time it is simply seen as a form of public sculpture, rather than a commemorative form of public art. People take the opportunity to engage with the work in a very physical way, despite the risks of injury from slipping or falling. The memorial appears to complement the looseness of its public setting through its physical placement and materiality, but its use as an object of physical play has clearly been unanticipated. In containing memory, the memorial’s physical form suggests types of engagement other than reflection and remembrance.

### Australian War Memorial

This memorial is located at Hyde Park Corner, effectively a large traffic island in the centre of London on a key ceremonial route linking the Admiralty Arch and the Mall, Buckingham Palace, and the Marble Arch. As part of the brief requirements, the memorial design required the incorporation of a wall to provide shelter from traffic to the south and water as a key element.

The memorial, designed by Tonkin Zulaikha Greer Architects, appears as a 44-metre long, curved wall commemorating those Australians who died alongside their British allies in two world wars. The wall is composed of planar, granite slabs; some blocks protruding to create places for floral tributes and others function as seating for viewers. Rather than using Portland stone as required by the initial brief, the design incorporates Australian granite, a literal translation of the Australian landscape into the heart of London. Water, as a symbolic purifying element, is designed to flow in a programmed sequence from the top of the wall in sections.

In contrast to the Canada Memorial, the setting of the Australian War Memorial is less loose. Located on a secondary pathway, the memorial operates as an incident in people's journeys across the site. Passersby rarely engage with the work beyond stopping and looking. With a distinct "front", the work reads as a more traditional form of war memorial and engagement with the work is limited to the taking of photos. In containing memory, the memorial's form, materiality, and setting work together to delimit the forms of social behaviour that are acceptable around it.

An interesting aspect of the memorial's ability to contain memory, however, is the recent controversy over its closure for substantial repairs. The key feature of the memorial is its visual basis, grounded in the play of naming and inscription. At a distance the names of 47 battles are read, for example, Gallipoli, The Somme, and Darwin. At a closer scale, the battleground names lose their legibility and the randomly arranged names of 23,844 Australian towns come into focus.

By 2008, the text had degraded to such an extent that the memorial had to be closed for extensive repairs. The repair and maintenance shortcomings of the memorial, it is argued, are directly linked to the extraordinarily short timeframe between the selection of the winning design and completion (a period of just 11 months).

Memorials are typically completed and dedicated on anniversary dates and these deadlines can often be significant factors in the way in which a work is conceived and developed. In the case of the Australian War Memorial, the containment of memory was dictated by the date of the 85th anniversary of the signing of the Armistice and dedication of the work by the Queen and Prime Ministers of both Australia and Great Britain. Inevitably this has resulted in compromises, including the inability to thoroughly prototype methods for incorporating the memorial text.

### New Zealand War Memorial

This memorial, dedicated in 2006, commemorates the lives of New Zealand servicemen and women killed in both world wars. Designed by Athfield Architects and sculptor, Paul Dibble, the memorial titled "Southern Stand" is sited on a grassy

slope on the north-eastern side of Hyde Park Corner opposite the Australian War Memorial. The memorial straddles an existing walkway and is composed of a loose arrangement of tilted, bronze columns. The patinated, cast bronze cross standards, varying in height from 1.7 to 1.4 metres, are slanted at an angle of 11 degrees.

Six of the standards represent the Southern Cross constellation and are illuminated at night. Nine of the standards are located on the grass mound while the remaining seven are on the gravel pathway. Each standard is inscribed with explanatory text on the bases. Figurative castings on the standards are intended to be descriptive of the relationship between New Zealand and Britain.

Unlike its Australian counterpart, the New Zealand War Memorial appears as a space rather than an object. The memorial negotiates the looseness of its public setting through its physical placement, form, and materiality. People walk along the path, stop, and read the memorial's inscriptions, thus directly engaging with the work. The memorial slows down passersby, and many take their time to wander through and read the inscriptions on the columns.

While the memorial has no clear focus, people create their own narrative by wandering through the space and engaging with the work. Few people however venture up the slope, most remaining around the columns on the flat pathway. The sombre patina and detailing of the columns sets up a contemplative interaction with the work—visitors read and touch the memorial with deference.

Unlike the Canada Memorial, the New Zealand War Memorial is not an attractor for social play. Its setting is primarily a thoroughfare rather than a destination, an incident through which people pass. While joggers use the path, they do not run through the space of the columns but instead use the edge of the path. In containing memory, the memorial's formal and material qualities work together to define the intended use of the space as one of reflection and contemplation.

### Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fountain

This fountain, located in the south-west corner of Hyde Park, is a memorial expressly designed as an enabling civic experience rather than a solemn symbol of loss and mourning. Designed by American landscape architect, Kathryn Gustafson, and titled "Reaching Out/Letting In", the memorial fountain is intended to symbolise Diana's personality and openness. It also reflects the two sides of her life: those happy times as well as turbulent periods.

Dedicated in 2004, the fountain is more accurately described as a large, oval streambed approximately 50 by 80 metres in size. Composed of 545 individual pieces of Cornish granite, the stream-bed ranges in width between three and eight metres and changes from a smooth bed with gentle ripples of water to a more turbulent side with steps, curves, and rills and more active water formations. Water flows from the highest point down both sides of the ring and its depth varies from ankle to knee deep.

The memorial clearly acknowledges the looseness of its public setting through its physical placement, form, and materiality, but like the Canada Memorial its dominant use as an object of physical play has clearly been unanticipated.

The memorial's complex interplay of open space, tree plantings, water, and views is intended to create an environment for public enjoyment through which memory of the Princess is projected. However, the reality of its everyday use is often much different. Unlike other memorials that may encourage reflection and introspection, the Diana Memorial encourages people-watching and overt performance. The circular form of the work encourages movement around and through the memorial. At most times this activity is relatively passive. However, more active behaviours are often present such as inline skating, running, and ball games. The form of the memorial is not dissimilar to an amphitheatre with perimeter seating facing a central stage.

The most significant activity is interaction with the water. There is a diverse array of social behaviour—visitors engage with the water in various ways from simply dipping in hands or feet to walking and playing in the stream. Signage attempts to contain the types of behaviours that are acceptable at the memorial site. There are no fewer than seven activities one cannot do in the fountain, including walking or running in the water.

However, people continue to walk or run in the water despite the signage and limited park security. The inability to contain forms of acceptable behaviour on the site stems, in large part, from the 2004 dedication when children from the royal party were photographed walking and playing in the water. In the days following the opening, large numbers visited the site in the midst of an unseasonal heat wave. As Gustafson noted, the visiting public used it more like a water park: *When it first opened, 5,000 people an hour came to see it ... How could you anticipate that? How can you solve a problem like that quickly? The turf around the oval couldn't survive these kinds of numbers. The level of management has had to be increased because of the level of people. We really underestimated that ...*<sup>8</sup>

By deviating from conventional memorial responses, the Diana Memorial attempts to define a space of memory of openness and optimism. In deliberately designing the memorial to complement its loose setting, however, unanticipated activities and overuse have restricted its ability to contain memory and to operate as a fitting setting for contemplation and reflection.

## 7 July Memorial

Located in the south-eastern corner of Hyde Park, the 7 July Memorial is dedicated to the memory of the 52 victims of the 2005 London terrorist bombings. Designed by architects, Carmody Groake, and dedicated on the fourth anniversary of the attacks, the memorial comprises 52 individually cast, stainless steel columns symbolic of the victims. These are arranged in four loosely interlocked groupings, representative of the four bombing locations. The columns and their

arrangement are intended to reflect both the individual and the collective and the interconnectivity of the events of July 2005.

Each of the stelae is 3.5 metres high and is individually cast, resulting in unique characteristics in finish and texture. Inscriptions located at mid-height on the columns mark the locations, date, and time of each of the four bombing sites. The columns are, however, not ascribed to each of the victims, a deliberate strategy used in the event of any graffiti or vandal attack. At the termination of the memorial path, a grass mound holds a blackened stainless steel plaque that lists the names of the victims.

The space is used in a variety of ways, both expected and unexpected. The physical approach shapes people's perception of the memorial and its purpose. The memorial is located at the termination of a new public pathway and most visitors approach it frontally and deliberately. People are able to walk around and through the memorial and engage with its tactility directly by running their hands over the surfaces of the columns and reading the names inscribed on the plaque.

The memorial is designed to counteract its loose setting. No seating is provided at the memorial, a deliberate design decision to protect the privacy of the bereaved and delimit the forms of behaviour around it. The slope behind the memorial creates a small berm that reduces the visual impact of passing double-decker buses. In containing memory, the memorial's form, placement, and materiality aim to delimit the forms of social behaviour that are acceptable around it.

Despite this, forms of behaviour outside those that are deliberately contained are evident. The columns sometimes act as a labyrinth of play for children, who in some cases even climb upon them. The surrounding grass bank also provides an opportunity for children to roll or slide down its slope. People are observed interacting with the space often while in the process of doing other things such as eating, using their mobile phones, cycling, or jogging.

Most importantly, however, is the way in which the columns have begun to be appropriated by the bereaved. In some cases floral tributes or ribbons will appear on specific columns, either on the anniversary of the bombings or other significant dates such as birthdays. In rarer cases, graffiti naming victims has also appeared on the columns. As a form of spontaneous memorialisation the graffiti indicates a desire for giving form to the dead, a counter to the over-riding containment of memory in the memorial as ordered, homogeneous, and abstract.

### Conclusion: contained memory and loose space

Participant observation of recent memorial spaces in and around London's Hyde Park and Green Park indicate that public open spaces that possess particular physical features act as an invitation to people to appropriate them for their own uses. Memorial spaces that are located in loose public spaces, such as urban parks, contribute to amenity, place-making, and individual and communal behaviour in public spaces. They also function as places of remembrance.



Physical features such as walls, ledges, and slopes are often designed into public spaces in order to define spatial and behavioural boundaries. However, they can also serve other purposes, becoming places to sit, recline, climb, linger, and play. People may seek out spaces that will support a predetermined action, or the space itself may inspire social action, for example a fountain that encourages interaction.

Beyond this, participant observation also indicates that the aesthetics of contemporary memorialisation contribute to visitors often being unaware of the significance of a memorial setting. Public spaces that contain memory attempt to fix the use of a particular site. Through the appearance and aesthetic qualities of these sites, designers attempt to communicate specific symbolic meanings that will either stimulate certain actions, such as reflection and contemplation, or inhibit other actions:

*The appearance of spaces can also directly communicate a variety of religious and political beliefs and commercial and artistic agendas. Symbolism can either stimulate or inhibit actions by affecting potential users' interpretations and feelings, persuading them that a space is sacred or accommodating or private, that it provides or denies roles to certain individuals, that it is a place for escapism or grieving or work or protest.<sup>9</sup>*

The aesthetics of abstraction and minimalism of contemporary memorialisation allows for many personal and communal readings to mutually co-exist. In some cases, however, the pure abstraction of a memorial design may offer no clues to participants of appropriate codes of behaviour within the space.

People, through their own initiative, create the possibility of loose space and actively fashion public space to suit their own needs. In the case of representational spaces, such as memorial sites, unregulated and often anticipated actions of people in these spaces results in the loosening up of the intended meanings of these sites. For the most part, these forms of behaviour are benign, but in some cases they are fundamentally at odds with the conventional expectations of memorials as places where both memory and social behaviour are contained and restricted. This understanding challenges the way in which designers need to conceive, construct, and manage the way in which places of memory can be contained within urban landscapes.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>The research for this article was supported by a Design Researcher Award from the British Council in 2009.

<sup>2</sup>Erika Doss, "Memorial Mania," accessed September 28, 2010, <http://www.aamus.org/pubs/mn/memorialmania.cfm>

<sup>3</sup>Robert Musil, Joel Agee and Burton Pike, "Monuments," in *Selected Writings* (New York: Continuum, 1986), 320.

<sup>4</sup>Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire," in *Representations* 26 (1989): 13.

<sup>5</sup>James E. Young, “Memory and Monument After 9/11,” accessed September 28, 2010, <http://www.brooklynpubliclibrary.org/events/enshrined/pdf/young.pdf>

<sup>6</sup>Karen A. Franck and Quentin Stevens, *Loose Space: Possibility and Diversity in Urban Life* (London: Routledge, 2006), 25.

<sup>7</sup>Franck and Stevens, “Loose Space,” 2.

<sup>8</sup>Stuart Jeffries, “I Still Love My Diana Fountain,” accessed September 28, 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2004/oct/12/art.monarchy>.

<sup>9</sup>Franck and Stevens, “Loose Space,” 10.

## Bibliography

Doss, Erika, “Memorial Mania,” accessed September 28, 2010, <http://www.aamus.org/pubs/mn/memorialmania.cfm>

Franck, Karen and Stevens, Quentin, *Loose Space: Possibility and Diversity in Urban Life* (London: Routledge, 2006).

Ivy, R., “Memorials, Monuments, and Meaning,” *Architectural Record* 190(7) (2002): 84-87, 214.

Jeffries, Stuart, “I Still Love My Diana Fountain,” accessed September 28, 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2004/oct/12/art.monarchy>.

Musil, Robert, Agee, Joel and Pike, Burton, “Monuments,” in *Selected Writings* (New York: Continuum, 1986), 320.

Nora, Pierre, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire,” in *Representations* 26 (1989): 7-24. *Ontario Could Maintain War Memorial in England: McGuinty*, accessed October 10, 2010, <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/toronto/story/2007/08/22/war-memorial.html>

Savage, Kirk, “The Past in the Present,” *Harvard Design Magazine* 9 (Fall 1999): 14-1.

## Biographical note

Dr Russell Rodrigo is an architect and lecturer with the Faculty of the Built Environment, University of New South Wales, with an interest in the architecture and philosophy of memory and place. He is the designer of a number of memorial projects including the NSW Police Memorial and Gay and Lesbian Memorial in Sydney. Russell has recently completed a research-through-design PhD in memorial architecture.

Email: [russell.rodrido@unsw.edu.au](mailto:russell.rodrido@unsw.edu.au)

---

## Re-making Memory on Matiu and Other “Settlement” Sites

Rachel Buchanan

---

## Re-making Memory on Matiu and Other “Settlement” Sites

Rachel Buchanan

---

### Abstract

This article, written by a historian descended from Māori (and Pākehā) early settlers in Wellington, has three purposes. It reinscribes some whānau (extended family) history, hapu (sub-tribe) and iwi (tribal) histories onto the sites that co-hosted the *Contained Memory Conference 2010*: Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa and Massey University, Wellington. It then explores two possible approaches to the problem of reclaiming history or remaking memory on the 18 sites “handed back” to Wellington Māori in the recent settlement of a long-standing historical claim, against the Crown, for breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi. The first approach was to “re-touch” all the archival evidence generated about two of the “returned” sites—the harbour island, Matiu, and its small neighbour, Mokopuna, and the second was to visit the sites. These visits were a way of constructing whānau memory from the ground up. Through them, I have learned to cherish these disparate and frequently abject places, our ragged little spoils of “settlement”.

Keywords: Māori, Wellington, memory, history, archives

In 2005, the delicate remains of three sand- and shell-encrusted whare ponga (Māori dwellings made from native tree fern) were discovered amid the ruins of a recently demolished 1906 building on Taranaki Street, Wellington. The Wellington Tenth Trust, the body that represents descendants of Māori leaders living around the harbour in 1839, had urged the developers to undertake an archaeological dig at the site because it was so close to the original foreshore.<sup>1</sup> The request was prescient. The whare, which can now be viewed through glass windows in the basement of the Bellagio Ataahua Apartments, are the only ones known to have survived anywhere from the early nineteenth century. They are the ruins of Te Aro Pa, once home to about 130 Māori who had migrated south from Taranaki in the 1820s and 1830s.<sup>2</sup> Some of my Māori tīpuna (ancestors), including Taranaki rangatira (chief) Hemi Parai, lived there. Nearly 180 years on, they are still making their claim to the place.

Four years after this precious portion of the past emerged from the ground, Taranaki Māori in Wellington settled the historical Treaty of Waitangi claims against the Crown.<sup>3</sup> The process had taken 22 years and resulted in a settlement package that included: a public Crown apology; a \$25 million payment; and the vesting—or “return”—of 18 sites to the Port Nicholson Settlement Trust (Taranaki Whanui Ki Te Upoko o te Ika).<sup>4</sup> The land on which the whare were discovered was not among these sites. It remains “lost property”.

What has been “returned” as “cultural redress” is a disparate portfolio of property that includes: Matiu (Somes), Mokopuna (Leper), and Makaro (Ward), the three islands in Wellington Harbour; Pipitea Marae on Thorndon Quay; three former school sites in Waiwhetu and Wainuiomata; Point Dorset Recreation Reserve, and Wi Tako Scenic Reserve; the beds of two lakes (Kohangatera and Kohangapiripiri) hidden behind the folded hills over the other side of the harbour at Eastbourne; and a rare dendroglyph site.<sup>5</sup>

The unearthing of the whare and the settlement of the Treaty claim raised many questions for me, both personally and professionally. As a university-trained historian, I learnt that history was something external. History was a narrative summoned into existence by the historian as a result of extensive research in the archives. As one of the 14,000 registered beneficiaries of the Port Nicholson Block Settlement Trust, I have learnt that history is just as likely to be embedded in places (the earth, a marae, a person’s name) and that it will reveal itself when the moment is right. I have laboured to incorporate these two different perspectives into my scholarly writing. The Settlement Trust negotiating team had to work very hard to secure the return of any property at all, but what is it that we have settled for? How can I be an active and ethical custodian of this returned land (as a descendant and as a historian)? How do I resolve the problem of the absence of contemporary or historical whānau (extended family) memories or histories about most of these seemingly random and frequently abject “settlement” sites?

Flawed regimes of national collective memory in Aotearoa New Zealand continue to marginalise, elide, or silence public memories about Māori people and places.<sup>6</sup> A related problem is how to ensure that national or international

histories and memories, such as those shared by scholars at the *Contained Memory Conference 2010*, can sit alongside micro-local indigenous ones relevant to the sites where the conference was held. The lives of h (non-Māori) pioneers in Wellington (including my relatives, the Wallaces) are well documented, but the same is not true for the place’s Māori pioneers.<sup>7</sup>

As historians Tracey Banivanua Mar and Penelope Edmonds have recently argued, attempts to “decolonise geography” tend to be theoretical. Writing about (white) settler colonialism, they state that:

*... little scholarly work attends to the particular and often violent historiographies in settler colonies themselves on the ground, the very micro-conditions which underpin, produce and reinforce settler spaces in our nominally postcolonial societies.*<sup>8</sup>

My whakapapa (genealogy) connects me with the two host sites of the *Contained Memory* conference: Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa and Massey University, Wellington. I will therefore begin with a brief reminder of the Māori history of the land around these significant institutions. After this, I deal with two of my experiments in being an ethical and engaged guardian (kaitiaki) of “settlement” land. One of the many things my Māori ancestors lost in the early to mid-nineteenth century was narrative control over the place that was fast becoming Wellington (when it had been Te Whanganui a Tara).<sup>9</sup> The violence of settlement included, for my extended whānau at least, a rupture in inter-generational story-telling.<sup>10</sup>

The harbour islands are the most prominent pieces of land returned in the settlement. I decided to try and literally “re-touch” all the archival evidence generated about these taonga (treasures) between 1839 and 2008, and so re-claim narrative control over these places.<sup>11</sup> My second approach was more about my feet. As a new landlord, I spent some time with family walking around our new properties. Although we come from Wellington, the parcels of land were containers empty of any family memory and I wanted to start filling them up. This article describes my two attempts at grappling with the problems of making histories of Wellington that honour the continuity *and* discontinuity of Māori occupation here.

### Two non-settlement sites: Te Papa and Massey University

While marae (meeting places) are usually sites of deep significance to a particular whānau, hapu, or iwi, at Te Papa the marae’s purpose has been adapted and extended beyond the boundaries of geography. Te Marae, on the fourth floor, is an embodiment of “the spirit of bicultural partnership that lies at the heart of the Museum”.<sup>12</sup> Carved figures face outwards, towards the harbour, the heads and beyond, beckoning all-comers to “feel at home on this marae”.<sup>13</sup> It is appropriate that a national museum should look beyond the place where it stands, but it is also important to remember that Te Papa is built on reclaimed land that contains local history.

Te Aro Pa was once at the harbour’s edge, as the mussel, pipi, limpet, and oyster shells embedded in the walls of the unearthed whare attest. In 1845, one of my Pākehā ancestors, John Wallace, painted a watercolour on Thorndon Beach, Wellington. Looking out to sea, he drew five whaling boats and canoes leaving “Te Aro Pah”.<sup>14</sup> My Māori and Pākehā forbears once swam, fished, and sailed over the place where Te Papa now stands. One of our ancestors, Arapera Rongouaroa, known as “the belle of Te Aro Pa”, swam out “after the *HMS Galatea* to say goodbye to the Duke of Edinburgh on his departure from Wellington” in 1869.<sup>15</sup>

Figure 1. A map of Te Aro Pa, Wellington. Archives Reference: MA-MT 12 9/150, Archives New Zealand, The Department of Internal Affairs Te Tari Taiwhenua. Published with the permission of Archives New Zealand.



Arapera’s home was gradually destroyed between 1839 and the early twentieth century by earthquakes, by the white settlement, and by the hostility of government officials towards ongoing Māori occupation of the site. In the late 1870s, most of the pa land was taken “to provide access to reclamation and what was to become Taranaki wharf”.<sup>16</sup> In 1844 my tūpuna, Hemi Parai, signed a Deed of Release for Te Aro but the pa itself (including the gardens and burial grounds) was supposed to be reserved.<sup>17</sup> In 1847, Lieutenant Colonel William McCleverty, who had been appointed to settle the New Zealand Company’s land claims, made a similar promise.<sup>18</sup> Māori Land Court documents signed by Parai and his relatives in the 1860s provide evidence of many more government promises that land at Te Aro

“shall be inalienable by sale or by lease for a longer period than twenty one years” and would be held, instead, by Māori and “their Heirs and Assigns forever”.<sup>19</sup> By 1874, the Crown had begun to declare portions of the pa to be “Waste Land of the Crown”, and by the 1880s the remaining portions of Te Aro were “taken for Public use as a road”.<sup>20</sup> In 1881, only 28 people were still living at Te Aro and their home was bisected by the new road.<sup>21</sup>

Māori Land Court documents provide information on succession of the blocks of land owned by Parai. He died in about 1877 and at the time two of his children, Te Awhi Parai and Mohi Parai, were living in Taranaki with their mother, Pirihihi Matangi. Both children were involved in the non-violent ploughing protests at Parihaka, a large and influential Māori settlement in Taranaki that was invaded by the Crown in 1881.<sup>22</sup> These two were arrested and imprisoned at Mt Cook, Wellington, and then at Ripapa Island, off Lyttelton Harbour near Christchurch.

In the 1840s, the settler administration built military barracks over the garden beds at Pukeahau, one of the many cultivation grounds that had fed people at Te Aro Pa. One of the brothers, Te Awhi, was only 14 when he was arrested and sent to Mt Cook and then Christchurch.<sup>23</sup> Te Awhi and the others arrested were not given a trial. One of Massey University’s campuses is at Mt Cook in the former Dominion Museum and National Art Gallery building and the National War Memorial is in front of it. There is a very modest memorial, erected by Māori, in front of the university building to recall the unjust imprisonment of men like Te Awhi. However, the war memorial itself acknowledges neither New Zealand’s wars of foundation nor the (Māori) histories of the land on which it stands.

### An archival tour of the islands

Matiu and Makaro are the two biggest islands in Wellington Harbour. Historian, Angela Ballara, writes that Ngati Ira, who occupied the land around the harbour in the eighteenth century, built pa on both islands and the islands themselves also served as refuges.<sup>24</sup> Matiu retained this status as a refuge in the early nineteenth century when many Taranaki people fled south to escape inter-tribal warfare. In 1835, hundreds of landless Taranaki refugees left Matiu for Wharekauri (the Chatham Islands), 800 kilometres east of New Zealand. They travelled on the purloined brig, *Rodney*.<sup>25</sup> Before they went members of one Taranaki tribe, Ngati Mutunga, gave land they had occupied around the harbour (including land at Te Aro, close to where Te Papa is now) to their Taranaki relatives.

Then, in 1839, the New Zealand Company’s supply ship, *Tory*, sailed into the place they called Port Nicholson. The company’s Principal Agent, Lieutenant-Colonel William Wakefield, “bought” most of the land around the harbour and renamed Matiu, “Somes”, after Joseph Somes, an English shipping magnate and the Company’s deputy governor.<sup>26</sup> The harbour islands were supposed to be reserved and held in trust for the future benefit of the descendants of the 16 chiefs who signed the 1839 Deed of Purchase.<sup>27</sup>



But only two years later, in 1841, the Crown’s representative, Governor William Hobson, proclaimed these islands to be Crown reserves.<sup>28</sup> The islands remained in Crown ownership from then on. Matiu was a human and animal quarantine station, a prisoner of war camp (in two world wars), the site for an anti-aircraft artillery battery and de-gaussing station, a graveyard, and a fort.<sup>29</sup> A maximum security animal quarantine station operated on Matiu between 1972-1995. The islands have been vested to the Settlement Trust to be administered as “scientific or historic reserves”. A kaitiaki (guardians) board oversees the administration, but the Department of Conservation continues to manage the islands and enforce bylaws.<sup>30</sup> The islands are in Māori hands again, but our ownership is limited by the reserve status. We could not, for example, decide (as entrepreneurial Wellington mayor, Michael Fowler, did in the 1980s) to announce that we were doing a feasibility study to establish a casino on the island.<sup>31</sup>

The Fowler plans for a casino—and the letters of disgust from “morals campaigner” Patricia Bartlett’s Society for the Promotion of Community Standards—were contained in some of the hundreds of archival documents I examined as part of my project to “re-touch” archival documents about our islands.<sup>32</sup> I scoured the diverse holdings at the Alexander Turnbull Library and the National Archives, and read defence, agriculture, conservation, and wildlife records.<sup>33</sup> I looked at the diary of a German doctor, Max Buchner, who was emigrating to New Zealand on the *Euphrosyne* in 1878. Eight of the ship’s passengers had died of typhus on the voyage out and two more passed away on Matiu during a dismal 55-day quarantine.<sup>34</sup> Buchner wrote: “We found ourselves alone on the small island ... surrounded by raging seas which separated us from the rest of the world. We were the banished.”<sup>35</sup>

I discovered some amusing things as well. In World War I, 296 enemy aliens were interned on Matiu. One of these men was Rinaldo Zahn, a 31-year-old Austrian-born, Australian resident who had spent the past nine years touring British countries, especially New Zealand and Australia, as a showman at the Fuller’s Vaudeville. He was captured in August 1914 in Wellington. Zahn applied for parole and the New Zealand Police collected character references from John O’Donnell, the manager of La France, a woman who had been showing at Fuller’s Vaudeville, and from Myer Myers, “manager for the Siamese Twins lately showing in Manners St”.<sup>36</sup> While on Matiu, Zahn earned money by tattooing other prisoners, using a machine sent to him in 1917 by a man who was a prisoner of war on Gallups Island, Boston.<sup>37</sup>

In World War I, prisoners of war shared the island with quarantined animals, such as a Pomeranian dog that came from Durban on the *Marama*, a white poodle from San Francisco via Sydney on the *Manuka*, and two sleigh dogs that arrived from Antarctica (with polar explorer, Sir Ernest Shackleton) on the *Aurora*.<sup>38</sup>

Matiu’s neighbour, Mokopuna, is a tiny island also known as Leper Island in memory of Kim Lee, a Chinese man suspecting of having leprosy, who was quarantined in a cave and died six months later in March 1904. By 1919,

Department of Internal Affairs files reveal an escalating anxiety about the safety of tuatara (a prehistoric New Zealand lizard) on all the harbour islands, and in 1920 six were released on Mokopuna.<sup>39</sup> In 1948, the Wildlife Division of the Department of Internal Affairs killed the rabbits that had overrun Mokopuna and replanted native trees such as taupata and ngaio.<sup>40</sup> In 1957, the island was declared a wildlife sanctuary. From the early 1980s volunteer groups such as the Lower Hutt branch of the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society raised seedlings, planted new trees, and controlled weeds on Matiu as well.<sup>41</sup>

While the archives tell many interesting historical stories, the most powerful of all for me is the one about the efficiency and totality with which my nineteenth and twentieth-century Māori forbears were banished from Matiu. Aside from a few lines in a 1940 newspaper feature story (“evidence of Māori ... occupation has been found on the island—beds of charcoal high up, pipi shells and fish bones as well as fields of greenstone in the rough or in the process of being fashioned as artefacts”), I found nothing else about Māori occupation.<sup>42</sup>

It was not until I got into the local government archives from the 1990s that I met people I recognised. In 1995, the Wellington and Hutt City councils invited Wellington Māori to a workshop for “stakeholders” of Matiu. The animal quarantine station had closed and the island’s future was up for discussion. The meeting recognised Te Ati Awa’s “pre-eminent” claim to the island.<sup>43</sup> Te Ati Awa leader, Ngatata Love, addressed the group on behalf of the Wellington Tenth Trust. He explained that the island had not been included in the sale of land to the Company and noted:

*... one time the tangata whenua could live off the harbour and now could not do so because of pollution. They had also been banned from visiting the island because of its status as a prisoner of war camp and quarantine station. Its European history is only a short incident in its longer history.*<sup>44</sup>

The next month, Dr Love and fellow Taranaki kāumatua (elder), Teru Wharehoka, were at the ceremony to open the island to the public. Wharehoka was photographed gazing back to Wellington “from Somes Island, known to his ancestors as Matiu”. Dr Love said it was the first time he and Wharehoka had even been on Matiu: “Every child from Wellington and the Hutt has looked here and wondered why this taonga [treasure] has not been available to them.”<sup>45</sup> Two years later, in 1997, the Geographic Board renamed the island “Matiu-Somes”.

To unearth the “longer history” referred to by Dr Love, I needed the skills not just of the historian, but of archaeologist, geologist, and botanist. The paper archive I had been so keen to explore could actually tell me very little.

Figure 2. The author on the steps of the old grandstand at Wainuiomata Secondary College, Wellington, 5 August 2010. Photo: Ben Buchanan.



### A settlers' settlement tour

Kāumatua (elders), Ngatata Love and Teru Wharehoka, placed great value in standing on Matiu. This was how the island became “available to them”. I have learnt that in the Māori world, history starts from where you stand.<sup>46</sup> First, though, there was the problem of finding these places I wanted to stand on—the other “settlement” sites listed in the Port Nicholson Block Trust 2010 annual report.<sup>47</sup> Most of them were unfamiliar to me.

I visited Korokoro Gateway (a place where gypsy caravans often park), Steeple Rocks (a nudist beach) and Shelley Bay (the former naval base purchased by the Port Nicholson Block Settlement Trust), with my mother, Mary, my daughter, Antonietta, and my niece, Tusiata. With my father, Leo, and my brother, Ben, I went to Wi Tako Scenic Reserve in Upper Hutt. We ignored a Department of Conservation sign that forbade anyone to enter—“because dead pines are a significant hazard” and the tracks were not maintained by the department—and squeezed through the supplejack onto a slippy, narrow, path dappled with late afternoon sunlight.

Earlier that day, we had had a look at the three schools the trust now owns—Waiwhetu Primary and Wainuiomata intermediate and secondary college. The college is derelict. The classrooms are boarded and the boards tagged. Windows are smashed and the steps of the old grandstand are rotten.

Figure 3. The author’s brother, Ben, and father, Leo, Wi Tako Scenic Reserve, Upper Hutt, 27 August 2010. Photo by the author.



We also visited a site that contains an extremely rare example of Māori art: the dendroglyph (a carving made on a living tree). There are three by the lakes Kohangapiripiri and Kohangatera, the only known examples on the New Zealand mainland. Liz Mellish, then CEO of the Wellington Tenth Trust, told us that she believed the dendroglyphs had been carved by one of our ancestors in the 1830s or 1840s.<sup>48</sup> We unlocked Burdan’s Gate and drove out towards the heads. From the crest of a steep hill we could see the two silver lakes and much toi toi, flax, grass, and gorse. There were no trees. After a long search, we took a path that led to a swampy wetland and there was a rickety fence and a karaka tree, gnarled and modest, shaped by the winds into a flat-topped green flat flying east. The grey trunk was lumpy and indented, like skin when a tattoo has been removed. We touched it carefully, struggling to identify the shapes.<sup>49</sup>

I wondered if the carver worked alone or in a team? Was the carver a “graffiti artist” or a “stonemason”? Were the pictures like a tag—“I am here”—to be read by members of other iwi or were they a memorial engraving: “We were once here but now we are not.” Did the carvers chisel pictures that would make sense at the time, or were the patterns meant to expand with the tree, presenting messages to be deciphered by generations to come, by people like my brother and I? If the tree continues to flourish and expand, will the carving eventually disappear?

The tree is a historical marker with a fence but no sign. The only other place in New Zealand where you can find dendroglyphs is the Chatham Islands.<sup>50</sup> Perhaps this mainland carving was the work of someone who had been there and come back? Or perhaps the carver was a Taranaki person familiar with the ancient, mysterious carved rocks and reefs that can be found along the coast in that province.<sup>51</sup>

Figure 4. The author’s father, Leo, and the carved karaka tree, Lake Kohangapiripiri, Wellington, 27 August 2010. Photo by the author.



Is memory like the tree or is it like the carving on the tree? Many dead trees are turned into paper. Is history the stories we write on paper, nothing more than a sign that memory has died? Or, has memory merely shifted from intergenerational oral transmission to text-based archival material? What are archives anyway? Archives New Zealand is built on land where Māori used to grow vegetables. The collections it houses, like those in every archive, have grown through selection, rejection, exclusion, and destruction.<sup>52</sup> In this sense, as architectural historian, Kent Kleinman, has observed: “The archive is more accurately described as a machine for forgetting.”<sup>53</sup> For every voice, plan, or record in the archive, there are many more that have been excluded and so been “forgotten” or silenced. My failed quest to reclaim (Māori) histories of Matiu in the national and local archives was proof of this.

### Some concluding remarks

Colonisation was (and is) a global process, but it is also a local one. In the early nineteenth century, there used to be 29 marae dotted around this harbour. For my ancestors, and other Taranaki Māori who migrated south to live here from the 1820s onwards, the process of colonisation led to the destruction of every one of the eight major marae. Te Aro became a name associated with a suburb rather than a marae. Matiu-Somes, like Ripapa, Otamahua, and Quarantine islands, became a quarantine station to “protect” New Zealanders from introduced human and animal diseases.<sup>54</sup>

“Māori-ness” became associated with rural, rather than urban, places. Marae contain, enact, and interpret history and memory. We lost so much of that here at Te Aro and elsewhere in Wellington. The national museum built its own marae while the original one for this place lies buried just up the road. The dialect spoken

by the people who occupied Te Aro is fragile but Taranaki people are working very hard to preserve and transmit this taonga.<sup>55</sup> One innovative strategy is to form a partnership with Archives New Zealand and provide “access to important records, written in te reo Taranaki, from 1860 to 1900”.<sup>56</sup>

We—the descendants of Taranaki people—have been given back some land in recognition of the injustices that occurred in Wellington, but colonisation means that many of the sites returned to us contain the memories of others.<sup>57</sup> As Jonathan Lear has argued in *Radical Hope*, his brilliant analysis of the utterances of Plenty Coup (the last great Chief of the Crow Nation in the United States), the point is not one of narrative control. Lear writes: “For the issue that concerns us is not who has the power to tell the story, however important that might be; it is rather how power shapes what any true story could possibly be.”<sup>58</sup> For Māori from Wellington (and Taranaki) the issue is also deeper than competing narratives; it is what stories are actually possible (and useful) in the face of such profound cultural devastation. Initially, when I visited these sites and thought about them, all I could see were continuities between the (colonial) past and the present. Perhaps I had been looking at the wrong past, the shallow past, rather than the deeper, “longer history”.<sup>59</sup> To my surprise, I have come to see, in the seemingly random 18 sites handed back to us, an echo of a much earlier Māori point of view. These sites—the former naval base at Shelley Bay and the many other places over which the Settlement Trust has sale and leaseback rights (such as the National Archives and the National Library) or first right of refusal to buy (including Te Papa itself)—remap the deeper Māori past onto the present. Point Dorset, Shelley Bay, the wakaama next door to Te Papa, the Railway Station social hall, the land on Thorndon Quay, the Korokoro Gateway at Petone, Matiu, Makaro, and Mokopuna, and then around across the sea to Eastbourne and the lakes with their dendroglyphs, form a necklace around the harbour, re-stoking our fires of occupation.

Figure 5. Antonietta Hope Buchanan Gentile, the author’s daughter, throws rocks at a rainbow, at a departing ship and at Makaro Island and Te Aroaro-o-Kupe, Wellington, 24 August 2010. Photo by the author.



## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>The Wellington Tenth Trust has its origins in the 1839 Deed of Purchase in which 16 Māori rangatira (chiefs) “sold” what was then known as Port Nicholson to the New Zealand Company, a British-based property speculation firm. In return, these chiefs were promised that a tenth of every bit of land sold should be reserved, in trust, for their heirs forever. For information on Te Aro Pa see Wellington Tenth Trust, “Cultural Impact Report 39-43 Taranaki Street, Te Aro Pa,” January 2004, 3. See also my discussion of this find in Rachel Buchanan, *The Parihaka Album: Lest We Forget* (Wellington: Huia, 2009), 257-60. I would like to thank the many people who have helped me with this article including my whānau, Neville Gilmour, Liz Mellish, Joanna Sassoon, and the two anonymous peer reviewers whose comments prompted a significant rewrite.

<sup>2</sup>Buchanan, *Parihaka Album*, 244-54.

<sup>3</sup>The Treaty of Waitangi, New Zealand’s founding document, was signed in 1840 between the British Crown and 540 Māori rangatira. The British signed a document in English while Māori signed a text in Māori. Debates continue over the contradictory meanings of these documents. Broadly, Māori believed the Crown had acknowledged their ongoing rangatiratanga (chieftanship) over the land while the Crown believed Māori had ceded sovereignty over it. Claudia Orange’s *The Treaty of Waitangi* (Wellington: Allen & Unwin/Port Nicholson Press, 1987) is a good starting point for understanding the many meanings of the Treaty.

<sup>4</sup>See “Taranaki Whanui ki Te Upoko o Te Ika Settlement Summary,” Office of Treaty Settlements, accessed September 14, 2011, <http://www.ots.govt.nz>. For one history of Māori interactions with the Crown in Wellington see “Te Whanganui a Tara Me Ona Takiwa Report on the Wellington District,” *Waitangi Tribunal Report 2003* (Wellington: Legislation Direct, 2003).

<sup>5</sup>The harbour islands were named, in the tenth century, by Māori explorer Kupe. The biggest two, Matiu and Makaro, were named after the explorer’s nieces or daughters. The other small one, Mokopuna, means grandchild or great-grandchild. The English names were bestowed in 1840 by the New Zealand Company. For a full list of the 18 sites and varying mechanisms in which they have been offered as cultural redress (e.g. some are “fee simple” and some must be administered as “Māori reservations,” or scenic, recreational, historical or scientific reserves) see “Taranaki Whanui ki Te Upoko o Te Ika and The Port Nicholson Block Settlement Trust and The Sovereign in Right of New Zealand” Deed of Settlement of Historical Claims, accessed September 14, 2011, <http://ots.govt.nz>, 24-25.

<sup>6</sup>Rachel Buchanan, “Why Gandhi Doesn’t Belong at Wellington Railway Station,” *Journal of Social History*, 44 (2011) 4: 1077-93.

<sup>7</sup>For a discussion of commemoration of the Wallaces, especially their significant place at the old Bolton Street Cemetery, see Buchanan, “Pioneers,” in *Parihaka Album*, 235-68. The Wallaces have a strong archival presence at the Alexander

Turnbull Library (hereafter ATL). The library holds the papers of John Howard Wallace, a historian, and letters written by William Eilerslie Wallace and art by their father, John Wallace. The history of Māori occupation of the land around the harbour is far more complex and stretches back to Kupe’s discovery of the harbour in the tenth century. Since then, successive waves of different iwi have occupied the place now known as Wellington. In the early nineteenth century, Taranaki iwi fleeing south to escape war displaced iwi that the Waitangi Tribunal described as ‘Whatonga-descent peoples’ (including Ngai Tara, Rangitane, Muaupoko and Ngati Apa, and Ngati Ira). By the 1830s, Taranaki iwi, especially Te Ati Awa, had claimed occupation rights to the harbour, and in its 2003 report the Waitangi Tribunal reinforced Te Ati Awa’s mana whenua status. When I use the phrase “Māori pioneers” I am referring to my ancestors who helped found the city of Wellington while also acknowledging the Māori who were there before Taranaki people arrived.

<sup>8</sup>Tracey Banivanua Mar and Penelope Edwards eds., “Introduction: Making Space in Settler Colonies,” in *Making Settler Colonial Space: Perspectives on Race, Place and Identity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) 2.

<sup>9</sup>Te Whanganui a Tara means “the great harbour of Tara”. The harbour was named by Whatonga, who explored the great harbour and named it for his son, Tara. See “Te Whanganui a Tara Me Ona Takiwa Report on the Wellington District,” 17-18.

<sup>10</sup>That said, several of my relatives, including Raumahora Broughton and Mike Walsh, have been working very tenaciously to reconnect all of us with whānau stories about Māori Wellington. See Raumahora Broughton, *Charles Taare Warahi Wallace 1848-1932* (Palmerston North: Massey University, 2010). This whakapapa book was made for a whānau reunion held at Hutt Park from 14-16 January 2011.

<sup>11</sup>I am using the word “re-touch” in two ways. I mean I wanted to literally put my hands on the papers, maps, and photographs generated about our island, but I also wanted to re-touch this material, to reshape it to my own ends. In this sense I am referring to the way photographers re-touch an image.

<sup>12</sup>“The Marae”, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa website, accessed June 21, 2011, <http://www.tepapa.govt.nz/WhatsOn/exhibitions/Pages/TheMarae.aspx>

<sup>13</sup>“The Marae”, <http://www.tepapa.govt.nz/WhatsOn/exhibitions/Pages/TheMarae.aspx>

<sup>14</sup>John Wallace, “View of Wellington Harbour from Thorndon Beach,” 12 July 1845, watercolour and pencil, 253 x 422 mm, drawings and print collection, ATL, Wellington, Ref B-079-007. For a discussion of this drawing and Te Aro Pa in the 1840s see Buchanan, “Pioneers,” *Parihaka Album* 243-258.

<sup>15</sup>Broughton, *Charles Taare Warahi Wallace*, 18.

<sup>16</sup>Some of the last Māori to hold land at Te Aro Pa included Tamati Wiremu Te Wera and Raniera Erihana. In 1906, Erihana and the Public Trust sold “section 24” to Thomas J Young while Te Wera retained “section 12” until 1902. See Tenth Trust “Cultural Impact Report” 1-2 and *Nga Tupuna o Te Whanganui-a-Tara* (Wellington:



Wellington City Council, 2001) 39. For a discussion of the forces that destroyed the pa, see Buchanan, *Parihaka Album*, 253-57.

<sup>17</sup>Buchanan, *Parihaka Album*, 208-211 and “The 1844 Deeds of Release,” in *Report on the Wellington District* (Waitangi Tribunal) 145-86.

<sup>18</sup>See “The McCleverty Transactions,” *Report on the Wellington District*, 227-58.

<sup>19</sup>See, for example, Hemi Parai and Sir George Grey, 27 November 1866, “Grant Under the Native Lands Act 1865,” Māori Land Court, Wanganui, Te Aro Block Order file.

<sup>20</sup>These phrases are all used in documents held at the Māori Land Court in the Te Aro Block Order file.

<sup>21</sup>Buchanan, *Parihaka Album*, 256.

<sup>22</sup>For an overview of these events, see Buchanan, *Parihaka Album*, 23-55.

<sup>23</sup>Native Land Court of New Zealand sitting, 31 March 1880, where James Booth appointed a trustee on behalf of Awhe (i) Parai (14 years) in regard to Te Aro pa sections 6 and 9, Māori Land Court Aotea District, Wanganui, Te Aro Block Order file.

<sup>24</sup> For an excellent overview of early nineteenth-century Māori Wellington see Angela Ballara, “Te Whanganui-a-Tara: Phases of Māori Occupation of Wellington Harbour c. 1800-1840,” in *The Making of Wellington*, eds. D. Hamer and R. Nicholls (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1990) 9-34.

<sup>25</sup>Ballara, “Te Whanganui-a-Tara,” 26-29.

<sup>26</sup>Ballara argues that the “sale of Te Whanganui-a-Tara by Te Wharepouri and Te Puni was itself an act designed to set the bounds of their mana over the harbour, ‘Te Whanganui-a-Tara’, 33.

<sup>27</sup>Port Nicholson Block (Taranaki Whanui Ki Te Upoko o Te Ika) Deed of Settlement, 2009, 8-9.

<sup>28</sup>*Report on the Wellington District*, 110. For popular, mid-twentieth century understandings of ownership and uses of the island see “Now a Home of Aliens and Penguins,” *The Weekly News*, Auckland, 29 May 1940. This article asserts: “The Crown took over Somes Island from the New Zealand Company about 1850 about the time that grants were issued for 1600 town acres.”

<sup>29</sup>For an overview of quarantine in New Zealand, including human quarantine on Matiu, see Gavin McLean and Tim Shoebridge, *Quarantine! Protecting New Zealand At The Border* (Otago: Otago University Press, 2010).

<sup>30</sup>“Te Ngonga o te Piukara: The Sounds of the Bugle,” *Port Nicholson Block Settlement Trust Newsletter*, 32, 6: March 2010.

<sup>31</sup>“R.D. Muldoon to Michael Fowler,” 30 March 1981: “This is to acknowledge your letter of 25 March—reference 31/269—in which you comment on a resolution passed by the Wellington City Council welcoming the concept of a casino as a tourist amenity in Wellington ...” Ref 00001: 1129:31/269, Part 2, Wellington City Archives (hereafter WCA).

<sup>32</sup>B.P. Caughley, Director, Intercissors for New Zealand to Mr Fowler, 25 March 1981, and Patricia Bartlett to Mr Fowler, 6 March 1981, File 00001:1129:31/269, Part 2, WCA.

<sup>33</sup>The Alexander Turnbull in Wellington is part of the National Library of New Zealand. It collects and protects published and unpublished material relating to the peoples of New Zealand and the Pacific.

<sup>34</sup>Buchner papers, ATL, 7.

<sup>35</sup>Max Buchner papers, ATL ms-papers-5630, 6.

<sup>36</sup>“Report of Sergeant Vyvyan R. Tayler, Relative to Zahn Rinaldo Austrian Prisoner of War on Soames Island and Applicant for Parole,” 29 August 1914, Manners St Police Station, AAAB 482 (Department of Justice), Rinaldo Zahn file, ANZ.

<sup>37</sup>Mr Lezke to Mr Zahn, 15 May 1917, Zahn file, ANZ.

<sup>38</sup>Department of Agriculture, Industries and Commerce, Live-stock and Meat Division, Particulars of Quarantined Stock, Somes Island Quarantine Station, month ending 30 April 1917, AANR (Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries) Acc W3209, Somes Island Quarantine Station 1912-1920, ANZ.

<sup>39</sup>J. Allan Thomson, Director, Dominion Museum memo to Under Secretary for Internal Affairs, “Tuatara Lizards,” 26 November 1920, “Wildlife Somes & Mokopuna,” ANZ.

<sup>40</sup>“Island Regenerated: Native Plants Flourish Again,” unidentified news-clipping, 4 March 1953, ANZ.

<sup>41</sup>“Matiu (Somes Island) Reserve Working Plan Community Focus on an Island Habitat,” Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawha, working party draft to consultative group, 1994, Ref: 00444: 283: 23/27/2 Pt2. WCA.

<sup>42</sup>“Now a Home of Aliens and Penguins,” *The Weekly Times*, Auckland, 29 May 1940, AAAC W3179, “Wildlife Somes & Mokopuna,” ANZ.

<sup>43</sup>Ngatata Love, Wellington Tenth Trust/tangata whenua, Notes on Somes Island/Matiu Workshop, 2 June 1995, Parks and Reserves: Somes Island 1988-1994, Ref 00444:283:23/27/2, WCA.

<sup>44</sup>Love, Notes on Somes Island/Matiu Workshop, 2 June 1995, WCA.

<sup>45</sup>“Somes Island likely to be renamed within two years,” *The Dominion*, 2 August 1995.

<sup>46</sup>In part, this insight is based on the concept of turangawaewae—which are places where Māori feel connected and empowered. It can be translated, literally, as turanga (standing place) and waewae (feet).

<sup>47</sup>“Port Nicholson Block Settlement Trust Annual Report,” 31 March 2010, 19.

<sup>48</sup>Liz Mellish, CEO Wellington Tenth Trust, personal communication, 26 August 2010. See also “Pencarrow Lakes: Conservation Values and Management January 2002”, 8, accessed October 25, 2011, <http://www.doc.govt.nz/upload/documents/parks-and-recreation/places-to-visit/wellington/Pencarrow-Lakes.pdf>.

<sup>49</sup>Archaeologists have suggested the dendroglyphs are marked with “fish” motifs, including a representative of a killer whale, “Pencarrow Lakes”, 8.

<sup>50</sup>For information on the very uncertain future of these trees and a project to preserve the information carved into them, see Kiran Chug, “Scanner gives old Moriori Art New Life,” *The Dominion Post*, 10 April, 2010.

<sup>51</sup>Buchanan, *Parihaka Album*, 196-97.

<sup>52</sup>Terry Cook, “Remembering the Future: Appraisal of Records and the Role of Archives in Constructing Social Memory,” *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory: Essays from the Sawyer Seminar*, eds. Francis Blouin and William Rosenberg (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006) 169. Cook, an eminent Canadian archivist, reminds us that state archives around the world select “for long-term preservation as society’s memory roughly 1-5 per cent of the total documentation of major institutions and considerably less from private citizens”.

<sup>53</sup>Kent Kleinman, “Archiving/Architecture,” in *Archives, Documentation and Institutions of Social Memory*, 55.

<sup>54</sup>McLean and Shoebridge, *Quarantine!*.

<sup>55</sup>Te Reo o Taranaki was formed in the 1980s to “manage and co-ordinate a strategic direction for the regeneration and continued development of Taranaki reo ... the Indigenous Reo (regional Māori language variation/dialect)”. See Te Reo o Taranaki website for more information, accessed October 25, 2011, <http://www.taranakireo.co.nz/index.php?page=about>

<sup>56</sup>“Celebrating the Partnership with Taranaki Iwi,” Archives New Zealand website, accessed October 25, 2011, <http://archives.govt.nz/about/news/2009/12/celebrating-partnership-taranaki-iwi>

<sup>57</sup>Kiran Chug, “Somes Sweet Home After 50 Years Away,” *The Dominion Post*, undated clipping, 18 December 2009.

<sup>58</sup>Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2006) 31.

<sup>59</sup>Love, Notes on Somes Island/Matiu Workshop, 2 June 1995, WCA.

## Bibliography

Ballara, Anglea, “Te Whanganui-a-Tara: Phases of Māori Occupation of Wellington Harbour c. 1800-1840,” in *The Making of Wellington*, eds. D. Hamer and R. Nicholls (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1990) 9-35.

Banivanua Mar, Tracey and Edwards, Penelope eds., *Making Settler Colonial Space: Perspectives on Race, Place and Identity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

Broughton, Raumahora, *Charles Taare Warahi Wallace 1848-1932* (Palmerston North: Massey University, 2010).

Buchanan, Rachel. *The Parihaka Album: Lest We Forget* (Wellington, Huia, 2009).

Buchanan, Rachel. “Why Gandhi Doesn’t Belong at Wellington Railway Station,” *Journal of Social History* 44 (2011): 4.

Chug, Kiran, “Scanner Gives Old Moriori Art New Life,” *The Dominion Post*, 10 April 2010.

Chug, Kiran, “Somes Sweet Home After 50 Years Away,” *The Dominion Post*, undated clipping, 2010.

Kleinman, Kent, “Archiving/Architecture,” in *Archives, Documentation and Institutions of Social Memory: Essays from the Sawyer Seminar*, eds. Francis Blouin and William Rosenberg (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006) 54-60.

Lear, Jonathan, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Destruction* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2006).

McLean, Gavin and Shoebridge, Tim, *Quarantine! Protecting New Zealand At The Border* (Otago: Otago University Press, 2010).

*Nga Tupuna o Te Whanganui-a-Tara* (Wellington: Wellington City Council, 2001).

“Taranaki Whānui ki Te Upoko o Te Ika Settlement Summary,” Office of Treaty Settlements, accessed September 14, 2011, <http://www.ots.govt.nz>.

“Te Ngona o te Piukara: The Sounds of the Bugle,” *Port Nicholson Settlement Trust Newsletter*, 32, March 2010.

“Te Whanganui a Tara Me Ona Takiwa Report on the Wellington District,” Waitangi Tribunal Report 2003 (Wellington: Legislation Direct, 2003).

“The Marae,” Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa website, accessed June 21, 2011, <http://www.tepapa.govt.nz/WhatsOn/exhibitions/Pages/TheMarae.aspx>

Wakefield, William, “The Company’s Purchases of Land From The Natives 1839 to 1942,” *Appendix to the Report of the Court of Directors of the New Zealand Company*, 12 (London: The Company, 1844) 43F.

Wellington Tenth Trust, “Cultural Impact Report 39-43 Taranaki Street, Te Aro Pa,” January 2004, 1-27.

### Biographical note

Dr Rachel Buchanan (Te Ati Awa, Taranaki, Ngāti Ruanui) is the author of a history-memoir, *The Parihaka Album: Lest We Forget* (Huia, 2009). In 2011 she was awarded the Australian Book Review’s Sidney Myer Fund Fellowship to research and write a major essay on archivists, archives, and personal papers. The resulting piece, ‘Sweeping Up the Ashes’: The Politics of Collecting Personal Papers, appears in ABR’s December issue. Buchanan is an honorary research fellow in the School of Historical and European Studies, La Trobe University, Melbourne.

Email: [rachel.buchanan@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:rachel.buchanan@latrobe.edu.au)

6.

---

## PERFORMING MEMORY

---

# Battlefield Pilgrimage and Performative Memory: Contained Souls of Soldiers in Sites, Ashes, and Buddha Statues

Akira Nishimura

---

## Battlefield Pilgrimage and Performative Memory: Contained Souls of Soldiers in Sites, Ashes, and Buddha Statues

Akira Nishimura

---

### Abstract

Towards the end of the Pacific War (1941-1945), members of the Japanese Army were engaged in mortal combat with the Allied Forces. For many the outcome was fateful, and for those soldiers serving on the Pacific islands and in Southeast Asia a large number of them would not return home alive. Despite the Japanese military agency receiving orders to retrieve the bodies of those killed, remains were not recovered to send back to their bereaved. Previous studies revealed that the great majority of the funeral urns delivered to bereaved families contained nothing but a small stone or a chunk of wood.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the religious explanation given by the heads of the armed forces was unconvincing, claiming that while the soldiers' remains could not be returned home, their souls would. Consequently, it is no surprise that the families and the surviving comrades of the fallen regarded this explanation as unsatisfactory. In view of this, the bereaved began to visit the battlefields to hold memorial services for their relatives, and to re-locate and recover their remains. This article focuses on the pilgrimages made by Japanese people to key sites of former battlegrounds. I will discuss how these pilgrims regard the places and the materials associated with the fallen soldiers as harbouring the souls of the dead. Finally, I will consider the "performative" aspect of their memories. By applying this linguistic term when discussing the material, I aim to illustrate how the active characteristics of memory can instigate the living to perform acts that acknowledge the status of those who have passed away.

Keywords: performative memory, spirits of the dead, fallen soldiers, battlefield pilgrimage, ashes, statue

### His spirit is another word for his memory?

In Japan, it is possible to see a number of ceremonies and memorials “to comfort the spirits” of the dead killed in natural disasters and wars. Such forms of memorialisation are not only performed in Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo, but also in local communities, schools, and even in some private companies throughout the country. Kazuhiko Komatsu, a Japanese folklorist and anthropologist, insists that “the spirit” of the dead person is another word for “the memory” of them.<sup>2</sup> He argues that the act of comforting the spirits of the dead is the means whereby memories of the dead are prevented from fading away. In other words, the notion of the departed soul is a device for remembering, which has been generated by the desire to preserve such memories against the passing of time.

In this argument, the spirit of the dead is regarded not as “substantial” but as “relational”. In other words, the existence of the spirit is not an issue here. Rather, the concept of the spirit is considered as an index of the relationship between the living and the dead. Such a concept is certainly very suggestive from the viewpoint of my interest in ideas surrounding “contained memory”. However, I am also slightly doubtful about the assumption that memory is only concerned with the past. I would like to point out not only the preservative aspect of memory, but also its other facets related to both the present and the future.

The Battle of Guadalcanal in 1942 is generally said to be one of the decisive turning points of the Pacific War and resulted in an overwhelming number of deaths of Japanese soldiers. The system of repatriating the remains of fallen soldiers to their bereaved families, overseen by the Japanese Army, was severely limited at that time.

A document entitled, “The Memorandum of Sand of the Fallen Soldiers’ Spirit”, was issued in March 1943 by the colonel of the 29th Foot Regiment. This officer, who had been engaged in the battle of Guadalcanal, was responsible for sending home the sand from the beach where the soldiers had died.<sup>3</sup> According to the memorandum, the survivors tried to recover and repatriate the remains (i.e., dead bodies, ashes, or at least hairs), but were unsuccessful. Instead, they held funeral ceremonies at the exact place of death and gathered “the coral sand on the beautiful beach on the island”. The sand, representing the dead soldiers’ spirits, could be returned home to Japan, thus enabling the souls to be reunited with the parents through this material. After the ritual, the grains of sand were distributed and divided according to the number of the dead.

Japanese cultural anthropologist, Emiko Namihira, identified the unconventional nature of this practice. Regarded as the remains of the dead, the sand was put into funeral urns or boxes. The surviving comrades and the bereaved had no other choice but to deal with the sand as if it had been no less than the dead bodies.<sup>4</sup> This deceptive practice was later discontinued and replaced by a more systematic response when it was revealed that it was sand contained in the



urns representing the spirits of the deceased rather than the soldiers' actual ashes. The Vice-Minister of the Army discussing "the affair to repatriate the remains of the dead engaged in the Battle of Guadalcanal", said that:

*The ashes would not always be sent back due to the particularity of the operation. The dead soul, however, would certainly come back home. We repatriate the spirit to the base and deliver it to the bereaved. Therefore, it is necessary for them not to think the ashes are in the funeral urns but to understand that it is the spirits that are contained there.*<sup>5</sup>

It seems unlikely that all bereaved families were persuaded by such rhetoric, as a number of them (as well as surviving comrades) visited former battle sites and recovered remains following the war.

### The development of battlefield tourism in post-war Japan

Just before Japan recovered its sovereignty in 1952, the government began preliminary research on the possibility to recover the remains on Okinawa and Iwo Jima Islands sanctioned by the United States. This action was strongly backed by the citizens' movement instigated as a consequence of an airplane crash. The airplane, en route to Hawaii in 1950, made an emergency landing on Wake Island. Its passengers, including a popular Japanese singer, Kasagi Shizuko, and a famous composer, Hattori Ryoichi, happened to see the remains of many Japanese soldiers on the island. Kasagi wrote an article in a magazine to inform the Japanese people about this situation.<sup>6</sup>

As a consequence of the publicity, the government carried out a three-stage plan between 1953 and 1975 to recover the remains from former battlefields. By 1964, overseas travel became popular, and one out of 1,000 Japanese citizens took trips abroad at this time. This phenomenon was enabled by the economic growth in Japan and the regional development in the locations of the former battlefields. In addition, the Japan Confederation of Promoting Recovery of Remains Organizations was established in 1972. This body liaised with individuals and groups representing bereaved families, deceased soldiers' comrades, and youth volunteers whose private activity of recovery was now eligible to receive government subsidies.

Since 1976, however, the main target of the government project has shifted to the support of pilgrimages for memorial services held by the Japan War-Bereaved Association at former battle sites.<sup>7</sup> In addition, there are many other tours hosted by associations of surviving comrades or religious groups. Recently, there has been an increase in individual pilgrimages by the retired children of fallen soldiers. Although it is quite difficult to grasp the overall trend of the pilgrimage phenomena, it is apparent that recovering remains is not always the pilgrim's main purpose. It might be also important for them to travel to the very place where the soldiers met their fate and to hold some personal ritual by themselves.

## Pilgrim case studies

Seinosuke Kobayashi was born in 1940. His father died in 1944 in Tuluvu, the most western side of New Britain Island. After retiring from the local government office in 2001, Kobayashi decided to go to Tuluvu for his father's commemoration, taking part in the memorial tour of Eastern New Guinea in 2005. Following this experience, he compiled the postcards which his father sent to him and his family from the battlefields and published them in 2007 in a book titled *Letters from Tuluvu*.<sup>8,9,10,11</sup> Kobayashi overlapped what he saw there with the memory of his father's drawings which confirmed the latter's existence and presence in Tuluvu.

Figure 1. Front cover of Kobayashi's book, *Letters from Tuluvu* (top left).

Figure 2. Drawing on the postcard from Kobayashi's father in Tuluvu (right).

Figure 3. Dancers Kobayashi saw on the memorial tour of Eastern New Guinea (bottom left).



The bereaved children participating in the tour held memorial rituals for their fathers at the very places they died, or nearby if the locations were difficult to reach. They placed their fathers' pictures on the altar and in front of them dedicated flowers, fruit, snacks, or something of their favourites such as liquor and cigarettes. Kobayashi read his message as if he was directly appealing to his father. There are many cases where bereaved children say the words, “Otoh-san”

“My Dad”), for the first time in such memorial rituals. At the end of the ritual, they offered flowers to the sea and Kobayashi buried in the sand on the shoreline a piece of paper on which his father’s Buddhist holy name was written. After publishing his book, he related that he began voluntary work in some elementary schools to pass on the stories about the war in which both he and his father were involved.

Another case is that of Hajime Shigematsu, born in 1923. He said to me, “I was originally born in Ethiopia and I am also good at French. I used to be a footman of His Majesty Haile Selassie.”<sup>12</sup>

This story is not true, but an example of how he injected some lightness into the serious narrative of his war experience. Shigematsu was dispatched to Myanmar as a foot soldier during World War II. He barely managed to survive while most of his comrades died there. In the last two decades he has visited Myanmar every year. Just after his first visits he began to study carving under a professional sculptor of Buddha statues. He has already dedicated 15 self-made Burmese sandalwood Buddha statues to the temples in the former bloodiest battlefields from the sub-Himalayan Hukawng Valley in the north to Sittang River near the Malay Peninsula in the south.<sup>13,14</sup>

These statues are made and dedicated to the temples by Shigematsu as a memorial to his fallen comrades in the manner of Mahayana Buddhism, which is practised in East Asia, including Japan. The recipient temples, however, are of Theravada Buddhism and the people in Myanmar regard his dedication, in the context of Theravada teachings, not as a memorial but as respect for Buddha and as proof of his goodwill. Shigematsu maintains a friendship with the local people in Myanmar whenever he visits the sites, presenting them with school supplies and electronic appliances.

Figure 4. Shigematsu carving a statue.



Figure 5. Shigematsu’s Buddha statues.



Although making Buddha statues seems to be very rare, there are other cases. For example, in a narrative record of the National Museum for Japanese History, a former soldier from Hokkaido went to Waleai Atoll in Yap to recover remains in 1979 and he cut a red sandalwood tree for making a Buddha statue. There he asked a sculptor to make it and dedicated it to a temple in Hokkaido.<sup>15</sup> The

narrative record also reveals cases of some veteran groups building schools for the local children or providing other means of support.

### The performative aspect of memory

This article has addressed some memorial acts associated with battlefield pilgrimage and now I would like to reconsider the hypothesis of “the departed spirit as a device of memory” with reference to the early framework of John Austin’s Speech Act Theory.<sup>16</sup> Austin introduced two kinds of utterances: a “constative utterance” and a “performative utterance”. The first only describes some situations, like “he died in the war”. On the other hand, the second contains acts in themselves (oaths, promises, or orders) such as “I pledge a sincere search for peace”.

In Komatsu’s argument, “Spirits as the device of memory” seems to have only the constative aspect of memory. He underscored that the spirit is the preservation of the memory of the dead; the memory here is only past-oriented. However, I propose that it also has a performative aspect to it. As we have seen, the battlefield pilgrims not only remember the memory of the dead but also perform other kinds of actions. Kobayashi and other bereaved children held the commemorative rituals on the former battlefield while Shigematsu carved Buddha statues with sandalwood found nearby and dedicated them to local temples. These acts seem to be “materialising” the memory with religious customs as well as “preserving” the memory. Such performative memory is also expressed in a second action, such as voluntary works in the cases of Kobayashi and Shigematsu.

Performative memory is therefore active memorising which is held as performance itself.<sup>17</sup> Memory does not relate only to the past, nor is it static. Rather, it is a dynamic phenomenon relating to present and future.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Fujii, Tadatoshi, *Hei-tachi no Sensoh (Wars for Soldiers)*, (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbun-sha, 2000), 208. See also Yokoyama, Atsuo, “Rikugun-bochi to Ippan-bochi nai no Gunjin-bo (Tombs of Soldiers in the Army Graveyards and General Ones),” in *Tama no Ayumi (The History of Tama)*, (Tokyo: Tamashin Chi’iki Bunka-zaidan, 2005), 63-69.

<sup>2</sup>Komatsu, Kazuhiko, “Tamashii toiu Na no Kioku Souchi (The Memory Device Named Spirit),” in *Kami naki Jidai no Minzokugaku (Folklore in the Era without Deities)*, (Tokyo: Serika Shobo, 2002), 110-14.

<sup>3</sup>Shirai, Shijo, *Gatoh ni Shisu Made (Until the Last Breath on Guadalcanal Island)*, (Tokyo: Kindai Bungei-sha, 1996).

<sup>4</sup>Namihira, Emiko, *Nihonjin no Shi no Katachi: Dentou Girei Kara Yasukuni Made (The Japanese Forms of Death: Between Traditional Rituals and Yasukuni Shrine)*, (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbun-sha, 2004).

- <sup>5</sup>Yokoyama, “Rikugun-bochi to Ippan-bochi nai no Gunjin-bo (Tombs of Soldiers in the Army Graveyards and General Ones),” 62.
- <sup>6</sup>Koseisho (Japanese Ministry of Health & Welfare) ed., *Hikiage-Engo no Kiroku, Zoku (Records of Reverse Migration Relief, Sequel)*, (Tokyo: Kuresu Shuppan, 2000). See also Nishimura, Akira, “Ikotsu eno Omoi, Senchi eno Omoi: Senshi-sha to Seizon-sha no Sengo (Feelings for Remains, Feelings for Battle Sites: Postwar Era for Fallen Soldiers and Survivors),” in *Kokuritsu Rekishi Minzoku Hakubutsukan Kenkyu Hokoku (Bulletin of National History of Japanese History)*, (Chiba: Kokuritsu Rekishi Minzoku Hakubutsu-kan, 2008), 147.
- <sup>7</sup>Koseisho Shakai-Engo-kyoku Engo Gojishshunen-shi Henshu-i'in-kai (Editorial Committee of Fifty Years' History of Relief in Social Relief Office, Japanese Ministry of Health & Welfare), *Engo Gojishshunen-shi (Fifty Years' History of Relief)*, (Tokyo: Gyosei, 1997).
- <sup>8</sup>Kobayashi, Seinosuke, *Tuluva Kara no Tegami (Letters from Tuluva)*, (Yamaguchi: Shin-Nihon Kyoiku Tosho, 2007).
- <sup>9</sup>Kobayashi, *Tuluva Kara no Tegami*, front cover.
- <sup>10</sup>Kobayashi, *Tuluva Kara no Tegami*, 23.
- <sup>11</sup>Captured from the movie that Kobayashi tracked by video camera (2005).
- <sup>12</sup>Fukuoka-shi-shi Henshu-i'in-kai (Editorial Committee of Fukuoka Municipal Historiography), *Fuku no Tami (People of Happiness)*, (Fukuoka: Fukuoka-shi, 2010), 133.
- <sup>13</sup>Fukuoka-shi-shi Henshu-i'in-kai ed., *Fuku no Tami*, 133.
- <sup>14</sup>Fukuoka-shi-shi Henshu-i'in-kai ed., *Fuku no Tami*, 133.
- <sup>15</sup>Kokuritsu Rekishi Minzoku Hakubutsu-kan (National Museum of Japanese History), *Senso-Taiken no Kiroku to Katari ni kansuru Siryo Shusei (Collaborative Research of Personal Experiences of War, 1931-1945: A Survey of Japanese Written and Oral Records)*, (Chiba: Kokuritsu Rekishi Minzoku Hakubutsu-kan, 2004-2005), 1-4.
- <sup>16</sup>Austin, John L, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962).
- <sup>17</sup>In fact, performative memory also has another aspect that makes memorising people act as a historical subject toward future. I dealt with such an aspect of performative memory in another paper on the commemoration for the atomic bomb dead in Nagasaki. Nishimura, Akira, “La Performativité de la Mémoire: Quand le Future est Fondé sur la Mort de Victims (Traduit par Takizawa Meiko),” in eds. Anne Bouchy and Ikezawa Masaru, *La Mort Collective et le Politique: Constructions Mémoires et Ritualisations* (Tokyo: Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology, The University of Tokyo, 2011).

## Bibliography

- Austin, John L., *How to Do Things With Words* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962).
- Fujii, Tadatoshi, *Hei-tachi no Sensoh (Wars for Soldiers)*, (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbun-sha, 2000).
- Fukuoka-shi-shi Henshu-i'in-kai (Editorial Committee of Fukuoka Municipal Historiography), *Fuku no Tami (People of Happiness)*, Fukuoka: Fukuoka-shi, 2010).
- Kobayashi, Seinosuke, *Tuluv Kara no Tegami (Letters from Tuluva)*, (Yamaguchi: Shin-Nihon Kyoiku Tosho, 2007).
- Kokuritsu Rekishi Minzoku Hakubutsu-kan (National Museum of Japanese History), *Senso-Taiken no Kiroku to Katari ni kansuru Siryo Shusei (Collaborative Research of Personal Experiences of War, 1931-1945: A Survey of Japanese Written and Oral Records)*, (Chiba: Kokuritsu Rekishi Minzoku Hakubutsu-kan, 2004-2005), 1-4.
- Komatsu, Kazuhiko, "Tamashii toiu Na no Kioku Souchi (The Memory Device Named Spirit)," in *Kami naki Jidai no Minzokugaku (Folklore in the Era without Deities)*, (Tokyo: Serika Shobo, 2002), 110-14.
- Koseisho, Shakai-Engo-kyoku (Editorial Committee of Fifty Years' History of Relief in Social Relief Office, Japanese Ministry of Health & Welfare), *Engo Gojishshunenshi (Fifty Years' History of Relief)* (Tokyo: Gyosei, 1997).
- Koseisho, Shakai-Engo-kyoku (Japanese Ministry of Health & Welfare) ed., *Hikiage-Engo no Kiroku, Zoku (Records of Reverse Migration Relief, Sequel)*, (Tokyo: Kuresu Shuppan, 2000).
- Namihira, Emiko, *Nihonjin no Shi no Katachi: Dentou Girei Kara Yasukuni Made (The Japanese Forms of Death: Between Traditional Rituals and Yasukuni Shrine)*, (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbun-sha, 2004).
- Nishimura, Akira. "Ikotsu eno Omoi, Senchi eno Omoi: Senshi-sha to Seizon-sha no Sengo (Feelings for Remains, Feelings for Battle Sites: Postwar Era for Fallen Soldiers and Survivors)," in *Kokuritsu Rekishi Minzoku Hakubutsukan Kenkyu Hokoku (Bulletin of National History of Japanese History)*, (Chiba: Kokuritsu Rekishi Minzoku Hakubutsu-kan, 2008), 147.
- Nishimura, Akira, "La Performativité de la Mémoire: Quand le Future est Fondé sur la Mort de Victims" (Traduit par Takizawa Meiko), in eds. Anne Bouchy and Ikezawa Masaru, *La Mort Collective et le Politique: Constructions Mémoires et Ritualisations* (Tokyo: Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology, The University of Tokyo, 2011).

Shirai, Shijo, *Gatoh ni Shisu Made (Until the Last Breath on Guadalcanal Island)*, (Tokyo: Kindai Bungei-sha, 1996).

Yokoyama, Atsuo. “Rikugun-bochi to Ippan-bochi nai no Gunjin-bo (Tombs of Soldiers in the Army Graveyards and General Ones),” in *Tama no Ayumi (The History of Tama)* (Tokyo: Tamashin Chi’iki Bunka-zaidan, 2005).

### Biographical note

Akira Nishimura (PhD) is Associate Professor of Religious Cultures, Department of Humanities, Kagoshima University, Japan. He is author of *Sengo Nihon to Senso Shisha Irei: Shizume to Furui no Dainamizumu (Postwar Japan and IREI Commemorations for War Dead: Dynamism of Calming and Inspiring)*, (Tokyo: Yushisha, 2006). This book gained the 3rd Award of International Institute for the Study of Religions, International Institute for the Study of Religions. He has also published papers in English: “Symbiosis or Segregation?: Dealing with the ‘Foreign’ in Nagasaki,” in eds. Alexander Henn and Klaus-Peter Köpping, *Rituals in an Unstable World: Embodiment-Hybridity-Identity* (Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Bern, Bruxelles, New York, Oxford, Wien: Peter Lang, 2008); and “Relating to the Unknown Dead Through Ritual: On Publicness in Japanese Folk Religion,” *Forum Bosnae* (Sarajevo: Bosnia Forum, 2007), 39.

Email: [aquillax@leh.kagoshima-u.ac.jp](mailto:aquillax@leh.kagoshima-u.ac.jp)

---

# Pupuri Pohewa: Collective Memory

Ross Hemera



---

## Pupuri Pohewa: Collective Memory

Ross Hemera

---

### Abstract

*Pupuri Pohewa* was used as the Māori name for the *Contained Memory Conference* held at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington, in December 2010. Because this international conference was hosted in Aotearoa New Zealand, the title would provide a cultural perspective on memory based on the traditions of the indigenous people of this country. In the spirit of New Zealand's aspiration to recognise its indigenous culture as an expression of its interface with the world, the use of Māori concepts was a key component of the conference. A translation of the term "pupuri pohewa" means to hold on to the ability to imagine, to create, and to dream through the medium of collective memory. This article introduces the notion that deep-rooted cultural concepts affect the way memory is understood and explained. Such concepts refer to past generations as a means of genealogical belonging and connectedness. The cultural imperative in such a view is echoed in the well-known Māori proverb, "taonga tuku iho" (gifts handed down). An expanded meaning of this proverb expresses the idea about holding onto the knowledge handed down to us by our ancestors and passing it on to the generations to come. Māori recognise the implication as being a matter of survival. Hence the essence of "taonga tuku iho" is a central part of the creative practice of many of today's Māori artists. In this article I will talk about my own artistic practice as one that responds to taonga, the drawings left on rock surfaces by my ancestors, the Waitaha people. I will discuss how, as Ngāi Tahu, my artistic practice relates to these taonga and draws on an inherent cultural context, which provides a genealogical link to ancient drawings and (as such) a connection also to the knowledge surrounding them.<sup>13</sup> Specifically, I will introduce the notion that through the recognition of this connectedness comes a certain responsibility. For the artist tied into this continuum, the obligations are to retain and treasure the ability to imagine, to create, and to dream.

Keywords: Aotearoa, collective memory, Māori, connectedness, ancestors, generations, taonga

Figure 1. This reef off the Otago coast (South Island, New Zealand) is the remains of Araiteuru, ancestral waka of Ngāi Tahu.



*Ka tangi te tītī*

*Ka tangi te kākā*

*Ka tangi hoki ahau*

*Tihei Mauri Ora!*

*Ko Araiteuru te waka*

*Ko Aoraki te maunga*

*Ko Waitaki te awa*

*Ko Ngāi Tahu te iwi*

*Ko Ngāti Māmoe, Waitaha te hapū*

*Ko Motoitoi te tipuna*

*Ngā mihi nui ki a koutou*

*Kia ora mai tātou*

*Nō reira*

*Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou,*

*tēnā koutou katoa*

The muttonbird cried

The parrot cries

And I cry too

Behold there is life!

Araiteuru is the canoe (Figure 1)<sup>21</sup>

Aoraki is the mountain (Figure 2)<sup>32</sup>

Waitaki is the river

Ngāi Tahu is my tribe<sup>43</sup>

Ngāti Māmoe and Waitaha are the ancient tribes<sup>54</sup>

Motoitoi is my ancestor

Warm greeting to you all

Greetings to us all

Therefore

Greetings to you all

The mihi above is my greeting and introduces me in te reo (Māori language). The mihi is at the heart of a Māori world-view and, as such, is central to this article. In the mihi I have explained who I am, who I descend from, where I come from, my river, my mountain, and how I am connected to the world. This is, therefore, the inherent cultural context from which my creative practice originates.

Fundamental for Māori are the threads that tie the world and the individual

together as a whole. It is through a process of personifying the land and its features that Māori perceive the world and connect themselves genealogically to it. For example, Ngāi Tahu (the principal Māori tribe of the South Island of New Zealand) explain the unique boulder formations at Moeraki as the cargo of their ancestral canoe. (Figure 3) The mihi is an overt expression of this containing two intertwined threads, the two essential relationships: tīpuna (ancestral connections) and iwi (tribal connections). These closely linked ancestral and tribal connections are collective and Māori refer to them as whakapapa. It is through such affiliations that the notion of pupuri pohewa (collective memory) has such resonance and application.

Figure 2. Aoraki is one the principal ancestors of Ngāi Tahu connecting land and people.



Figure 3. Ngāi Tahu whakapapa explain these Moeraki Boulders (large spherical rock forms, which are a unique geological phenomenon near Moeraki on the Otago coast) as the cargo of the Araiteuru.



Essential to the collective is knowledge about the collective, and this includes the protocols associated with its retention. To begin to recite whakapapa in your mihi is to begin to build your knowledge and your ability to undertake customary iwi practices. One begins to understand one's place within the whole. The ritual of mihi is a cultural device, which assists the retention of knowledge; in essence it is an aid to memory. Equally, both visual and material objects also assist in the retention and expression of knowledge. For example, Māori art forms are devices used for this purpose and I will return to this point presently.

One of the key ways that Māori culture recognises the importance of knowledge (and knowledge systems) is by assigning high value to such things, and this is observed through the notion of taonga. It is through this concept that knowledge is manifest and, as such, it is central to my own creative practice.

Dictionary definitions of taonga seem inadequate. Yes, taonga is a treasure and something prized. However, in the context of whakapapa, it is much more. My understanding of it has slowly evolved over the years and is still expanding. Let me explain how I think about taonga in relation to my work.

I first visited the Takiroa rock shelter (Figure 4), which contains ancient Waitaha drawings, when I was seven years old. Even though I had no idea that a term like taonga existed, I did, however, recognise that there was something particular about this site and its drawings. Recognition that the drawings were very special probably had something to do with how very old we perceived the drawings to be. As children, I remember my dad telling my brother and I that, “These were the drawings that the old Māori made.” Yet at such a young age we sensed their importance. For someone, a very long time ago, to make these mystical drawings out in the open, on a rock wall, seemed somehow very important and this was enhanced by the fantastic imagery depicted in them

Figure 4. Takiroa rock art shelter (an inland locality in the central region of the South Island of the New Zealand known for its Māori rock art) and ancient taonga.



There were things in these drawings that echoed with our own young imaginings. There were all sorts of people and creatures doing all sorts of things. These drawings were awesome. While coincidental, it is significant that right from preschool age my brother and I had a really deep passion and excitement for drawing. As children we were always drawing, and looking back now I recognise just how liberating it was to us. We could create anything we liked; we imagined and created the world we lived in through drawing.

It is not unexpected, therefore, that we developed a kind of empathy through a perceived sharing of creative imaginings and delight in drawing. We sat for hours in the shelters and copied the imagery in the drawings. We began to feel closely connected to them, and I think this was how I recognised their importance and special meaning. I thought of them as perhaps the greatest treasures in the universe.

I certainly appreciate that this is where much of my continued desire and aspiration to understand them stems from. They hold vast knowledge and information about the world of our tipuna. While most of this knowledge is clouded away in a haze of history, it continues to inspire. These rock shelters, together with the ancient drawings, are taonga. These drawings are the containers of the creative imaginings of our ancestors, although much of their original meaning has been lost over time.

Iwi traditions include taonga as part of an ongoing cultural process reaffirming collective continuity; the drawings maintain their value for generation after generation.

Taonga tuku iho translates as the gifts handed down to us by our ancestors. Ngāi Tahu Cultural Advisor, Moana Tipa, talks about taonga tuku iho as something underpinned by wairua or spirituality; something experienced and felt.

Let us return to the idea of art forms functioning as cultural memory devices where memory is about connecting with the ancestors. When visiting rock art sites and examining the ancient rock drawings I have come to experience and feel the wairua (the spirit or presence of the ancestors) in them. The desire to seek after the knowledge and connect with the ancestors is both inspirational and obligatory. I think somewhere in this apparent duality is the wairua that Moana Tipa speaks about.<sup>65</sup>

As a Ngāi Tahu artist the challenge for me is to find ways to recognise the mātauranga (knowledge) inherent in the drawings. Further, the challenge is to continue to recreate new imaginings and interpretations about the mātauranga given to us by our tipuna, while retaining the integrity of the taonga it comes from, and ensuring they continue their position as markers of collective definition.

Inspiration comes from the drawings of the tipuna. My obligation is in recognising that they are my tipuna, and that they are the physical manifestation of the collective identity of which I am a part.

Despite being inspired by the rock drawings from a very early age, it has been relatively recently that the associated obligations have become fully apparent. For instance, taking on the responsibility for looking after the knowledge and

mātauranga linked with them is today a primary consideration for me. While this involves particular sensitivities and understanding about preserving the art form, it is also incumbent on the artist to develop new interpretations. The manu, tiki, and kuri are such innovations (Figure 5). The responsibility of interpretation is a major consideration associated with the inspiration and obligations of the process of creating new art works. The following provides an insight into this process with reference to examples of my creative work.

Figure 5. Manu (bird), tiki (human like), and kuri (dog) motifs inspired by ancient rock art imagery.



One of the themes in my 2008 *Manu Atua* solo exhibition (Figure 6) at the Kura Gallery in Wellington, New Zealand, was an investigation into the body blank area of rock drawing design. An example is the central negative space found in tiki or human figures. The first part of the responsibility of interpretation is recognising the visual occurrence of the body blank and its possible cultural implications. Speculation about the meaning of this space covers a range of possibilities, including the Ngāi Tahu explanation about it being a residing place for spirits.

Figure 6. Three works from the *Manu Atua* exhibition.



This explanation describes the pervasive spiritual nature of all things in the Māori world; both the physical and mental are imbued with the wairua (spiritual essence) of the atua or gods. In addition, this space can be compared to similar visual spaces found in other Māori art forms. For example, negative space in kōwhaiwhai (rafter painting) is explained as a space occupied by manawa or genealogical bloodlines.

Most negative spaces are devoid of any imagery. However, breaking from convention, there are a few examples where spaces do contain some imagery. As a Ngāi Tahu artist I am inspired by these variances and excited by their occurrences. The second responsibility is in recognising that such irregularities provide inherent lessons about exploration, risk-taking, and discovery, together with applying them

in our own time and place. Representing the body blank symbolically into a wātea (an open and available space) has been an area of development. By doing this a place has been created for the wairua of the memory of people special to us to reside. A space has been created in the *Manu Atua* works for my late brother (Figure 7), with whom I shared many childhood experiences drawing in the rock shelters.

Figure 7. Manu Atua exhibition detail.

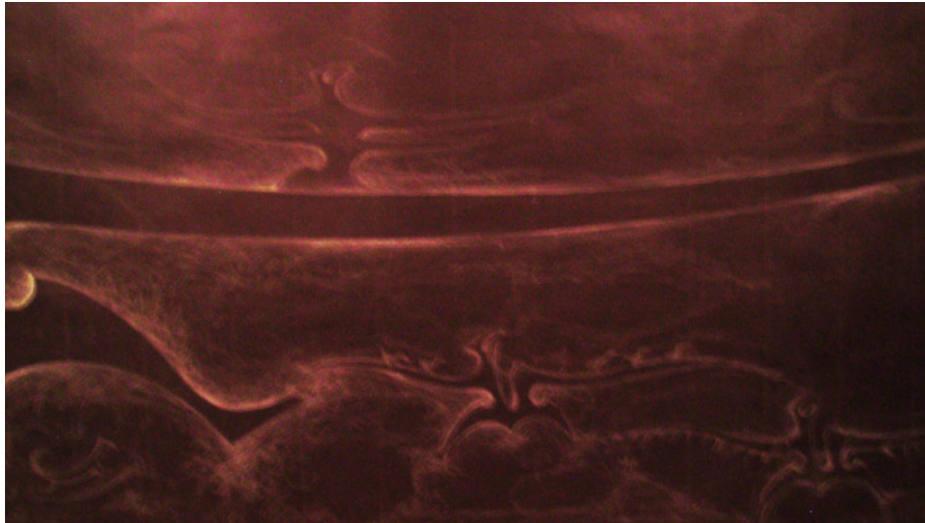


*Paemanu* featured in the innovation segment of the *Mō Tātou, Ngāi Tahu Whānui* exhibition at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa in 2009.<sup>76</sup> In a similar way, the responsibility of interpretation in this work recognises that a particularly rare image can be used as a starting point for creative imagining. While the birdman image is relatively common in Māori rock drawing, the depiction of a bird figure with, what Ngāi Tahu refer to as babies perched on its outstretched wings is unique. My investigation of the possible cultural meaning has uncovered some fascinating interpretations for me. A literal description suggests something about a place for birds to perch. The translation for a bird perch is *paemanu*, meaning literally a perch for a bird. While this might normally be a satisfactory explanation, the term *paemanu* also has other meanings such as the collarbone or clavicle (Waitaha narratives talk about the collarbone and the perch as transposable). Yet another meaning of *paemanu* is the thwart in a canoe. As a Ngāi Tahu artist, the responsibilities are to sift through this terminology for a range of possible ideas and to interpret them as creative works celebrating social organisation in Ngāi Tahu society.

Simultaneously, while examining such a unique image, there is another quite different responsibility to consider involving the inherited genealogical responsibilities of *iwi* expectations, and an understanding of one's place in the world, according to *whakapapa*.

The paemanu interpretation (Figure 8) is therefore a creative, imagined result that combines all three meanings together. Iwi imperatives are reaffirmed by emphasising imagery that depicts position and place within the larger group. The work celebrates cultural objects and images that define and describe the importance of the individual as part of the collective. The designated position of each and every warrior in a war canoe is testament to this.

Figure 8. Paemanu, drawing detail.



Recently, I was invited to work with Ngāi Tahu Holdings Group, Ngāi Tahu Properties, and Ngāi Tahu whānui on two significant iwi projects, including the installation of culturally specific art works as part of civic building developments.<sup>87</sup> These projects highlight the role of the artist as kaitiaki (guardian) of Ngāi Tahu visual culture. Primarily the role is one centred on iwi aspirations, expectations, and requirements. For example, the *Pouwhenua* project seeks to physically portray Ngāi Tahu as mana whenua (people and guardians of the land).<sup>98</sup> I was invited because my whakapapa links to the region are regarded as very important by Ngāi Tahu iwi.

The works developed for the Queenstown Post Office Precinct project were created to affirm whakapapa links to the area as a means of asserting iwi identity. This tribal aspiration guided the creative process. The theme for this project was to celebrate the extraordinary accomplishments of local tipuna, Hakitekura. Her selection was based on her interconnectedness with the land; many prominent landmarks in the Queenstown and Lake Wakatipu area bear Hakitekura's name and reference her exploits.

The *Kauati Globes* (Figure 9) comprised one of the works that make up the Queenstown project. They contain sculpted faceplates mounted on seven bowl-shaped bases. The bases have a dual meaning as a metaphor for both Lake Wakatipu as a container of the water that challenged the women of the area, including Hakitekura, and the bundle of firewood that she carried on her epic swim across the lake. The radiating nature of the faceplate is a reference to the



lighting of Hakitekura’s fire as a result of her significant achievement. They also make reference to her adventures, including the rhythms of her swimming motion across the lake and Ka-Kamu-a-hakitekura, the glinting of the sun on the nearby mountains (Cecil and Walter peaks).

Figure 9. Kauati Globes.



The second *Pouwhenua* project included another of my artworks, the *Tuhituhi Whenua* mural (Figure 10), and was completed in August 2010. The title refers to the mural as a symbol of Ngāi Tahu’s visual identity drawn into the land in the manner of the ancient rock drawings. Again, working with Ngāi Tahu whānui, the mural was created for “Te Hononga”, the new civic buildings in Christchurch, and is a joint venture between Ngāi Tahu and the Christchurch City Council. Ngāi Tahu elders requested that the mural incorporate the iwi’s cultural traditions, as well as reflect the partnership established through the joint venture. The elders requested that the mural be inspired by the words of Ngāi Tahu tipuna, Mātiaha Tiramorehu, in his petition to Queen Victoria in 1857. His words conveyed Ngāi Tahu’s understanding about their relationship with the Crown in such a manner that the spirit of his sentiments still resonates today as Ngāi Tahu continue to forge partnerships with national and local authorities.

Figure 10. Tuhituhi Whenua.



Tiramorehu’s words convey the collective aspirations of Ngāi Tahu iwi. My responsibility as an iwi artist is, therefore, to embrace and express these aspirations while developing a creative interpretation. The key components of my role are about upholding the fundamental values underpinning collective thinking, primarily tapu and mana (respect and trust).<sup>109</sup> As much as the words of Mātiaha Tiramorehu are valued for their particular poignancy, the deeper knowledge is contained in the mātauranga (wisdom) associated with them. While commitment to the memory of these words reflects collective values, they also express innovative thinking. They capture the collective consciousness of today’s iwi because, while founded in tradition, they continue to express aspirations about the future.

The artistic approach in the mural was to incorporate specified imagery, such as sailing ships and the Tiramorehu text, together with an array of imagery representative of the visual and material culture of both Ngāi Tahu occupation and European settlement in the Christchurch area. Visual coherence was achieved through reference to and innovative interpretations of the ancient imagery of the Waitaha and Ngāti Mamoe. Tiramorehu’s words are taonga that have been handed down, and they contain a wealth of knowledge and mātauranga, least of which is to do with appreciating the ability to imagine and to dream. Pupuri pohewa: hold on to the ability to imagine, to create, and to dream through the continuum of collective memory.

*Nō reira*

*Kia ora mai ano*

*Tēnā koutou katoa*

And so

Once again greetings

Greetings to you all

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Araiteuru: a Ngāi Tahu ancestral canoe.

<sup>2</sup>Aoraki: the highest mountain peak in New Zealand, also known as Mount Cook.

<sup>3</sup>Ngāi Tahu: the principal Māori tribe of the South Island of New Zealand.

<sup>4</sup>Ngāti Mamoe and Waitaha: early Māori inhabitants of the South Island of New Zealand.

<sup>5</sup>Moana Tipa, “Akona ki ngā Rerekereke: Learning From the Knee,” in *Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu Presents Akona ki Ngā Rerekereke: Learning From the Knee* (Christchurch: Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu Publisher, 2006).

<sup>6</sup>Mō Tātou, Ngāi Tahu Whānui’: the name of an exhibition featuring Ngāi Tahu culture past, present, and future.

<sup>7</sup>Ngāi Tahu whānui: a term referring to the broad or extensive nature of Ngāi Tahu iwi as a large interconnected family.

<sup>8</sup>Pouwhenua: an identity marker.

<sup>9</sup>Tapu: sacred, restricted, prohibited.

## Bibliography

Hemera, Ross, *Manu Atua* (Wellington: Kura Gallery, 2008).

Mead, Hirini Moko, *Tikanga Maori Living by Maori Values* (Wellington: Huia, 2003).

Tau, Te Maire and Atholl Anderson, eds., *Ngāi Tahu A Migration History* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2008).

Tipa, Moana, *Akona ki Ngā Rekereke: Learning From the Knee* (Christchurch: Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu, 2006).

Stevenson, G.B., *Maori and Pakeha in North Otago* (Wellington: Reed, c.1947).

## Biographical note

Ross Hemera (Ngāi Tahu) is Associate Professor, School of Visual and Material Culture College of Creative Arts at Massey University. His creative interests include Māori visual expression, Māori material and visual cultural and Māori art and design practice. In recent times Ross's creative works have drawn their inspiration from ancient rock drawings, found in limestone caves and outcrops, created by his ancestors, the nomadic Waitaha people of the South Island of New Zealand. His work examines the inseparable relationship between the land and culture, recalling the words of an old Waitaha saying: "In the silence of the rocks the spirit of the old inhabitants is still alive." Ross has built an art practice that honours and reflects the cultural and artistic traditions of his iwi, whilst incorporating contemporary forms and materials. In this respect, his tribe has sought Ross's contribution and leadership regarding the development of Ngāi Tahu arts.

Email: J.R.Hemera@massey.ac.nz

---

# Memory as a Sense of Place: Migration and Narration in Whanganui, New Zealand

Suzanne MacAuley

---

## Memory as a Sense of Place: Migration and Narration in Whanganui, New Zealand

Suzanne MacAuley

---

### Abstract

*I came on what they call an LSD trip, which is Look, See, and Decide. That's what they call it! I was like her [his wife's] ... her satellite camera because I had to go back to South Africa and memorise everything that I had seen (Andrew Brown, interview with author, Whanganui, New Zealand, 15 March 2001).*

This article focuses on the process of remembering through the dynamics of narration. Material for analysis is based on my longitudinal study of an immigrant sector of global diasporic academic and medical professionals in Whanganui, New Zealand. In terms of a different and richer conceptual perspective, I treat these narratives as “artefacts”, as well as performance texts, which evoke meaning from the creative processes and aesthetic practices of the art of storytelling. As sensory artefacts (verbal, aural, emotional, kinaesthetic), these performed narratives are analogous to containers of memory such as tangible objects like photographs and journals in the interpretation of their layered meanings. The process of narrating memory in terms of multiple perspectives of place emerges as a crucial theme of this study. For example, Andrew Brown’s statement of creating memories for the future contrasts with the usual practice of recollection of the past. His reconnaissance visit to New Zealand from South Africa anticipates and gathers memories to share with his wife. He collects and stores mnemonic information in light of their future emigration, while still gauging present realities in both countries. Other narrative themes pertain to creating a temporal sense of place through memory-making by conjuring past and present meaning in light of forecasting the future.

Keywords: memory, migration, diaspora, personal narrative

*One of the things that dawned on me with emigrating to a new country, is the concept of dying in your adopted country. And ... um... [I'm] not comfortable with that. I would never have ... it would never occur to me in South Africa. I mean, that's the place where I was born. That's the place [where] I am going to die. And now ... now that I have relocated to a foreign country, I'm actually going to die here. I am going to be buried in a different ... different country. And that worries me ... To me it feels strange ... that I am going to die in a foreign country (Athol Steward, interview with author, Whanganui, New Zealand, 3 October 1997).<sup>1</sup>*

This is one of the more eloquently poignant passages to emerge from the early stages of my ethnographic study of an immigrant sector of global diasporic medical and academic professionals living and working in Whanganui, New Zealand, since the early 1990s.<sup>2</sup> The city's built environment of fading Victorian facades, neoclassical edifices, and moribund private clubs attests to an intermittent history of largesse and neglect. The most recent round of economic and aesthetic revitalisation, begun in the past two decades, coincides with the arrival of different waves of immigrant groups of doctors, lawyers, educators, psychologists, and dentists from other countries such as Canada, the United States, Great Britain, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Lebanon, Serbia, and Croatia. South African doctors are more prevalent in this group, both professionally and in terms of nationality. For the purposes of this discussion on how memory operates in the crafting and performance of personal narratives, excerpts from interviews with two South African doctors will be critically examined in light of narrated migration stories, cultural performance, and themes of memory and displacement.

In this article, I regard Whanganui, located as it is on one of the world's edges (the west coast of the New Zealand's North Island), as a microcosm to examine how all the linkages, or oppositions, transplants, and overlaps manifest when global dynamics converge with locale due to an influx of these cosmopolitan professionals. My larger ethnographic study delineates experiences of immigration as expressed, imagined, critiqued, and performed in personal experience narratives by a number of different expatriates. Consistent with many interviews, the extracts represented here also present an "actor-centred view" of the impact of globalisation on individuals within a particular community, revealed through their various perceptions and registered in their words and actions.

Many of these collected interview segments narratively operate from multiple perspectives of place vis-à-vis melding memories of the homeland while pondering future realities of life in a new location. With reference to the opening narrative excerpt, imagining death in a foreign country shifts the tenor of discussion away from merely describing a predicament to confronting reality of a different magnitude. By voicing the unfathomable, the narrator, Athol Steward, a South African doctor, taps into one of the salient themes of exile (dying away from home). At the same time, he experiences a heightened awareness of what the implications of global estrangement might mean for him personally.

On one level, Athol Steward acknowledges and identifies with an ancient, yet universal, dilemma for exiles and immigrants. On another level, he critiques

his reaction to it relative to his own life experience as it is being narrated in a particular moment in time. This section is expressed like a coda to the rest of his narration, where he spontaneously takes the opportunity to indulge in visionary memory creation while puzzling over feelings rather akin to nostalgia for an imagined past that will never occur. Finally, the doctor's thoughts yield to consternation and anguish over his dawning realisation of the real implications of his personal quandary and circumstances. To him, this truly amounts to a graphic break from the past and a severance from the legacy of his roots.

This interview passage is also a powerfully moving narrative event coloured by self-reflection and wonder, thus intensifying different sensory modes of performance. These involve an array of kinaesthetic body movements (e.g., rocking in place and swallowing), different hand gestures, glances, and facial expressions that accompany varying voice inflections and contribute to the mood of the narration and its reception by the listener. Inherent in this process is a somatic subtext that affects the relationship between researcher and participant and has a bearing on the subsequent interpretation as well. For the speaker and the listener, the aural aspects of interviews allow mutual access to sensate experience through the sounds made, the modulations, the shouts and whispers, the very tone of voice. In his work on sound and meaning, Steven Feld cites “the potential of *acoustic knowing* [my italics], of sonic presence and awareness as potent shaping forces in how people make sense of experiences”.<sup>3</sup>

By paying attention to bodily movement and feeling, or channelling other sensations that are aroused during the recitation of a particularly moving narrative passage, the interviewer tacitly collaborates with the narrator in coming to understand the corporeal basis of subjectivity, interaction, and narrative practice.<sup>4</sup> This understanding offers another way to know and gain access to a deeper, more immediate, level of “felt” experience and meaning. A subjective bodily engagement with one another in the interview context helps us to dissolve barriers of difference, as we try to sense the wellsprings of another's somatic knowledge, thereby approaching the source of shared embodied thoughts and memories.<sup>5</sup>

For analytical reasons, I interpret the interview fragments offered throughout this discussion as self-contained narrative events. In company with other oral narrative analysts (such as Charles Briggs, Richard Bauman, and Erving Goffman), I characterise narrative events as moments during an interview when stories become intensified in their delivery. This is not necessarily in a theatrical sense, or specifically limited to a dramatic rendering, but moments conducive to reflexivity and intersubjectivity that engage and bind us verbally (and non-verbally) and deftly turn us from interlocutors into corresponding actors and audience. The survey of performative elements in this folklore of entanglement evolves from an ongoing critique of verbal art as performance and performance analysis.<sup>6</sup> The scope of this body of work helps to apprehend the function and significance of moments of meta-communicative finesse, not only preceding or marking performative vignettes within personal experience narrations, but also embedded in these verbalised enactments.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, as a folklorist operating under the joint influence of art historical and material culture pursuits, I methodologically reconstruct and frame interviews as “performance texts” consonant with my investigations of performance in the context of art-making. This idea of performance embodies a double consciousness on the part of the artist or performer—a creative consciousness intertwined with an interpretive one interacting simultaneously. For example, when a memory is recollected from the past it is being artfully re-created, narrated, and performed at the very same time as being recalled in the present. In terms of narrative analysis, I regard these fragmentary, yet self-contained, narrative events shaped by verbal artifice and animated by somatic experience as “artefacts”. They evoke meaning from creative processes and aesthetic practices of the art of story-telling *in situ*.

Thus a speech artefact is crafted in the narrative moment as it is being narrated in order to contemplate and explore the story within the story. Although verbal artefacts can be distinguished apart from the ongoing narrative continuum as self-contained story units, they are often integral to it. As sensory artefacts (i.e., evocatively visual, verbal, aural, emotional, aesthetic, and so on), these narrative events are analogous to containers of memory such as physical, tangible objects like photographs and journals shaped by past, present, and future forces. Furthermore, the interpretive concept of narrative artefacts aligns with a behavioural approach to objects like photographs. In this way an analysis of the dynamics of creativity and imaginative interaction with objects also transfers to sensitively critiquing verbally expressive and improvisational communicative acts contextualised in storytelling sequences.<sup>8</sup>

If these intensified narrative events are singled-out as self-contained performative speech acts, with the capacity to function and have meaning apart from a continuous narrative line, then the application of a more inclusive sensory and cultural analysis could potentially yield a richer synthesis of the verbal, the sensual, and the aesthetic. The interpretation of narrative acts as artistic practice (e.g., style and mode of delivery) is complementary to the process of reconstructing the aesthetic orientation of performative elements and re-animating cultural behaviour in context. This interpretive methodology can be expanded to measure creative expressiveness, improvisatory performative qualities, and aestheticism. When Athol Steward began to narrate thoughts about his own death far away from his South African homeland, his whole body language dramatically changed to convey his anguish over the thoughts he was articulating. His style of narration altered to reflect the switch from the tone of a rather informal conversation to a mode of intensified emotional and physical behaviour. An aesthetically-oriented narrative analysis encompassing style, sensate experience, and embodiment of thoughts helps us approach the depths of human feeling and understand a bit about the process of voicing the almost inexpressible.

Just as performance is process, so is memory. Memory has the fluidity and adaptive potential to both recollect and anticipate. According to James Olney in his work on memory and narrative, “memory reaches toward the future as toward the past and balance demands a poised receptiveness in both directions”.<sup>9</sup> The



following narrative excerpt exemplifies a “doubled” duality or the bifocal vision of the narrator, Andrew Brown, another South African doctor, where his narration about creating memories for the future contrasts with the more commonly understood practice of recollection of the past.

Because of financial constraints, the demands of his wife’s job as a lawyer, and for different family reasons, he left Tanya Brown behind when he first visited “to come and explore” New Zealand: “I came on what they call an LSD trip, which is Look, See, and Decide. That’s what they call it. There’s the pun.” During his trip around New Zealand, he registered his impressions through a kind of “double-consciousness”, that is, an awareness of—or speculation about—Tanya’s possible reactions filtered through his own perceptions. Andrew likens his role to being his wife’s “satellite camera”, where the results of his immediate data-gathering and reconnaissance are metaphorically stored in his memory for later “broadcast” upon his return to South Africa.

*A. B. I was like her ... her satellite camera because ... I had to go back to South Africa and memorise everything that I’d seen.*

*T. B. And I had a list of questions, you know? Because we couldn’t both come ... (Andrew and Tanya Brown, interview with author, Whanganui, New Zealand, 15 March 2001).<sup>10</sup>*

Each step of the way Andrew had to imagine Tanya’s responses as well as log information as potential memories for subsequent recall—gathered as data with an eye to the selectivity of creating memory. For the process of committing to memory is just as elusively mobile as its recovery later. In his writing about everyday life, Michel de Certeau reminds us that memory is often catalysed by disappearance.<sup>11</sup> The poetic transference of sensation to recollection, however, can start earlier as a form of knowing. This concept of self-conscious “memory-in-the-making” and “memory recalled” in a different context is inspired by de Certeau’s thoughts on “remembering as an act of alteration because the invisible inscriptions that make up memory become visible under new circumstances”.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the task of memory-making in this instance is imaginatively fore-grounded in Andrew’s thoughts as he divides his attention between anticipating and gathering memories to share with his wife back home. As a witness, he collects mnemonic information in light of their future emigration, while still gauging present realities in both countries.

*T. B. But he had a lot of fact finding to do ....*

*A. B. Yeah.*

*T. B. ‘Cause he even went grocery shopping with friends to see.*

*A. B. Friends in Christchurch to see what the cost of living is.*

*T. B. What food costs, you know, everything, yeah ... yeah ....*

*A. B. You know, ‘cause it’s an expensive exercise moving countries. As I’m sure people have told you. And a stressful exercise and, you know, you have to ....*

*T. B. Hmmm ... be very careful.*

*A. B. Have certain things available, you know? And I had to go back to South Africa and tell my wife because we couldn’t afford to both come and look. So I had to*

*try to get a very good cross-section of the society here and what the cost of living is about and how people live here. And cost of rentals, vehicles, finances.*

*T. B. Schooling ....*

*A. B. ... schooling ... everything ....*

*T. B. ... the works.<sup>13</sup>*

Tanya and Andrew are equally engrossed in their narrated report of his trip, reinforced by his wife's interjections used to support and testify to the truth of her husband's statements. Throughout the narration she adjusts, or allies, her memories of what she heard from Andrew with his memories of how and why he acquired this information. Their performative style persuades us that in the end their reciprocal caution and practicality influenced their estimation of facts and circumstances, until they mutually and definitively reached the decision together to emigrate. Their prudent orientation and deliberation in fashioning this unified narrative sequence enhance feelings of solidarity and commitment, which are reflected in how they harmoniously co-fashioned their dialogue.

At the beginning of their interview, Andrew portrays himself as the memory-recorder and an anthropomorphic container of memory, a human camera, which captures information for Tanya vis-à-vis Paul Ricoeur's sense of seeing "oneself as another".<sup>14</sup> This also alludes to the compound sense of double-consciousness or "bifocal vision" incorporating both near and far, that is, the immediate experience of New Zealand balanced with knowledge acquired from a longer biographical life in South Africa.<sup>15</sup> Andrew's position operating as a human satellite camera becomes more complex since he is suspended in liminal space (i.e., neither here nor there), as well as positioned between temporalities (past, present, and future). He is storing memory data in the present while looking forward to a future time of relaying this information to Tanya, and in terms of temporal continuity, looking into the distant future (perhaps finally settling in New Zealand). Sense of place is also central to memory creation in his narration. In this instance, it is really a sense of two places—South Africa and New Zealand—conjoined in memory and experience, by means of which he conjures past and present meaning in light of forecasting an imaginary future.

Andrew Brown's image of himself as a camera recording, containing, and transmitting memories for present and future use relates to Northrop Frye's description of how metaphor works: "metaphor helps us understand one domain of experience in terms of another because logically two things can never be the same thing and still remain two things".<sup>16</sup> Andrew whimsically represents himself as an instrument performing in a mechanistic domain of exploration and action, while still sensitively operating within the exacting personal terrain of relationship and dual decision-making.

The span or scope of Andrew and Tanya's narrative accommodates these divergent metaphoric spheres of memory creation and recollection without compromising cohesion and meaning. The sensory aspects of their breathless co-narration, where sentences overlap and truncate as if each person is finishing the other's thoughts out loud, further emphasise the unity of their narration through

an intensified self-absorption in the telling of their story. This deepens their affinity as manifest in the verbal interchanges between them, thus dilating while amplifying their intertwined and imbricated speech patterns.

The “satellite camera” passage is only one narrative event in a series of episodes narrated by the Browns. It exemplifies, however, many of the characteristics associated with these “stand alone” performance texts and narrative artefacts—intensity of tone, aesthetics, and style of delivery. This leads to a form of knowing and making sense of experience, acoustical force (the volume and cadence of the voices), and emotional overtones expressed in the fast pace of articulating sound into words. For example, note the repetitive echoes, overlapping words, and climax to their story: “T. B. Schooling .... A. B. ... schooling ... everything ....T. B. ... the works.”

As containers of memory and sensation, narrative artefacts suggest another realm of understanding and interpretation where, according to Michael Jackson, “individual experiences are selectively refashioned in ways that make them real and recognisable in the eyes of others”.<sup>17</sup> Although memory is a recurrent theme in these particular South African narratives, it is the process of how memory creation is catalysed by narrators through reveries and body movement that weds sensate experience and the sense of experience together. Honouring the power of speech, and recognising that as words are formed memories are released and then shaped according to circumstance, allows us to better understand the workings of the mind in the moment.

When Andrew and Tanya’s dialogue is parsed into a string of verbal artefacts, rather than the common method of parsing to identify grammatical units, one begins to understand how conceptualisation, improvisatory behaviour, and action transform and merge into utterance. Narrative artefacts suggest that they are as multi-faceted as physical objects, and can also be turned over in our mind’s eye in order to glimpse the obverse sides of words as entrances to different meanings taken to new levels of comprehension. This is what is meant by the narrative artefact as not only a container of memory, but also a receptacle for the breadth of sensory experience realised through acts of narrating.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Athol Steward, interview with author, Whanganui, New Zealand, 3 October 1997.

<sup>2</sup>Suzanne MacAuley, “Diaspora by Degree: Narrative and Performance in Interviews of Expatriates from Wanganui, New Zealand,” *Journal of American Folklore* 117 (2004): 262-87.

<sup>3</sup>Steven Feld, “Waterfalls of Song: An Acoustemology of Place Resounding in Bosavi, Papua New Guinea,” in *Senses of Place*, eds. Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso (Santa Fe, New Mexico: School of American Research Press, 1996), 97.

<sup>4</sup>For a discussion on physically manifest interactions between interlocutors in interview sessions, see Larissa Buchholz, “Bringing the Body Back into Theory and

Methodology,” *Theory and Society* 35 (2006): 481.

<sup>5</sup>Refer to Deidre Sklar, “Reprise: On Dance Ethnography,” *Dance Research Journal* 32 (2000): 72.

<sup>6</sup>See Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974); Richard Bauman, *Verbal Art as Performance* (Prospect Heights, Ill: Waveland Press, 1984); Charles Briggs, “Metadiscursive Practices and Scholarly Authenticity in Folkloristics,” *Journal of American Folklore* 106 (1993): 387-34; Deborah A. Kapchan, “Performance,” *Journal of American Folklore* 108 (1995): 479-508; and Harris M. Berger and Giovanna P. Del Negro, “Bauman’s *Verbal Art* and the Social Organization of Attention: The Role of Reflexivity in the Aesthetics of Performance,” *Journal of American Folklore* 106 (2002): 62-91.

<sup>7</sup>Berger, Harris M. and Giovanna P. Del Negro, “Bauman’s *Verbal Art* and the Social Organization of Attention,” 79.

<sup>8</sup>Suzanne P. MacAuley, *Stitching Rites* (Tucson, Arizona: The University of Arizona Press, 2000), 62-63, 105-06, 133-34.

<sup>9</sup>James Olney, *Memory & Narrative: The Weave of Life-Writing* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 343.

<sup>10</sup>Tanya and Andrew Brown, interview with author, Whanganui, New Zealand, 15 March 2001.

<sup>11</sup>Michel de Certeau quoted in Ruth Behar, *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 81.

<sup>12</sup>Behar, *The Vulnerable Observer*, 81.

<sup>13</sup>Andrew Brown, interview with author, Whanganui, New Zealand, 15 March 2001.

<sup>14</sup>Alluded to in Michael Lambek, “The Cares of Alice Alder: Recuperating Kinship and History in Switzerland,” in *Ghosts of Memory: Essays on Remembrance and Relatedness*, ed. Janet Carsten (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 236.

<sup>15</sup>See Eva Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* (London: Vintage, 1998), 213.

<sup>16</sup>Referred to in Joanne B. Mulcahy, “The Weight of Faith: Generative Metaphors in the Stories of Eva Castellanos,” in *Living with Stories: Telling, Re-telling, and Remembering*, ed. William Schneider (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 2008), 112.

<sup>17</sup>Michael Jackson, *The Politics of Storytelling: Violence, Transgression, and Intersubjectivity* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2002, Reprint 2006), 11.

## Bibliography

Bauman, Richard, *Verbal Art as Performance* (Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press, 1984).

Behar, Ruth, *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996).

- Berger, Harris M. and Giovanna P. Del Negro, "Bauman's *Verbal Art* and the Social Organization of Attention: The Role of Reflexivity in the Aesthetics of Performance," *Journal of American Folklore* 106 (2002): 62-91.
- Briggs, Charles, "Metadiscursive Practices and Scholarly Authenticity in Folkloristics," *Journal of American Folklore* 106 (1993): 387-34.
- Buchholz, Larissa, "Bringing the Body Back into Theory and Methodology," *Theory and Society* 35 (2006): 481-90.
- Feld, Steven, "Waterfalls of Song: An Acoustemology of Place Resounding in Bosavi, Papua New Guinea," in *Senses of Place*, eds. Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso (Santa Fe, New Mexico: School of American Research Press, 1996), 91-136.
- Goffman, Erving, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).
- Hoffman, Eva, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* (London: Vintage, 1998).
- Jackson, Michael, *The Politics of Storytelling: Violence, Transgression, and Intersubjectivity* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2002, Reprint 2006).
- Kapchan, Deborah A., "Performance," *Journal of American Folklore* 108 (1995): 479-508.
- Lambek, Michael, "The Cares of Alice Alder: Recuperating Kinship and History in Switzerland," in *Ghosts of Memory: Essays on Remembrance and Relatedness*, ed. Janet Carsten (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 218-40.
- MacAuley, Suzanne P., *Stitching Rites: Colcha Embroidery Along the Northern Rio Grande* (Tucson, Arizona: The University of Arizona Press, 2000).
- MacAuley, Suzanne P., "Diaspora by Degree: Narrative and Performance in Interviews of Expatriates from Wanganui, New Zealand," *Journal of American Folklore* 117 (2004): 262-87.
- Mulcahy, Joanne B., "The Weight of Faith: Generative Metaphors in the Stories of Eva Castellanos," in *Living with Stories: Telling, Re-telling, and Remembering*, ed. William Schneider (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 2008), 99-116.
- Olney, James, *Memory & Narrative: The Weave of Life-Writing* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998).
- Sklar, Deborah, "Reprise: On Dance Ethnography," *Dance Research Journal* 32 (2000): 70-77.

### Biographical note

Suzanne MacAuley PhD is Associate Professor of Art History and Chair of the Department of Visual and Performing Arts at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs. From 1994 to 2003, she was Head of the Quay School of the Arts, Whanganui Polytechnic. She has written a book, *Stitching Rites*, about the cultural politics of craft revitalisation movements and published findings from her longitudinal study of a professional class of immigrants in Whanganui. Her research interests are performance theory and personal narrative, memory, diaspora, class, globalisation, and material culture studies, particularly Spanish Colonial textile revitalisations and Māori weaving traditions.

Email: [smacaulay@uccs.edu](mailto:smacaulay@uccs.edu)

---

## The Event Horizon: Returning “After the Fact”

Donna West Brett and Ann Shelton

---

## The Event Horizon: Returning “After the Fact”

Donna West Brett and Ann Shelton

---

### Abstract

“Trauma is a disorder of memory and time. This is why in his early writings Sigmund Freud used the metaphor of the camera to explain the unconscious as the place where bits of memory are stored until they are developed, like prints from black and white negatives, into consciously accessible recollections.”<sup>1</sup> The relationship between the photographic impulse to record events in the landscape and how those events are viewed in the “here now” unfolds across complex layers of meaning that engage with artistic, philosophical, and theoretical positions on photography in relation to memory, trauma, time, and history. What is the association between trauma and time, between the photographic image, the past and the present? This article examines how the photographic might relate to concepts of trauma, and how those subjects are expressed in relation to landscape from a contemporary position. Psychoanalysis advocates remembering (perhaps for the first time) an event as part of therapeutic process, and often one visits a site as an aid to memory, whether this is an individual or collective memory. Hence, this article will also explore the testimonial potential of the photographic image and reflect on how it can act as an indexical marker of past events.

Keywords: photography, landscape, “after the fact”, memory, trauma



The photographic and the psychoanalytic have been inextricably linked through their concurrent and intertwined histories. The well-known images of female patients at Salpêtrière show this relationship in stark relief.<sup>2</sup> Here photography was a witness to, and accomplice in, the construction of our understanding of pathology in relation to mental illness. As Georges Didi-Huberman notes, the concept that one should look at the surface of the body rather than vivisect it was popular in the nineteenth century as reflected in the then promoted science of phrenology.<sup>3</sup> At this time psychiatry, photography, art, and science collided; indeed psychiatric photography used the “art of the portrait” as an instrument of measure.<sup>4</sup>

Through the images made at Salpêtrière and other institutions, as one of the authors paraphrases in an artist text elsewhere, pictures of auras, bodies, vibrations, and emotions became a tool with which to attempt to extract scientific data from a surface: the two-dimensional surface of the photograph.<sup>5</sup> David Campany argues for the most part that “photography after an event” exhibits a kind of “numbness”; a depoliticised and ineffectual positioning of places and their histories, which results in an evacuation of context and meaningful dialogue.<sup>6</sup> Conversely, we would like to suggest that some key contemporary photographs taken “after the event” form a response to the inadequacies of representation rendered so obvious by images such as those from Salpêtrière.

The images of Sarah Schönfeld and Mark Adams have evacuated this pseudo-scientific impulse into seemingly empty vistas of place. However these photographs are of places where traumatic events, both cultural and social, are referenced in a particular way and with specific intentions. This photographic methodology can be understood as a crucial position in the development of representational strategies, an attempt to represent the potentially traumatic, the violent and the anxious, and to picture such difficult content within a transformed framework.

Psychoanalysis advocates remembering or retelling (perhaps for the first time) an event as a component of the therapeutic process. As part of that process of recovery, one may re-visit a site as an aid to memory, whether this is an individual or collective memory. In much the same way, the very act of photographing the landscape requires a kind of secondary pilgrimage to the site of an event for the practitioner, and the viewer makes a similar vicarious visit through their engagement with the resulting image.

Enacting and inviting just such a vicarious return are the photographs of Mark Adams. Taking as their subject the complex contact relations between Māori and Pākehā, his photographs depict this subject referencing the often devastating outcomes in stunning black and white, large format, sometimes scenic, images of people-less places. Appearing initially as images from the nineteenth-century pictorial tradition, and seemingly empty of political content, a closer reading prompts a recollection of New Zealand as saturated with the memory of colonisation, and its violence and loss.

His images can be read as textual documents in the symbolic sense because they argue for a country more cognisant of its complex past and for an in-depth understanding of these significant events and histories. Pākehā, current resident of Oxford, North Canterbury, and born in the region, Adams has always occupied a multi-faceted position himself—simultaneously outsider and insider to contemporary local Māori political and cultural life through his long-standing commitment to these issues.

Figure 1. Mark Adams. The heke to Te Ao Marama. Aoraki-Mount Cook, Hooker Valley, 1988. Courtesy the artist.



Six images in his book, *The Land of Memories* 1993, (one variation of which is illustrated here) mark a significant event in the history of Te Wai Pounamu (the South Island) which is largely forgotten by Pākehā but not by South Island Māori, NgaiTahu. The images retrace a journey of protest initiated by Temuka Māori from Arowhenua and Moeraki Māori to their traditional food gathering areas (or mahinga kai) and beyond to Aoraki.<sup>7</sup>

As Harry C. Evison explains in his book, *Te Wai Pounamu*, these mahinga kai (which included mountainous areas) were confiscated in what is known as the Kemp Purchase of 1848.<sup>8</sup> Evison goes on to detail a complex series of manipulative manoeuvres manifest as legal and linguistic deceits which were orchestrated through Kemp's Deed and its mistranslation. He explains further that these actions clearly contravened the rights of Māori as stated in the Treaty of Waitangi and by the New Zealand Supreme Court at the time.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, Evison outlines that these significant sites were sold to Pākehā landowners violating the promises made by Kemp himself during the original negotiation of the deed with South Island Māori chiefs.<sup>10</sup>

Evison reminds us that the outcome of these proceedings was that many Māori were impoverished, and dispossessed of their traditional food gathering areas and sacred sites.<sup>11</sup> Māori also witnessed the destruction of their food resources and

they no longer—according to colonial law—owned many of their spiritually and economically significant places.

Figure 2. Mark Adams. The heke to Te Ao Marama. Huruherumanu-Korotuaheka, site at Waitaki mouth, 1988. Courtesy the artist.



In protest, Māori from Arowhenua and Moeraki commenced a heke or migration in 1877 and were joined by many others along the way.<sup>12</sup> They initially travelled south to the Waitaki river mouth and then inland to what is now known as Omarama. Here, Buddy Mikaere tells us, is where they set up village life and stayed for nearly two years until they were eventually evicted by armed police.<sup>13</sup> Adams's series of seven images indicate points along their journey, and beyond, to the source of the Waitaki watershed. His photographs retrace this protest, while marking out the historical territory of Arowhenua Māori from the Waitaki River to Aoraki, the apex of which is depicted in the gateway at Arowhenua (as seen in Figure 3).

Figure 3. Mark Adams. The heke to Te Ao Marama. Ratana gateway, Arowhenua, 1988. Courtesy the artist.



While Adams is obviously not a nineteenth-century Māori, through his act of recording these sites he places himself in the position of Māori food gatherer,

traveller, and protester. His quiet images impart a tone one could imagine of the peaceful, but firm, protest of 1877. One might attempt to argue that these are empty images, dislocated from the context of protest and politics. However this would locate the photograph, as a "blank" document, according to John Roberts, freely floating without semiotic meaning.<sup>14</sup> Instead the void that is created here between historical events and the construction of these contemporary photographs can be seen to stand in for the complexities of what cannot be said, both through the medium of photography and what cannot be remembered or articulated by a dominant Pākehā culture at large. In "re-presenting" and "representing" these traumatic displacements, Adams asks a viewer to extend their understanding of this history and to consider its revaluation.

Jill Bennett states that "emotions are felt only as they are experienced in the present; as remembered events, they become representations".<sup>15</sup> Adams's use of the device of the return "after the fact" might be seen as a way to critique, to open up the potential of photographic testimony to layered complex meanings that are constantly in flux. His works allow reverence, contemplation, and study. However like the traumatic, his photographs also unfold over time, simultaneously placing viewers in the "there then" of the event and the "here now" of the viewing.

According to Roberts, photographs are subject to an eternal process of reinscription as they make a "continuous passage from dormancy in the archive to ... [their] 'eventual' reinscription outside of the archive".<sup>16</sup> He believes this process always brings the possibility of counter-production and the reinterpretation of events. These images take his discussion of photography further and locate the archival event and the reinscription of its meaning simultaneously in the single image.

The process of looking at photographs that reference traumatic events taken "after the fact" is analogous to the process of "post-memory", described by Marianne Hirsch as a response by the second generation to trauma experienced by the first.<sup>17</sup> A photograph of a site of trauma or event taken "after the fact" has within it an intrinsic belatedness and a deferral of experience, exacerbated by time elapsing between the original event and its photographic reception. Such photographs attempt to fold back time and to capture some essence or trace of the original event.

In a similar vein Sarah Schönfeld's series *Void* (2009) is a form of return and a folding back; a secondary witnessing to events experienced by her grandfather from 1944 to 1946 that unfold over eight immersive landscape photographs. The series records places that stand in for her grandfather's experiences during World War II. She acts as a secondary witness, searching for traces of an event that, although real, is experienced by the artist as a post-memory via her grandfather's testimony.

Figure 4. Sarah Schönfeld. Allee  
from the series Void, 2009.  
Courtesy the artist.



In 1944 at the age of 19, Schönfeld's grandfather was fighting for the German army in Holland. On 17 September he became caught up in the largest ever air and land attack undertaken by the allied forces with over 35,000 men landing in the Netherlands and Germany. Their mission was to capture key bridges and to enable a rapid advance of troops into Northern Germany, over the Rhein, and past Germany's defensive Siegfried Line. The battle lasted eight days, during which time the young soldier was immersed in the sights and sounds of death.

In the midst of the action, including a massive inferno in the Dutch forests, he was apprehended by local partisans from Oranje (in the rural province of Drenthe) while delivering a message by bicycle. He was then taken from Holland, via France, to Scotland where he was interned in a prisoner of war labour camp until 1946. The failed attempt of the allied military operation code-named Operation Market Garden has since become part of cultural history through the 1977 film *A Bridge Too Far* based on the writings of war correspondent, Cornelius Ryan.

Schönfeld's eight photographs, which relate to the eight days of conflict, retrace her grandfather's experiences following the route he took to Scotland through his "keeping stories", in what she refers to as "history constructions". She consciously interweaves the experiences conveyed by her grandfather, her own imagination of these accounts and experience of being in these places, into a visual meta-narrative that accommodates collective memory *and* the possibility of an individual's open dialogue with the photographs. This process reflects Maurice Halbwachs's contention that the two types of memory, the individual and the collective, interpenetrate one another.<sup>18</sup>

The photographs are a personal attempt to understand her grandfather's past, Germany's modern history, and her place within it. They stand in for the experiences of an entire generation during the war, and the ongoing effect it has had on European society and collective or trans-generational memory.<sup>19</sup>

Figure 5. Sarah Schönfeld.  
Lichtung from the series Void,  
2009. Courtesy the artist.



Using the aesthetic convention of nineteenth-century pictorial photography, Schönfeld takes us on an idyllic journey, beginning with a visual invitation into an avenue of trees in a dense forest to an unnerving photograph of a clearing covered in moss down (Figure 5.) The journey continues across streams and ditches that remind us of Benjamin's "scene of the crime" where idyllic locations mask what the artist, David D'Anger, refers to as "landscapes of tragedy".<sup>20</sup>

The claustrophobic and enclosing nature of each photograph, with its central abyss beckoning us in, intimates that something has happened here. The images place us at the edge of a scene where we perceive something may have just occurred, and yet we are kept at the edge of experience and understanding, enhanced by their dark framing which makes us conscious of our own looking. The central abyss in each image exposes the blind spot in Schönfeld's memory of the events that took place at these sites with the memories of her grandfather mediated by narrative, time, and history itself. This reveals the dilemma of secondary witnessing or post-memory.

She uses a photographic deception in creating the void to respond to the *Abwesenheit*, the nothingness or absence of traces in the landscape, and the lack of what she refers to as *Schrecken* or "fright". The series title itself references the void

or lacuna between narrative and experience, between memory and history, which Halbwachs notes is itself reconstructed after the fact.<sup>21</sup>

Figure 6. Sarah Schönfeld.  
Brahan Castle Camp from the  
series *Void*, 2009. Courtesy the  
artist.



In the only photograph that identifies a specific location, Brahan Castle Camp (Figure 6), we are brought into direct contact with the prisoner of war camp (No. 109) in Scotland where her grandfather was interned. In the centre of the image a concrete circular mound with a partial low wall remains: the remnants of the seventeenth-century castle demolished in 1953.

The ruin, like photography, is a residue of experience and history revealing loss and tragedy as a palimpsest of the past. In the ruin, Walter Benjamin declares: “history has physically merged into the setting. And in this guise history does not assume the form of the process of an eternal life so much as that of irresistible decay.”<sup>22</sup> Monuments and ruins in the process of decay, Benjamin argues, cause the events of history to shrivel up and to become absorbed into the site of the event.<sup>23</sup>

Schönfeld’s photographic approach responds to the idea of the camera recording a fixed reality and having an objective claim to any particular moment, and yet she is also aware that photography itself changes our ways of remembering *and* forgetting *and* our perceptions of the past. She recounts how she took photographs of places where she *remembered* that something had happened and where she found that: “There is nothing to see, nothing to hear, nothing to smell or experience, only the REAL place, where I can have my own experience of memory.”<sup>24</sup>

This “remembering”, in terms of a phenomenological post-memory, folds into Schönfeld’s own experience of place through the collective memory of such events garnered through cultural and media images. Her photographs attempt to negate the erasure of memory and subvert absence by indicating and pointing to the events through the testimonial act of her grandfather.

Trauma theory posits that events of trauma are never fully experienced by the individual and that an absence remains—a non-experience of the event that, as Jessica Lieberman notes, allows the event to endure as a site of perpetual reinterpretation.<sup>25</sup> For Ulrich Baer, the possibility of photography to capture unexperienced events raises the question of the parallel between photography and the structure of traumatic memory.<sup>26</sup> The difficulty, he argues, in viewing images of events of trauma is that the viewer is confronted with a moment “that had the potential to be experienced but perhaps was not”, an experience of a recorded moment that may not have registered in the subject’s own consciousness.<sup>27</sup>

If we consider a photograph to be unable to record the reality of an “event” in all its complexities and reflections, in its inability to record and tell the truth of an event or to represent the real, the photograph itself becomes a “trauma”. Also as Roland Barthes notes, every photograph is “a catastrophe of death”.<sup>28</sup> In her analysis of photography and trauma Lieberman considers that:

*Rather than looking at a photograph as the depiction of an irredeemable past or the promise of a redeemable future, we can look at it as analogous to a trauma, where what matters is not the inaccessible original event but the history of interpretations.*<sup>29</sup>

Photography “after the fact” presents a distance from the original event that (like traumatic memories) remains at the edge or the horizon of experience. The events of history cling to these photographs by Adams and Schönfeld of places that reference trauma taken “after the fact” as they explore the edge of memory, or what Benjamin referred to as “short shadows”. In these images, the shadows on the edge of midday are little more than the sharp black edges at the feet of things preparing to retreat silently unnoticed.<sup>30</sup>

Adams’s photographs of the sites of both Māori protest and confiscated land, and Schönfeld’s images of places of conflict and personal trauma, both point to and reference events that, although represented as absence, are present on the periphery of history and at the edge of our memory and experience.

Post-event or “after the fact” photography frames a central question of how places of trauma (or places of memory) change our mode of looking and constitute a new way of seeing. Photography “after the fact” steps outside of an accepted framework of recording place, because of the very nature of the site itself as a place of trauma and the context in which it is photographed. We understand that photography privileges the event rather than an unfolding of time as Baer has argued. However, we suggest that in folding back time to the original event the photograph itself becomes an event.



## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup>Ulrich Baer, *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma* (Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT, 2005), 9.
- <sup>2</sup>See Ulrich Baer, *Spectral Evidence, 25-60* and Georges Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria, Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière* (Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT, 2003).
- <sup>3</sup>Georges Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria*, 49.
- <sup>4</sup>Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria*, 4.
- <sup>5</sup>Ann Shelton, "Artist Text 2004," accessed December 7, 2010, <http://www.annshelton.com/texts/omfts.shtml>.
- <sup>6</sup>David Company, "Safety in Numbness," in *The Cinematic: Documents of Contemporary Art*, ed. David Company (London: Whitechapel and Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2007), 185-94 and 187. The concept of photography after the event is also discussed in depth in John Roberts, "Photography After the Photograph: Event, Archive and the Non-Symbolic," *Oxford Journal of Art* 32(2) (2009): 281-98.
- <sup>7</sup>We stress here that while these are sites of land confiscations, they are also those of waahi tapu. "These sites are waahi tapu or sites of cultural significance to Ngai Tahu, Kati Mamoe and Waitaha, the original peoples of the South Island," in email conversation with Megan Tamati-Quennell, December 2010.
- <sup>8</sup>Harry C. Everson, *Te Wai Ponamu, The Greenstone Island: A History of the Southern Maori During the European Colonization of New Zealand* (Wellington: Aoraki Press, 1993), 253-71.
- <sup>9</sup>Everson, *Te Wai Ponamu*, 266-68 and 286-87.
- <sup>10</sup>Everson, *Te Wai Ponamu*, 266-67.
- <sup>11</sup>Everson, *Te Wai Ponamu*, 284-85, 463-65.
- <sup>12</sup>"1. (verb) (-a) to descend, get off, dismount, disembark, migrate, move, subside, fall, drip, ebb (of the tide), flow," accessed December 7, 2010, <http://www.maoridictionary.co.nz/index.cfm?dictionaryKeywords=heke&search.x=35&search.y=9&search=search&n=1&idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=>
- <sup>13</sup>Buddy Mikaere, *Te Maiharoa and the Promised Land*, (Auckland: Heinemann, 1998), 116.
- <sup>14</sup>John Roberts, "Photography After the Photograph; Event, Archive and the Non-Symbolic," *Oxford Journal of Art* 32(2) (2009): 284.
- <sup>15</sup>Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma and Contemporary Art*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 23.
- <sup>16</sup>Roberts, "Photography After the Photograph," 295.
- <sup>17</sup>Marianne Hirsch, "Past Lives: Post-memories in Exile," *Poetics Today* 17(4) (1996): 659-86, accessed February 26, 2008, <http://www.jstor.org/pss/1773218>.
- <sup>18</sup>See Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 393.

- <sup>19</sup>Ricouer, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 394.
- <sup>20</sup>Known as Pierre-Jean David.
- <sup>21</sup>Ricouer, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 394.
- <sup>22</sup>Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London and New York: Verso, 1998), 177-78.
- <sup>23</sup> Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 179.
- <sup>24</sup>In written correspondence from the artist October 2010.
- <sup>25</sup>Jessica C. Lieberman, "Traumatic Images," in *Photographies* 1(1) (2008): 87, accessed June 23, 2008, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17540760701788283>.
- <sup>26</sup>Baer, *Spectral Evidence*, 8.
- <sup>27</sup>Baer, *Spectral Evidence*, 8.
- <sup>28</sup>Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 2000).
- <sup>29</sup>Lieberman, "Traumatic Images," 87-102.
- <sup>30</sup>Walter Benjamin, "Short Shadows (I)," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, eds. Howard Eiland et al, 2(1), 1927-1930 (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 272.

## Bibliography

- Baer, Ulrich Baer, *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT, 2005).
- Barthes, Roland, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 2000).
- Benjamin, Walter, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London and New York: Verso, 1998).
- Benjamin, Walter, "Short Shadows (I)," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, eds. Howard Eiland et al, 2(1), 1927-1930 (Cambridge Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999).
- Bennett, Jill, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma and Contemporary Art* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005).
- Campany, David, "Safety in Numbness," in *The Cinematic: Documents of Contemporary Art*, ed. David Campany (London: Whitechapel and Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2007), 185-94.
- Didi-Huberman, Georges, *Invention of Hysteria, Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT, 2003).
- Everson, Harry C., *Te Wai Ponamu, The Greenstone Island: A History of the Southern Maori During the European Colonization of New Zealand* (Wellington: Aoraki Press, 1993).

Hirsch, Marianne, "Past Lives: Post-Memories in Exile," *Poetics Today* 17(4) (1996): 659-86, accessed February 26, 2008, <http://www.jstor.org/pss/1773218>.

Lieberman, Jessica C., "Traumatic Images," *Photographies* 1(1) (2008): 87-102, accessed June 23, 2008, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17540760701788283>.

Mikaere, Buddy, *Tē Maiharoa and the Promised Land* (Auckland: Heinemann, 1998).

Ricouer, Paul, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

Roberts, John, "Photography After the Photograph: Event, Archive and the Non-Symbolic," in *Oxford Journal of Art* 32(2) (2009): 281-98.

Shelton, Ann, "Artist Text 2004," accessed December 7, 2010, <http://www.annshelton.com/texts/omfts.shtml>.

### Biographical notes

Donna West Brett is a doctoral candidate in Art History and Film Studies at the University of Sydney. Her research area is on 'Documenting Place in German photography After 1945'. Recent publications include: 'The Uncanny Return: Documenting Place in Postwar German Photography', *Photographies*, 3, 1, March 2010. Brett is also Manager, Copyright and Curatorial Research Coordination at the Art Gallery of NSW, and board member of the Art Association of Australia and New Zealand and Peloton Gallery, Sydney.

Email: [donnabrett@iinet.net.au](mailto:donnabrett@iinet.net.au)

Ann Shelton is a visual artist, Director Undergraduate Studies Photography at the School of Fine Arts, Massey University, and Chair of the Wellington-based Enjoy Public Art Gallery. Her work is exhibited nationally and internationally and was included in Images Recalled (Bilder auf Abruf), Germany's largest photographic biennale. Recent presentations include 'Folie à deux/Twinly Madness: A Perspectival Violence' at the University of Plymouth, U.K. She was also 2010 recipient of the CoCA Anthony Harper Award for Contemporary Art.

Email: [A.Shelton@massey.ac.nz](mailto:A.Shelton@massey.ac.nz)

7.

---

## MEDIATED MEMORY

---

# De Architectura as Architectural Time Capsule: On Inventing a New Classical Memory

Daniel M. Millette

---

## De Architectura as Architectural Time Capsule: On Inventing a New Classical Memory

Daniel M. Millette

---

### Abstract

It is well established that archaeologists, architectural historians, heritage planners, and design theorists are linked within a disciplinary gaze towards the architectural past. The link is one that is founded in the classical tradition that in turn is bounded by Vitruvius' 10 books on architecture: *De architectura*. The treatise (a memory container for classical architecture), and its dozens of translations, transcriptions, and eventual transformations, form the topic of discussion for this article. I focus on how the same written script has become the memory container for classical architecture. I also explore the significance of *De architectura* as vessel of classical architectural knowledge extending from Antiquity to the present. Key to the discussion is the fact that versions of the treatise continue to be used as classical pattern books (or "proof" of accuracy) in understanding: the function of ruins in informing the reconstruction of monuments; the restoration of historically significant spaces; and the contextual intactness of their architectural embodiment. Through the use of an example, the article challenges the unquestioned use of *De architectura* as keeper of classical architectural memory.

Keywords: Vitruvius, memory, classical architecture, classical theatres, reconstruction

## Preface

Very clearly, we are experiencing acceleration in monument building and commemorative activity. It is also clear that Pierre Nora's notions of *lieux* and *milieux* (as related to monuments and memory) could readily be developed further to include "emptiness" in refining his theoretic.<sup>1</sup> However, the notion of "emptiness", as evocative as it can be in terms of monument design and building, and especially in terms of eventual commemorative activity, can be a slippery one where the gap created could in time be filled with memories that might have little to do with the original intent. Intentional or not, gaps, emptiness, and voids "work" in commemorative activity simply because the event, persons, or moment to be commemorated persists and is relatively clear in the collective memory. However, what happens when the collective memory is no longer charged with the same memories? This article relates to the latter, although dealing with a different kind of void, the architectural void of classical ruins.<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

One set of fragments that is still used in commemorative activity is the ensemble of classical monuments that persist throughout the Mediterranean basin and beyond. Greece, for example, has been in the process of rebuilding dozens of theatres as monuments commemorating what could be called "better times". I suggest that there persists a dual process within which "gaps" are used when rebuilding (in this case classical monuments) in order to arrive at a specific outcome (ideal classical types). Although not necessarily intentional, this revises our very notion of what classical architecture is and therefore what it can be made to stand for. I consider the first part of the process by going back to the use of the sourcebook, or memory container of classical architectural information, *De architectura*.

The 2000-year-old treatise outlines its author, Vitruvius', thoughts on *architectura*. This is not a book about his "current" architecture per se; it is about architecture the way he thought it should be. How this book is interpreted is key because its reading continues to define and arbitrate *the classical*. One of the features of the multitude of translations of the book is their penchant for illustrative material. I have always wondered why translators and transcribers have, through the last 500 years, been so persistent in providing drawings to supplement the words in this book. This, of course, alters the original, and what this means is that our notion of what "classical" entails also changes in time.

When it comes to classical architecture, for example, very rarely do we find research that does not include at least some reference to the ancient text. This comes from a tradition born out of Renaissance treatise writing, influenced by *De architectura*. This was combined with traditions related to the training of architects, where ancient ruins were measured, drawn, and then compared to the tenets found in Vitruvius' work. Schools of architecture continued the practice and today

we find echoes of the same tradition within curricula. Five hundred years after Alberti, we still find students of architecture visiting Rome, measuring monuments, drawing the ruins, comparing them to *De architectura*, and known examples, and producing reconstruction drawings.<sup>3</sup>

The result has not been without repercussions. A secondary set of traditions has emerged, where monuments are reconstructed using the same *modus operandi*. That is, ruined monuments are physically reconstructed by measuring their ruined state, compared to Vitruvius' highly generalised tenets, generating a set of reconstruction drawings, and rebuilding monuments. The process is one that involves the complicity of historians, architects, builders, and chroniclers of classical architecture. This article outlines and retraces such a process: the reconstruction of the *cavea* theatre at Orange, France, and the acceptance of the resulting construction as a genuine classical monument.

### The theatre at Orange

Sited within the urban plan of the Roman settlement, the theatre at Orange (Arausio)<sup>4</sup> was initially built during the first century AD, perhaps earlier, and would have quite clearly been a magnificent civic monument.<sup>5</sup>

Figure 1. The theatre at Orange – 1955. Source: Archives d'Orange.



For an idea of its scale, consider that the *cavea*; its circular seating space, is approximately 103 metres wide and seats some 7,000 spectators. The highest seats are over 30 metres above the *orchestra*. The *scaenae frons*, or scene, is divided into horizontal levels, with an assortment of bays and niches that would have accommodated statues on its inner façade, as well as a set of doorways along the lower part of its elevation. The *scaenae* building has inner spaces designed for



a variety of uses. Along its inner and outer faces can still be seen traces of the architectural decor that would have fitted within a comprehensive iconographic and memorial programme.<sup>6</sup> The facade of the colossal building confronts the present-day viewer as it must have stunned the urban dweller or visitor of Antiquity. Outside the building, to the north of the main wall, is a plaque that reads:

UNESCO

*Cet ensemble monumental est inscrit sur la  
liste du Patrimoine mondial. L'inscription sur  
cette liste consacre la valeur universelle  
et exceptionnelle d'un bien culturel ou  
naturel afin qu'il soit protégé au bénéfice  
de l'humanité.*

*Théâtre Antique d'Orange  
Patrimoine mondial<sup>7</sup>*

With words like “Patrimoine mondial” (world heritage), “valeur universelle” (universal value), and “protégé au bénéfice de l’humanité” (protected for the benefit of humanity), it is impossible to consider the space about to be entered without a pre-registered feeling of awe. The same observer might purchase the official guidebook.<sup>8</sup> Opening it, the second sentence of the theatre description reads: “This building, as the one at Arles, presents all of the tenets of Vitruvius’ Latin theatre: the semi-circular *cavea* with radiating stairways, lateral access points, the *scaenae* wall with superimposed decorative orders and a *parascaenia*.”<sup>9</sup> With UNESCO, the Direction du Patrimoine’s official guidebook, and Vitruvius as authorities, questioning the authenticity and architectural integrity of the monument seems quite redundant.

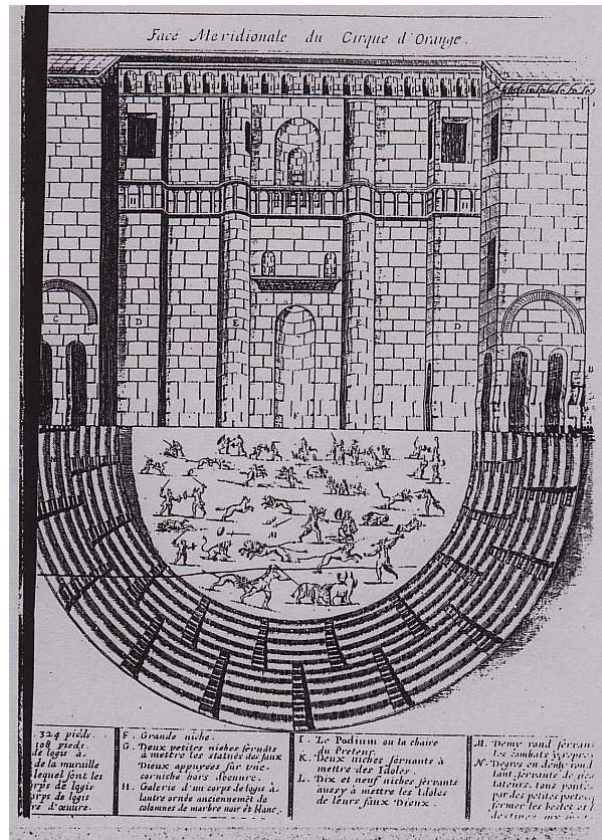
### The historical tradition

The theatre appears to have fallen into disuse some time during the fourth or fifth centuries after waves of barbaric attacks resulted in fires devastating the inner areas.<sup>10</sup> Little is known of the theatre’s use during the Middle Ages. It may have served as a defensive structure for the castle built upon the hill to the south; remnants of a (possibly) medieval tower built atop the *scaenae* wall were still partially intact during the early nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup> One of the earliest textual references to the structure is contained within Jean Bouveyroy’s *Discours des antiquités de la ville dorange* [sic] of 1649.<sup>12</sup> His narrative is detailed and records the presence of buildings sited within the *cavea* where the seats should have been.<sup>13</sup> From his commentary, we are told that at some point before the

seventeenth century the space was altered substantially. Gone is the *cavea* proper, and now dozens of houses fill the area.<sup>14</sup>

At about the same time that Bouveyroy was writing his *Discours*, Joseph de la Pise was preparing a history of the city and its monuments.<sup>15</sup> In it he provides an account of the theatre, complete with a multitude of references to Antiquity's erudites, such as Varro.<sup>16</sup> What is most interesting is the illustration of the theatre that he provides.

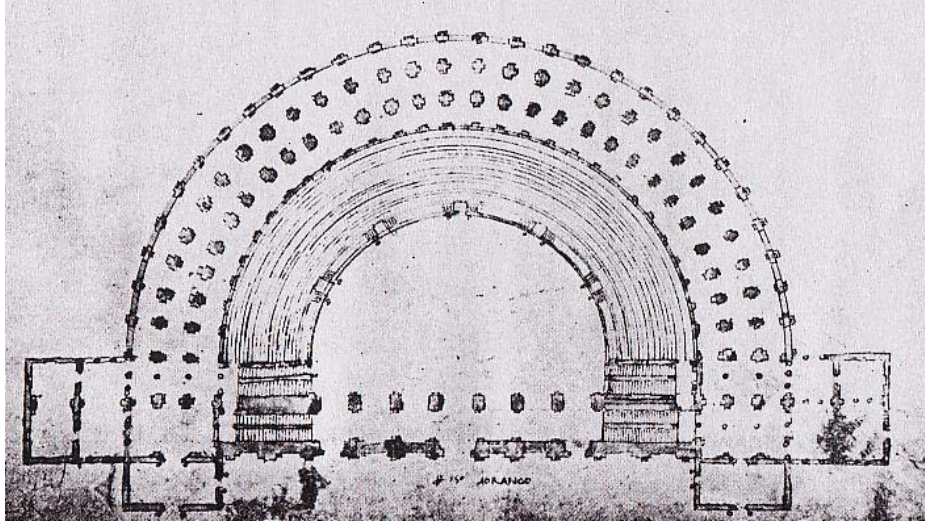
Figure 2. De la Pise's theatre at Orange. Source: de la Pise, 1640, plate 2.



In the textual and visual depictions, de la Pise outlines the theatre with the *scaenae* in full elevation and the *cavea* fitted with horizontal sections of seating, complete with animal fighting gladiators within the orchestra. The *scaenae frons* and *cavea* are completely intact. The difficulty, of course, is that the figure conflicts with Bouveyroy's mention of houses in the *cavea*. In other words, if we accept his words, this illustration seems to have less to do with the remains of the ruined theatre, certainly as far as the *cavea* is concerned. It has more to do with a depiction based partly on a personal classical architectural imagination.

It is possible that de la Pise saw the earlier treatise by Giuliano de Sangallo (c. 1452-1516). Sangallo was adept at interpreting Vitruvius and comparing remnants in the south of France, and one of the examples he focused on was the theatre at Orange.<sup>17</sup>

Figure 3. Giuliano de Sangallo's theatre at Orange – late fifteenth century. Source: Archives d'Orange.



De la Pise's textual and visual renderings become more questionable when one examines late eighteenth and early nineteenth century engravings.

Figure 4. The theatre at Orange – late eighteenth century. P. Fourdrinier (eighteenth century). Source: Musée municipale d'Orange.

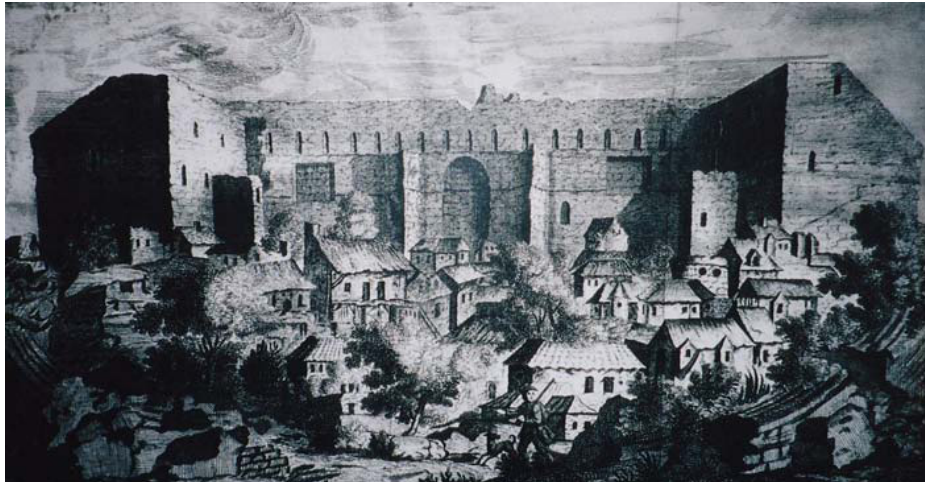


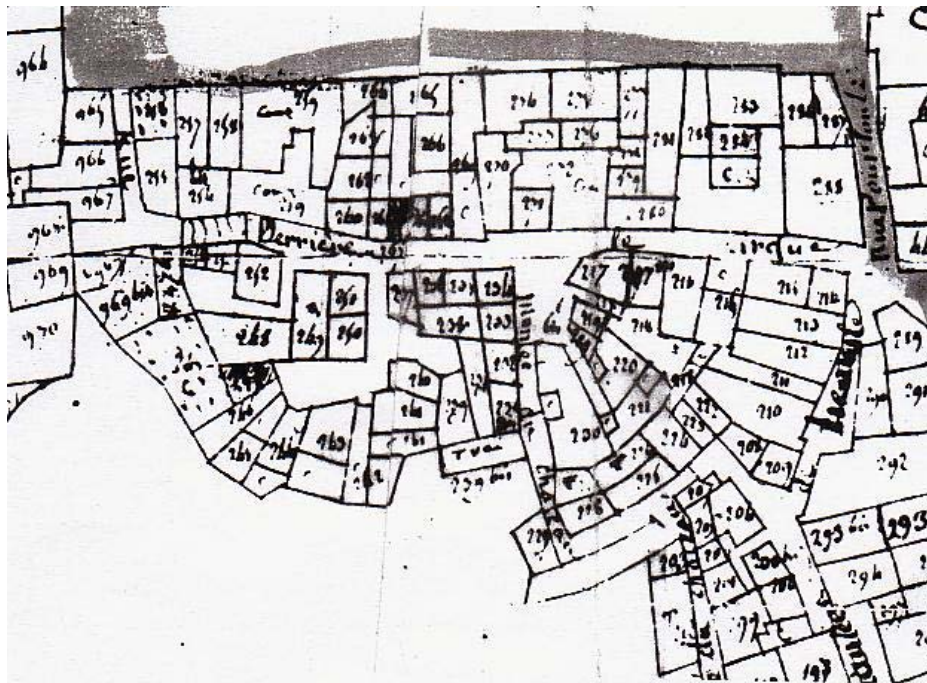
Figure 5. The theatre at Orange – early nineteenth century. John-Claude Nattes (1765-1822). Source: Musée municipale d'Orange.



The two images show that at some point after the abandonment of the structure-as-theatre; the *cavea* is certainly overtaken by houses and transformed into a distinct urban living area.

The depiction of the *cavea* as neighbourhood is more in keeping with Bouveyroy's words and less so with de la Pise's rendering, and while it is possible that the engravers are imagining sections of their respective spaces, it is quite likely that they are reflecting the realities of their immediate surroundings.<sup>18</sup> In yet another reference, F. Dignonnet tells us that "...Where the seats stood, fifty or so houses were pressed against each other; two streets and two dead ends gave access to them".<sup>19</sup> This is well confirmed by the early nineteenth century Napoleonic cadastral plan.<sup>20</sup>

Figure 6. Cadastre Napoléonien  
– Orange. Source: Musée de la  
municipalité d'Orange.



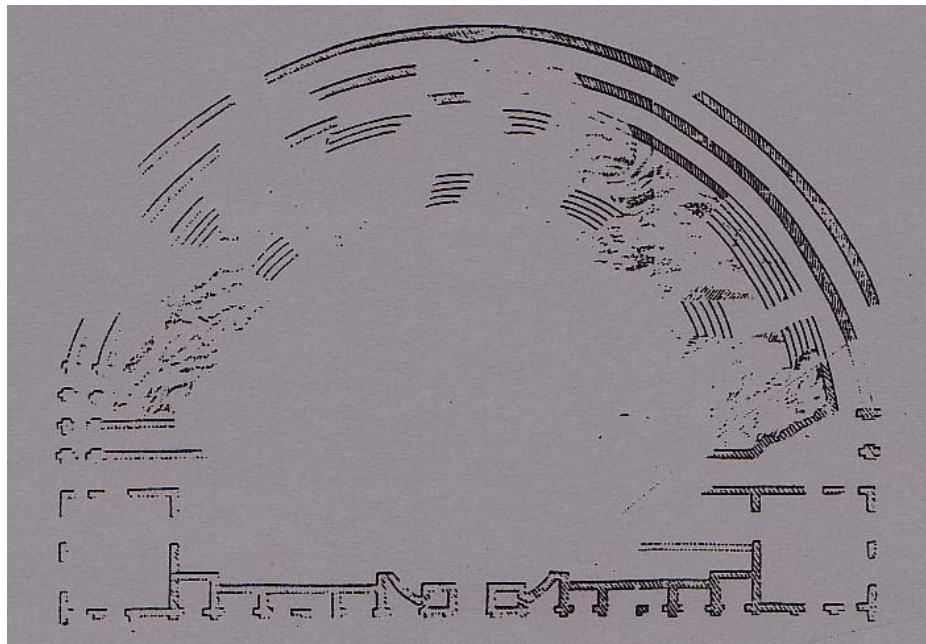
Within the survey, the *cavea* is sub-divided into dozens of lots, complete with a street running east-west along the front of what would have once been the *pulpitum*, or stage. The *frons scaenae* remains intact, as it is within the engravings (in both Bouveyroy's and de la Pise's texts).

By the early nineteenth century, it seems certain that the *cavea* had been dismantled during the period since its abandonment in the fourth or fifth centuries. While the *scaenae* stands as a reminder of a past theatre, the whole of what had constituted the physical *cavea* has visibly disappeared. What does remain of the *cavea*, however, is de la Pise's highly imaginative rendering and subsequent researchers would look to the drawing as a starting point in their quests to understand and reconstitute the *cavea*. De la Pise's drawing, like other architectural illustrations of the same theatre, acted as a reference point within the collective imagination; his *cavea* "exists" from the moment the viewer glances at its depiction.

The story of today’s theatre begins in 1807, with Aubin-Louis Millin’s travel writings.<sup>21</sup> He was a well-respected man, a member of no less than 19 learned societies and at least nine scientific academies, as well as a Professor of Antiquities. His book on the Midi describes urban areas and focuses primarily on classical monuments. For Orange, the entry is substantial and important.<sup>22</sup> He initially outlines the streets and houses and then quickly moves to the triumphal arch and eventually the theatre, and there are certainly references to de la Pise.<sup>23</sup> He begins his theatre discussion with “The circular section within which the spectator seats had been established”.<sup>24</sup>

Note that he uses past tense—“étoient établis” (had been established)—when he refers to the seats. This contrasts with his use of the present tense in the rest of his description. The implication is that the seats are no longer *in situ*. Two sentences later he writes: “Vitruve fait mention expresse de ce genre de construction”,<sup>25</sup> creating a connection between Vitruvius’ words and the *cavea* design at Orange. The difficulty, of course, is that all Roman theatres are “de ce genre” (of this type) because they all have, to some extent, semi-circular seating arrangements. At work here is a very basic mode of authentication (a circular one) where Vitruvius is appropriated to reinforce reconstruction drawings.

Figure 7. Millin’s theatre at Orange. Source: Millin, 1807, plate XXIV.



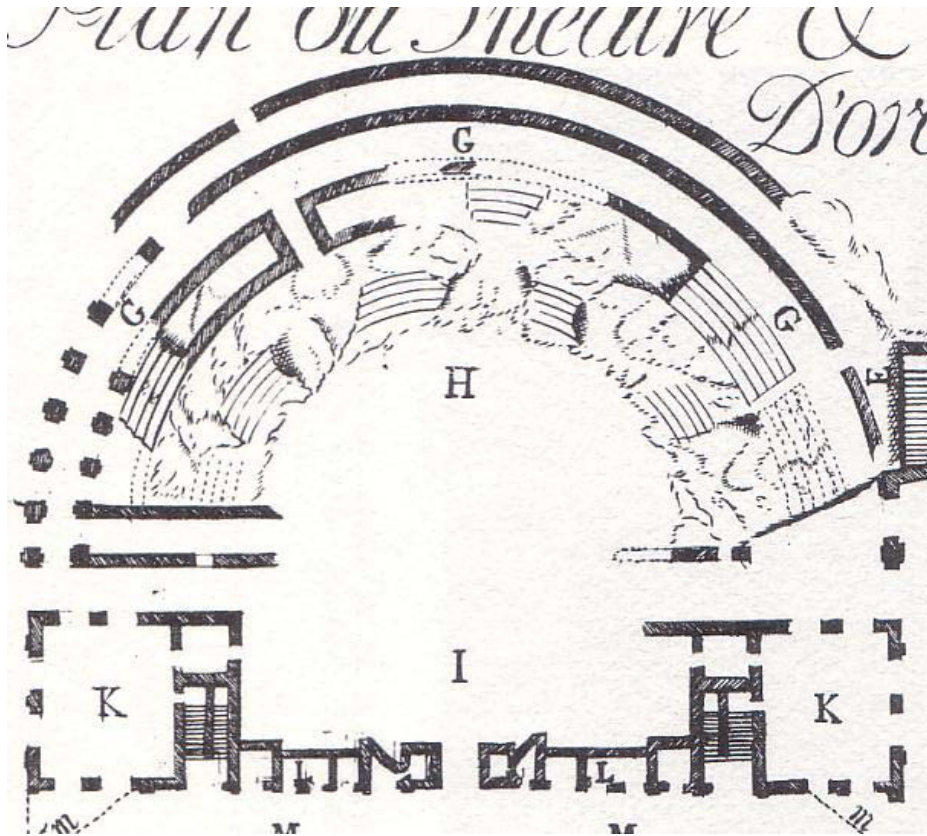
The same drawing is well worth perusing. Note that Millin uses different lines to show *cavea* remnants, seating limits, and so on. Note also the concentrically-drawn lines depicting the seats; the regularity of these lines renders a feel of accuracy and they will re-appear throughout future renditions of the *cavea*. What is especially impressive about the sketch is that Millin is able to draw it in spite of the approximately 100 medieval houses covering the space.<sup>26</sup> Obviously he is providing a hypothetical drawing based on his research and no-one should assume that it is a precise replication. Knowing that checking would have been physically limited by

the houses, the reader must presume that Millin would have resorted to whatever texts that would have existed, in addition to terrain observation.

However, the texts are limited and Millin only had two or three main architectural sources: de la Pise's earlier work; Sangallo's treatise (which Millin did not mention); and the theatre prescription contained within *De architectura*. He includes two of the references and they provide the reader with assurance that the depiction is accurate. Referencing Vitruvius' *Book V*, any reader would have found it reassuring that Millin's concentric lines "fit" the geometrically-bound model of *De architectura*.<sup>27</sup> This in spite of the fact that Millin's illustration does not, for example, provide a centre-point that would offer the reader a partial opportunity to check the interpretation. In the end, his drawing is schematic at best, and like de la Pise's earlier rendition, it remains for later scholars to study and register it within their imaginations.<sup>28</sup>

Just a few years after Millin's work, another history appears. In his *Histoire de la ville d'Orange et ses Antiquités*,<sup>29</sup> M. de Gasparin recalls in what has become a familiar way of authenticating descriptions of classical monuments, the writers<sup>30</sup> and theatres<sup>31</sup> of Antiquity. In what is about to become a cumulative knowledge-producing sequence, his text continues in de la Pise's and Millin's footsteps,<sup>32</sup> summarising the narratives of the two and offering his own plan of the theatre.

Figure 8. M. de Gasparin's theatre at Orange. Source: M. de Gasparin, 1815, plate 7.



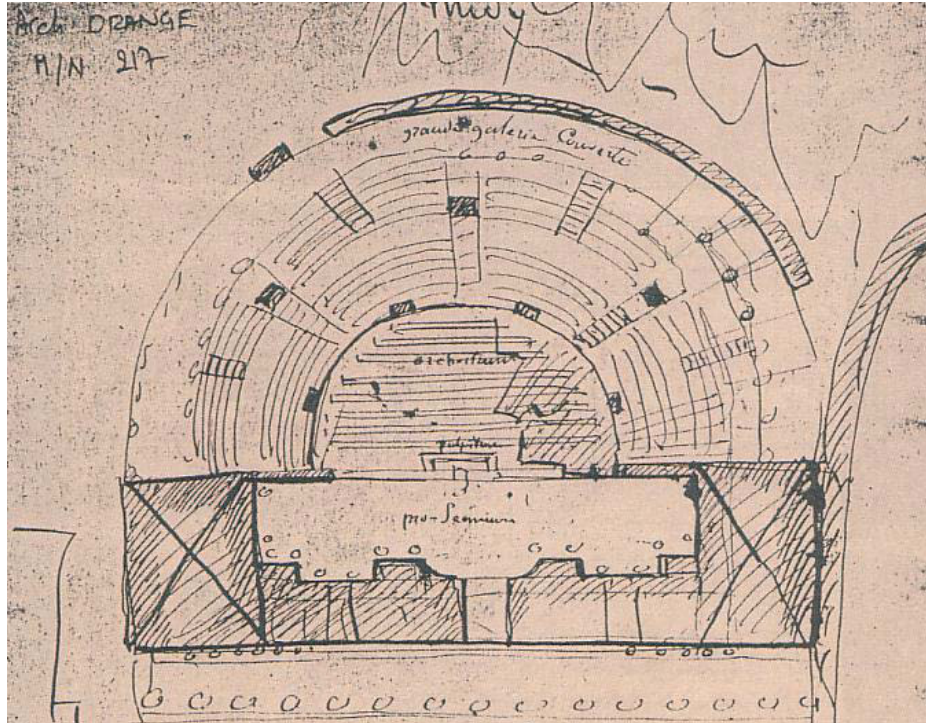
His plan is remarkably similar to Millin’s illustration and it is almost certain that he simply traced it and embellished some of the features. Note that in this drawing there are sections of the *cavea* that are drawn as dark outlines as if they are in place, with dotted lines continuing their trajectories presumably depicting hypothetical foundations and other lines that extend beyond the darker outlines. The whole certainly gives the impression of an accurate distinction between what is found on the ground and what is assumed. Again, however, there are dozens of houses standing within the *cavea*. How does de Gasparin arrive at this particular rendition of the remnants?

In 1825, after pleas from academics and municipal officials, *Les Monuments Historiques* began substantial clearing work, and local and state authorities continued to approve financial appropriations well into the 1830s. Within the city’s archives we find interesting notes regarding some of the work that are particularly relevant to this article. Pierre Renaux, the *architecte départementale*, who was responsible for portions of the project,<sup>33</sup> described the type, costs, and location of the work. Within his instructions, Renaux remarks that “Les tailleurs de pierres et maçons employés” (The stone carvers and masons employed are to re-work the large blocks—“les blocs antiques”—that are found amid the ruins.)

Further, he instructs that a certain wall should be restituted.<sup>34</sup> In referring to loose blocks, Renaux stipulates that “lorsque leur position aura été reconnue et constatée par l’architecte les blocs qui (gèneront) pour le travail seront enlevés et déposés dans l’endroit qui sera indiqué à l’entrepreneur”.<sup>35</sup> Apparently blocks are being removed for repositioning at a later time. Renaux intends to re-place the stones and from at least this point onwards, the clearing work is inextricably linked to the notion of putting things “back in their place”. In this case, Renaux is referring to an area parallel to the *frons scaenae* and the *scaenae* wall itself. However, he is also supervising the work throughout the *cavea* and it is no leap to assume that the construction work is taking place wherever he deems it necessary. That masons are employed to do “archaeological” work begs the question: exactly what is being re-built in the *cavea* neighborhood?

As part of the same manuscript, a single, un-numbered page provides Renaux’s vision of the theatre.

Figure 9. The theatre at Orange  
– Renaux, 1832. Archives  
d’Orange – manuscript M/N  
217. Source: Musée de la  
municipalité d’Orange.



The drawing page contains notes and is intended to accompany the instructions. From it we can see that the positioning of seats, stairs, and so on, has been more or less ascertained by Renaux. Recall, once again, that there remain dozens of houses in the space. The figure can only be hypothetical. He probably undertook some research to complement his archaeological explorations, looking at what would have been available; Millin, de la Pise, de Gasparin, and, Vitruvius would have been consulted. It is not certain which reference(s) he consulted. Certain, however, is that there is at least one feature on his sketch that is not contained within the earlier drawings. Scribbled along the upper part of the sketch is a label that says “Grande Galerie Couverte” (large covered gallery). If the others did not allude to the feature in their renderings, then where does Renaux get the impression that a large, open gallery was built upon the upper *cavea*?<sup>36</sup> One source that was certainly available to Renaux mentions a gallery in that section of the theatre: *De architectura*.<sup>37</sup>

In 1834, Mérimée was named successor to Vitet, the first *inspecteur général des monuments historiques*.<sup>38</sup> This coincides with the publication of his travel book on the region, and the attention and authority that he gains ensures that his work becomes far-reaching within the archaeological and architectural circles of France.<sup>39</sup> His theatre reflections are detailed, incorporating prior readings and observations. The research includes the work of many, including Renaux. He describes the ruins and he records that the *frons scaenae* is relatively intact.<sup>40</sup> At the same time, he notes that the seats are poorly conserved and he highlights the progress in clearing debris, and the expropriation and removal of houses which is by then ongoing.<sup>41</sup>



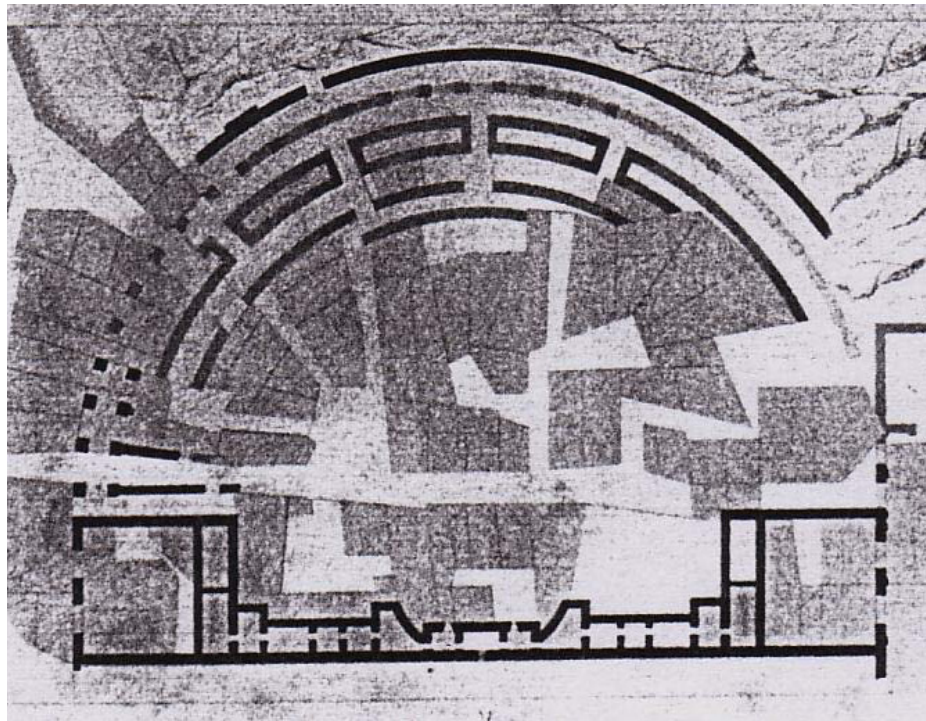
Mérimée underscores that the remains that were thought to be beneath the same houses have suffered important degradations and thus hints that what he observes may not necessarily be in keeping with the representations of others. In other words, he seems surprised and offers no drawing to complement his commentary. One of the final passages in Mérimée’s entry echoes Millin and de Gasparin: “Si l’on ne s’empresse d’y faire de grandes réparations, la France ne possédera pas long-temps encore ce monument presque unique dans son espèce”.<sup>42</sup> The book does not offer a reconstruction of the theatre. What it does do, however, is draw a great deal of attention to it. The four-volume book becomes a guide and reference manual for subsequent historians and architect-archaeologists of the region. As *inspecteur general des monuments historiques*, and especially later as *responsable des travaux*, Mérimée would be a key proponent of the construction work at the theatre.

### Auguste Caristie’s theatre

One of the early nineteenth century proponents of the excavation and consolidation work on the theatre at Orange was Auguste Caristie, a noted architect, who won the Grand Prix de Rome in 1813<sup>43</sup> and was involved with the theatre at least since 1820.<sup>44</sup> He undertook a detailed survey of the *cavea*.

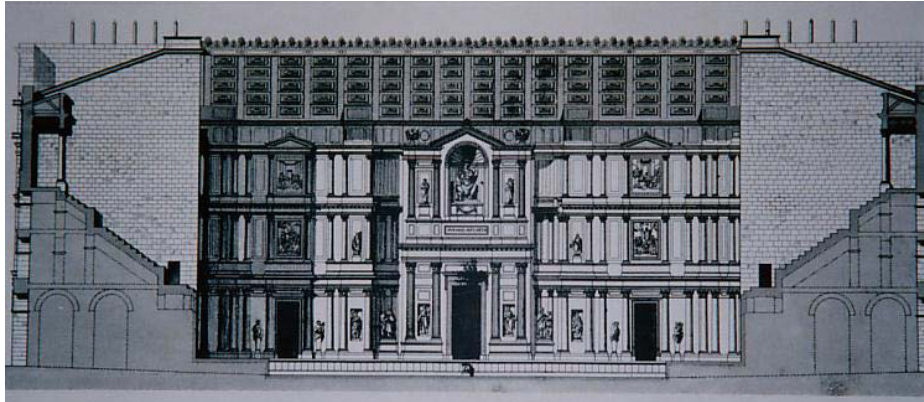
Figure 10. Site plan – Caristie’s drawing of theatre remains.  
Source: Caristie, 1856, plate XXXIII.

Figure 11. Site elevation – Caristie’s drawing of theatre remains. Source: Caristie manuscript – Musée d’Orange, 1856.



With his work, we have the formalisation of a hypothetical reconstruction of the theatre at Orange. As director of works from 1835 to 1856, and especially through his publication of detailed engravings and study, he convinces his readers that his rendition is that of a “real” monument. He pulls together the previous documentation of the theatre, examples from Antiquity, and Vitruvius’ tenets. All the while, he connects the intricacies of his etchings to the vividness of the *topoi* residing within the imagination in order to achieve this implicit goal.

Figure 12. Caristie’s reconstructed theatre. Source: Caristie, 1856, plate XLV.



### Accepting the argument

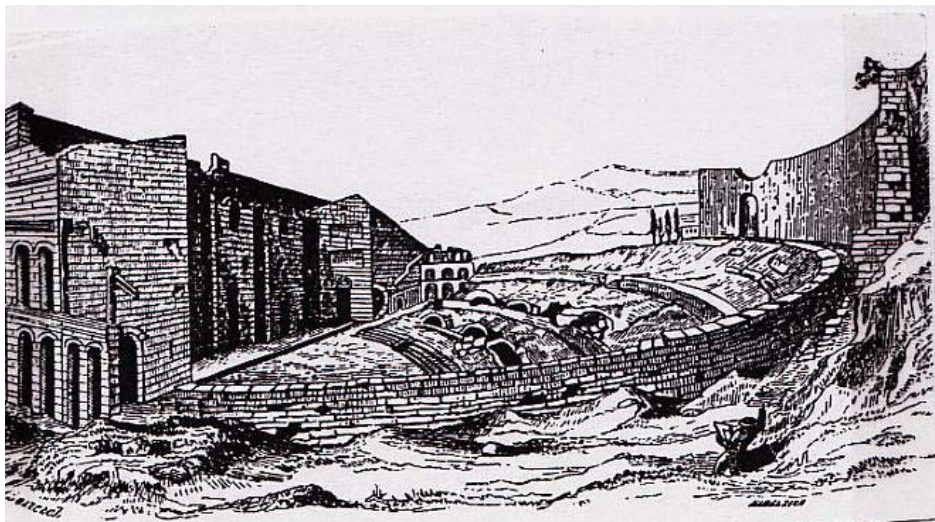
Present-day readers will think of Caristie’s book as just that: a book containing a hypothetical reconstruction. The publication, however, does not operate independently. Just after its completion, a man who has already been mentioned in relation to Mérimée and *Les Monuments Historiques* is working on a report of Caristie’s work; Ludovic Vitet, the first *inspecteur général des monuments historiques* has taken interest in the theatre.<sup>45</sup> In a detailed report in the *Journal des Savants*, Vitet completely endorses Caristie’s project and echoes his ideas, stressing the acceptance of the work.<sup>46</sup>

In a style that has by now become familiar, Vitet begins his report with a list of classical theatres, making the point that no other theatre is as important as that at Orange.<sup>47</sup> If the reader of Vitet’s report has difficulty creating a mental image of the *cavea* at Orange, the examples will undoubtedly help to fill in the gaps. Now that the theatre of Orange has been accepted within the grouping of other “great” classical theatres, its *cavea* “exists”; the hypothetical model provided by Caristie is merely its confirmation. Vitet is beginning to set the tone for an argument for physical reconstruction. However, a further element of confidence is required to solidify the argument. After comparative discussions of some of the listed theatres, a detailed description of the remains, the recalling of a variety of authorities, Vitet evokes the *De architectura* in his discussion of stage machinery:<sup>48</sup> “Vitruvius himself took care to indicate where the stage machines were located and how many there were. There were three in all in each theatre ....”<sup>49</sup>

If the reader is not, by then, convinced that Caristie's details should be accepted, the reference to some sort of duty to imagine helps. Vitet says that just as the imagination of children can work to transform baton-holding into an imaginary cavalry scene, so too can it—the imagination—accept the decor of the theatre. This is highly significant; there is a clear acknowledgement of the links between some of the components of the hypothetical solution of Caristie and the interpreter's imagination. With this notion accepted, it becomes easy to persuade the reader that the reconstruction is indeed plausible. After the digression on the child's imagination, Vitet writes: "Est-il besoin d'insister plus longtemps pour démontrer à nos lecteurs en quelle estime il faut tenir et les magnifiques restes du théâtre d'Orange, et l'ouvrage de M. Caristie qui les reproduit si bien." (Is it necessary to insist any longer to our readers as to the esteem which must hold the ruins of the theatre of Orange, and the work of M. Caristie who has reproduced these so well.)<sup>50</sup> He then suggests that, along with archaeological observation and historical and literary studies, more work of Caristie's type has to be undertaken to better understand ruins.<sup>51</sup>

The report ends with a reference to Millin, who whimsically described the *cavea* and first called for the removal of the hundred or so houses sited within. By Vitet's time, most of the homes are gone—"(g)râce à une heureuse application du principe de l'expropriation (et de l') inappréciable service rendu à la science...." (thanks to the great application of the principle of expropriation and the great service rendered to the science)<sup>52</sup> and the *cavea* is now ready to be re-constituted. Reflecting his influence, Vitet's *Journal des Savants* article is reprinted three years later in the first issue of the *Gazette des Beaux Arts*.<sup>53</sup> The clean illustration he includes attests to the *cavea*'s transformation since the engravings of the earlier part of the century.

Figure 13. Vitet's Illustration of the theatre at Orange. Source: Vitet, 1861, 305.



A short time after Vitet drafted his report, another architect was working on the theatre and preparing another important study. Until then, the references to Vitruvius had been specific, although not dominant, within the Orange literature. G. Legrand<sup>54</sup> takes on the design of the theatre and connects it, explicitly and directly, to *De architectura*.<sup>55</sup> After the usual recalling of the ancients and a *summario* of the Latin theatre of Vitruvius, Legrand commends Caristie and then writes this most significant passage:

*The disposition of the scaenae during stage representations appears to have thus far been scarcely studied; the physical elements no longer existing, and the information that the ancients have left us having been reduced to what Vitruvius wrote in a few sentences in his Book V, which has sometimes been interpreted by commentators with too much latitude. So as to avoid the same pitfalls, sirs, accompany us on an excursion to the theatre of Orange, to together make, Vitruvius in hand, the application of the text to the monument itself.*<sup>56</sup>

Thus Legrand proposes an excursion to the theatre of Orange with *De architectura* in hand. With some 25 pages interspersed with dozens of links between the general tenets of Vitruvius (he provides a sketch of Vitruvius' Latin theatre—and the specific features of the Orange monument) he concludes that: “Le théâtre d’Orange est la pour justifier les conjectures du doute ... [missing word in text] ... du XVIème siècle, et démontrer qu’il n’y a point d’erreur dans le texte de Vitruve”.<sup>57</sup> So circular has the argument become that the theatre is now used to check *De architectura*'s tenets.

On Caristie's work, Legrand simply states that “Nous n’avons pas la témérité de vouloir décrire cette admirable ruine; c’est une tâche qui vient d’être si fidèlement rempli par Caristie qu’il n’est désormais plus possible de rien ajouter à l’oeuvre consciencieuse de ce savant architecte”.<sup>58</sup> To Legrand, the authority of Caristie is as solid as Vitruvius' and there is nothing to add. When other architects (such as Louis Rogniat, Paul Blondel, and M. Daument)<sup>59</sup> undertake studies of the same monument, it is Caristie's text and engravings that persist.<sup>60</sup>

### Constructing the theatre

From 1877 to 1883, Daumet, *architecte attaché à la Commission Supérieur des Monuments Historiques*, supervises substantial reconstruction work in the lower partitions of the western areas. As of 1882, the Formigés, father and son, take on the reconstruction project; the municipal government is keen on facilitating live spectacles within the space and the two architects hurriedly begin to rebuild the seats. The two lower sets of seats as well as many of their supporting structures are constructed, and we can see some of the progress with a first horizontal section partly in place in an 1880s engraving.<sup>61</sup>

Figure 14. The theatre of Orange (1860s). Source: Album du Chemin de Fer de Lyon à la Méditerranée, 1860s, plate 12.



In the earlier part of the twentieth century, the son, Jules Formigé, builds the eastern section of the corridor leading to the inner *cavea* as well as a variety of features belonging to the *scaenae* wall and other components.

By the time Louis Chatelain writes his influential book for the *Bibliothèque des Hautes Études* in 1908, Caristie is fully accepted as the authority on Orange antiquities.<sup>62</sup> His work now serves as model, and the physically reconstructed areas re-confirm his “theorised’ theatre. With the emphasis on ancient sources as authorities, Chatelain’s book continues with what by the early twentieth century has become a tradition of including references, not necessarily to support particular views or arguments, but to render a feel of authority to the narrative.<sup>63</sup> As with his nineteenth century predecessors, Chatelain reverts to most of the earlier studies, all the while devoting a complete chapter on the theatre with Caristie as his primary source.<sup>64</sup>

Chatelain’s theatre discussion is descriptive and comparative, looking at, for instance, the different dimensions given by the various previous researchers. Throughout his work, the implication is that this is the best preserved monument of its type. He writes: “Le théâtre d’Aspende, en Asie Mineure, est le seul qui soit à comparer avec celui d’Orange pour son excellente conservation”.<sup>65</sup> Chatelain does not necessarily advance new perspectives, but he does hint at the extent to which the theatre is being constructed. In one passage he notes:

*It is important to signal the precissenes of the restauration of this monument; Caristie employed only the stones from the quarries, still exploited, that had been used by the Romans. Such were the repairs undertaken following the plans of Caristie. It allows us to appreciate the talent of this architect, his vast archaeological knowledge, his respect for the original work, and his longstanding tenacity through which he surmounted many difficulties ...*<sup>66</sup>

The passage is probably the first to clearly connect the reconstruction efforts to the drawings of Caristie. The fact that the builders employ stones from the same quarries as those used by the Romans seems to make the reconstruction more “Roman”. The whole of Chatelain’s argument in favour of the Caristie restitution is

extremely circular, at first stating that Caristie's drawings are used as guides for the reconstruction, then inferring that the rebuilt monument reflects the original one, the only record of the "original" one is the hypothetically drawn model by Caristie in the first place. Near the end of the chapter, Chatelain presents a comparison between modern theatres and theatres of Antiquity. For the Antiquity discussion, the example is the theatre of Orange, complete with references to the textual authority: the *De architectura*.

As Vitet, Daumet, Chatelain, and others are studying and writing about the monument, the Formigés continue with their building activities. Jules Formigé publishes a number of related articles,<sup>67</sup> as well as a comprehensive research paper on the theatres at Arles and Orange.<sup>68</sup> The 65-page report is detailed and combines a plethora of references to Vitruvius with details of classical theatres to provide hypotheses for the missing architectural components of the theatre at Orange. Using this methodology, Formigé confirms most of Caristie's postulated model and fills in some of the missing details. Note that he often reverts to the theatre at Arles for comparative discussion and to "explain" his proposal rationales (the two to him share unique features). This no doubt has something to do with the fact that he is also in charge of the ongoing reconstruction of Arles' theatre.

The construction and consolidation work continues well into the 1950s and 1960s, when the inner passageways underneath the *cavea* seats are rebuilt due to construction problems arising from the workmanship of the earlier part of the twentieth century. In the end, the *cavea* is very much like that of Vitruvius'. The problem, and perhaps this is what Formigé was alluding to in his early comment, is that the new *cavea* does not fit the architecture of the *scaenae* building. Figure 15 highlights the connection point between the seats and *versurae* along the western section. The seating clearly does not align architectural realities of this visible section and the re-builders never completed the work. It would seem then, that the nineteenth and twentieth century designers left out an important detail when re-presenting the *cavea*. Equally interesting is that Vitruvius is silent regarding the connection points and angles.

Figure 15. Theatre at Orange – western section.  
Photo by author.



Through a cumulative set of depictions—textual, visual, and imaginative—a *monumental ensemble* inscribed onto the *World Heritage List*, and of *universal value, protected for the benefit of humanity*, has been constructed. With earth-clearing, the re-shaping of the terrain took place, with the demolishing of houses, blocks and cobbles were safeguarded for re-installation, and with public support, the expropriation of houses was facilitated. Throughout, the referencing of a variety of drawings that go back to the imaginary classical theatre of de la Pise (and perhaps Sangallo) ensured that the builders worked towards a particular plan. This plan was not necessarily drawn according to some original design, but traced from the instructions borne out of the classical architectural imaginations of individuals far removed from Antiquity. The whole, of course, was fuelled at each stage by increasing and inextricably woven references to *De architectura*, whose broad instructions permitted a circular mode of authentication that provided “proof” for the schemas.

Filling in the gaps between topographic features and architectural entities, however, clearly does not result in an accurate reconstruction. It results in a new design that smoothes away sets of details related to, in this case, first century AD (and perhaps earlier) culture, craft, and site. The design becomes topographically idyllic, geometrically corrected and architecturally adjusted. In this case, it is not surprising that the reconstruction by Caristie is akin to Vitruvius’ tenets; the

former spent a great deal of time studying the latter and justifying the authoritative nature of *De architectura* before presenting the reconstruction and connecting it to the older treatise. The illustrations provided by his predecessors (those he accessed as he carried out his research) can be traced in part to de la Pise's drawing and description. Also, the corrections that he imposed on his theatre can be traced back to Vitruvius' *Book V*.

## Conclusion

In France, classical monuments formed part of the restoration debate. The ideas of Viollet-le-Duc prevailed as architects from *Les Monuments Historiques* generated drawings, and as archaeologists produced knowledge directly connected to Rome and as Vitruvius' treatise served as a memory container for classical architecture. This was the case in Orange, where each new architect, archaeologist, or researcher looked to predecessors and to Vitruvius in presenting the same monument. Almost all of the proposals of the reconstructed theatre included consideration for Vitruvius' theatre prescriptions; a closer look at the immediate terrain would have revealed that the proposals were not necessarily adequate. This is not to say that the theatre of Orange's *cavea* was completely rebuilt. However, its reconstruction in such a dramatic way definitely and permanently altered the original design and architectural intent. The official sanctioning of the site as "historically valuable" added to the authenticating process, with the whole mediated through modes of authentication involving cumulative studies of specific monuments, textual references, and imaginative drawings.

With the study of classical monuments, the tendency is still to revert to comparative studies and to the authoritative textual references of *De architectura*. Classical archaeology has, and continues to, direct its attention to clearing, consolidating, and, eventually, reconstructing. The latter efforts somehow leave one with the impression and assurance that what is observed and preserved is genuine. In the end, the monument serves as confirmation for the textual reconstruction, and the text re-confirms the monument in a completely circular mode of authentication. Throughout, *De architectura* is mined for any hint, most often non-specific and highly generalised, of like features that might correspond to the monument under study. Through the proof that all of these provide, *De architectura* takes on further authoritative weight. The more the ruined monument is studied, the more Vitruvius is quoted. The result of this particular knowledge production is the potential for a set of architectural constructions that are at best, Vitruvius-based, and not necessarily site or reality-based.



## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Pierre Nora Nora, Pierre ed., *Realms of Memory – The Construction of the French Past*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

<sup>2</sup>A short version of this paper was read at the *Contained Memory* conference at Massey University in Wellington in December 2010. This paper has benefited from comments at the same conference session and further research. In addition, the paper has benefited from the double blind review process. A longer paper, further developing the main ideas is in progress.

<sup>3</sup>For a discussion on classical architectural training since the seventeenth century see Daniel M. Millette, “The Prix de Rome – Three Centuries in the Eternal City,” in *The Prix de Rome in Architecture: A Retrospective*, ed. Marco Polo (Toronto, Coach House Books, 2006), 8-22.

<sup>4</sup>The city is mentioned by early chroniclers like Strabo (IV, 1, 11) and Pliny the Elder (III, 36), among others and its importance in Antiquity is without doubt. For a discussion of some of the early sources (albeit dated), see Louis Chatelain: “Les Monuments Romains d’Orange,” *Bibliothèque de l’École des Hautes Études* 170 (1908), 1-122.

<sup>5</sup>The literature related to early Arausio and historical Orange is vast. For an albeit dated bibliography see Agis Rigord, “Bibliographie sur Orange et ses Monuments,” *Bulletin des Amis d’Orange* (1964): 36-46.

<sup>6</sup>The technical and architectural features of the theatre have been recorded by several scholars. See for example: F. Sear, *Roman Theatres – An Architectural Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 245-47. See also P. Gros, *L’Architecture romaine – Les monuments publics* (Paris: Picard, 2002), 272-73. A more comprehensive publication is underway directed by J. Ch. Moretti and A. Badi. On decor, see N. Janon, M. Janon and M. Kilmer, “Les frises d’Orange: le pouvoir mis en scène,” in *Spectacula – II. Le théâtre et ses Spectacles – Actes du colloque tenu au Musée Archéologique Henri Prades de Lattes les 27, 28, 29 et 30 avril 1989*, ed. C. Landes (Lattes: Musée de Lattes, 1992), 149-62. For related context, see E. Rosso, “Le message religieux des statues divines et impériales dans les théâtres romains : approche contextuelle et typologique,” in *Fronts de scène et lieux de culte dans le théâtre antique*, ed. J. Ch. Moretti (Lyon: Université de Lyon, 2009), 89-126.

<sup>7</sup>[UNESCO – This monumental ensemble is inscribed onto the World Heritage List. The inscription onto the list signifies the universal and exceptional value of a cultural or natural entity so that it may be protected to the benefit of humanity. Antique Theatre of Orange. World Heritage.] (All translations from this point on are by the author.)

<sup>8</sup>Michel-Édouard Bellet, *Orange antique – Monuments et musée* (Paris: Ministère de la Culture, de la Communication et des Grands Travaux, 1991).

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 30. “Cet édifice, comme celui d’Arles, présente toutes les composantes du théâtre latin selon Vitruve : la *cavea* en hémicycle à escaliers radiaux, les accès latéraux, le mur de scène à ordres décoratifs superposés et les *parascaenia*.”

<sup>10</sup>For a summary on the research on the burn marks and related phenomena see P.

Milner, “Further Studies of the Roman Theatre at Orange – A Progress Report for Dr. M. Woehl,” *Technology Note*, No. TN-00/1 (2000).

<sup>11</sup>The tower was demolished in the early 1830s. See Prosper Mérimée, *Notes d’un voyage dans le Midi de la France* (Paris: 1835), 113. See also, Louis Chatelain, “Les Monuments Romains d’Orange,” in *Bibliothèque de l’École des Hautes Études* 170 (1908): 89.

<sup>12</sup>Jean Bouveyroy, “Discours des antiquités de la ville d’Orange,” *Archives Municipales d’Orange* Z 1174 (August 24, 1649).

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., *ddd*. Note also that a Monuments Historiques plaque installed onto the building wall indicates that the *cavea* was freed from houses built within it during the Middle Ages.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid. *dd, ddd, eee*.

<sup>15</sup>Joseph de la Pise, *Tableau de l’histoire des Princes et Principauté d’Orange Divisé en quatre parties selon les quatre races qui ont régné souverainement depuis l’an 793. Commençant a Gvillavme av Cornet Premier Prince d’Orange. Jusques a Frederish Henry de Nassau à prefent Regnant* (La Haye: De l’Imprimerie de Théodore Maire, 1640).

<sup>16</sup>Reference to Varro is on page 16.

<sup>17</sup>Sangallo was not alone in the comparative tradition; I use him as an example among many.

<sup>18</sup>See Olivier Poisson, “Le dégagement et la restauration des théâtres antiques d’Orange et d’Arles au début du XIXe siècle,” in *Exposition: Le Gout du Théâtre à Rome et en Gaule Romaine*, ed. C. Landes (Lattes: Musée de Lattes; Imago, 1989) 82-90.

<sup>19</sup>“... sur l’emplacement des gradins, une cinquantaine de mesures se pressaient les unes contre les autres ; deux rues et deux impasses y donnaient accès.” Quoted in Chatelain (1980): 89. While I use Millin and others in my reading of the literature, I do not purport that they are the only references to the monument. They are, however, typical.

<sup>20</sup>On the Napoleon Cadastre see François Monnier, “Cadastre,” in *Dictionnaire Napoléon* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1987) 318-20.

<sup>21</sup>Aubin-Louis Millin, *Voyage dans les départemens du midi de la France – Tome II* (Paris: l’Imprimerie Impériale, 1807). While I use Millin and others in my reading of the literature, I do not purport that they are the only references to the monument. They are, however, typical.

<sup>22</sup>Millin devotes some 22 pages to Orange.

<sup>23</sup>A direct reference is made in footnote 1, page 149.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 148. “... partie circulaire dans laquelle les sièges des spectateurs étoient établis”.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 149. [Vitruvius expresses construction of this type.]

<sup>26</sup>The lower parts of the *scaenae* building are also occupied by boutiques and, as well, the *bâtiment de scène* itself is used as a prison. That a prison occupies the *bâtiment de scène* is confirmed within the municipal archives; a municipal record entry of 1824, for example, states that “Le Conseil souligne que la prison qui est

dans l'enceinte du Théâtre et dont l'installation est défectueuse devrait être au plus tôt transférée ailleurs." [The Council underlines that the prison which is inside the theatre is defective and should be, as soon as possible, moved elsewhere.] See Raphaël Massé, *Annales d'Orange* (Orange: 1950), 30.

<sup>27</sup>Vitruvius' Latin theatre model is fully elaborated elsewhere; see F. Sear, "Vitruvius and Roman Theatre Design," *American Journal of Archaeology* 2(94), 249-58.

<sup>28</sup>Towards the end of his Orange entry, Millin suggests that the houses and prison should be removed. He wrote: "Ce seroit rendre un service réel aux arts et à l'humanité, que de chercher un autre logement pour les prisonniers, et de détruire ces misérables masures, dont on dédommageroit facilement les propriétaires" (151). The suggestion to demolish the buildings would be recalled by his contemporaries; the reference to a "service to humanity" would be echoed by UNESCO a century later.

<sup>29</sup>De Gasparin, *Histoire de la ville d'Orange et ses Antiquités* (Orange: Joseph Bouchony Imprimeur, 1815).

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 68. He mentions Strabo, for instance.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 73. The theatres at Delos, Syracuse, Sparta, Athens, and others are enumerated.

<sup>32</sup>De Gasparin references la Pise on pages 65 and 101; Millin is noted on page 102 in footnote 14.

<sup>33</sup>P. Renaux is *architecte de département de Vaucluse* at least until 1841.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 1, 2.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 2. [When their position has been recognized and defined by the architect, the blocks that are in the workers' way will be removed and deposited in an area designated by the contractor.]

<sup>36</sup>Remains were found at the top of the *cavea*; it is not clear, however, if a gallery had been part of the original design.

<sup>37</sup>*De architectura*, V, 9.9.

<sup>38</sup>Mérimée and Vitet maintained a long-lasting collaboration; the two worked together as late as the 1860s within, for example, the editorial ranks of the *Journal des Savants*.

<sup>39</sup>Prosper Mérimée, *Notes d'un voyage dans le Midi de la France* (Paris: 1835).

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 114.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 112, 113.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 113. [If we do not hurry to undertake major repairs, France may not possess for long, this monument that is almost unique in its class.]

<sup>43</sup>See André Louis, "A Paper Conservancy," in *La Revue* 10 (Paris: Musée des arts et des métiers, 1995), 25-29.

<sup>44</sup>Auguste Caristie, *Monuments Antiques Orange – Arc de Triomphe et Théâtre – Publiés sous les auspices de S. E. M. le Ministre de l'État* (Paris: 1856). "En 1820, étant sur le toit de la maison qui était adossée à cette partie de l'édifice, il m'a été possible de mesurer et de dessiner cette corniche avec facilité"; he is studying the theatre in detail. Footnote 1.

<sup>45</sup>Recall that Mérimée had succeeded Vitet as *inspecteur général des monuments historiques* in 1834.

<sup>46</sup>*Archives Municipales d'Orange* – Manuscript T. A. 20: Ludovic Vitet *Compte rendu de l'ouvrage de M. Caristie sur les monuments d'Orange*, 1859(a). This manuscript is almost identical to a section of a two-part journal article published in the same year in the *Journal des Savants* (1859(b)), 325-36, 430-43; it is possible that the handwritten manuscript is not of Vitet's hand and is a transcription of the article. While I here use the manuscript as reference, the words in the manuscript are the same as those of the article.

<sup>47</sup>Ludovic Vitet, *Compte rendu de l'ouvrage de M. Caristie sur les monuments d'Orange*, (Orange: Archives Municipales d'Orange, 1859) 1.

<sup>48</sup>Vitet develops a similar argument in his “De quelques moulages d'après l'antique exposés à l'école des Beaux-Arts,” *Journal des Savants* (1861): 376-86.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 10. “Vitruve lui-même a soin de nous détromper en indiquant quelle place occupaient ces machines et quel en était le nombre. Il y en avait trois en tout dans chaque theatre.”

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>53</sup>Ludovic Vitet, “Monuments antiques de la Ville d'Orange,” *Gazette des Beaux Arts* (1861): 297-310.

<sup>54</sup>G. Legrand, *Recherches sur la scène antique justifié par l'étude du théâtre d'Orange* (Orange: undated manuscript). I base the post-Vitet/Caristie date on the fact that Legrand refers to Vitet's 1859 report (footnote a, 40) and to Caristie's 1859 publication (footnote b, 14); they are the latest works he references.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, 3. Legrand uses the 1673 and 1680 French translations by Perrault (footnote b).

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, 14. “La disposition de la scène pendant la représentation nous paraît avoir été peu étudiée jusqu'ici; les éléments matériels de cette étude n'existent plus et les données que les auteurs anciens ont laissées à ce sujet, se réduisent à quelques phrases peu explicites du *Vième* livre de Vitruve, auxquelles les commentateurs ont, peut-être donné un peu trop d'élasticité. ... Pour ne pas nous laisser entraîner dans la même voie, veuillez, Messieurs, nous accompagner dans une excursion au théâtre d'Orange, pour faire ensemble, Vitruve à la main, l'application du texte au monument lui même.”

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, 44. [The theatre of Orange is there to justify the conjectures of doubt ... of the fifteenth century, and to show that there are no points of error in the text of Vitruvius.]

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, 14. [We do not dare describe this admirable ruin; the task has so faithfully been accomplished by Caristie that it is no longer possible to add anything to the work of this brilliant architect.]

<sup>59</sup>Correspondence from Louis Rogniat to the Mayor of Lyon dated January 23, 1883; Archives de Lyon document 4j4 wp25.

<sup>60</sup>References to Caristie-as-authority persisted throughout the nineteenth century; see for example Camille Saint-Saëns, *Décors de Théâtre Dans l'Antiquité Romaine* (Paris: L. Baschet, 1886).

<sup>61</sup>Conseil d'Europe, *Orange – Théâtre Antique – Analyses des Experts Européens* (Conseil d'Europe, 1993).

<sup>62</sup>Louis Chatelain, “Les Monuments Romains d’Orange” in *Bibliothèque de l’École des Hautes Études*, cent soixante-dixième fascicule (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1908).

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, 3-6.

<sup>64</sup>Among others not included in this discussion, de Gasparin is footnoted throughout, la Pise is referenced at 119, Mérimée at 90, 91, 96, and Renaux at 92. Caristie is evoked throughout the book.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, 98 [The theatre at Aspendos, in Asia Minor, is the only one that can compare to that at Orange for its excellent conservation.]

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, 94. “Il importe de signaler l’exactitude minutieuse de la restauration du monument... Caristie n’a employé que les pierres dont les carrières, encore exploitées, avaient été mises à contribution par les Romains. ... Telles furent les réparations exécutées sur les plans de Caristie. Elles permettent d’apprécier le talent dont a fait preuve cet architecte, sa vaste érudition archéologique, son respect de l’œuvre originale, et la longue ténacité avec laquelle, sans se laisser rebutter, il a surmonté des difficultés sans nombre ...”

<sup>67</sup>Jules Formigé publishes a set of articles related to the monuments of Orange in the *Bulletin des Antiquaires de France* (1924): 25, 26, 27 29; and *L’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* (1914): 16, 17, 33.

<sup>68</sup>Jules Formigé, *Remarques diverses sur les théâtres Romains à propos de ceux d’Arles et d’Orange*, Extrait des mémoires présentés par divers savants à l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, Tome XIII (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1914).

## Bibliography

### *Books and articles*

Bellet, Michel-Édouard, *Orange antique – Monuments et musée* (Paris: Ministère de la Culture, de la Communication et des Grands Travaux, 1991).

Bouveyroy, Jean, “Discours des antiquités de la ville d’Orange,” *Archives Municipales d’Orange* Z 1174 (August 24, 1649).

Caristie, Auguste, *Monuments Antiques Orange – Arc de Triomphe et Théâtre – Publiés sous les auspices de S. E. M. le Ministre de l’État* (Paris: 1856).

Chatelain, Louis, “Les Monuments Romains d’Orange,” *Bibliothèque de l’École des Hautes Études* 170 (1908).

Conseil d'Europe, *Orange – Théâtre Antique – Analyses des Experts Européens* (Conseil d'Europe, 1993).

De Gasparin, Joseph, *Histoire de la ville d'Orange et ses Antiquités* (Orange: Joseph Bouchony Imprimeur, 1815).

De la Pise, Joseph, *Tableau de l'histoire des Princes et Principauté d'Orange Divisé en quatre parties selon les quatre races qui ont régné souverainement depuis l'an 793. Commencant a Guillaume av Cornet Premier Prince d'Orange. Jusques a Frederish Henry de Nassau à prefent Regnant* (La Haye: De l'Imprimerie de Théodore Maire, 1640).

Formigé, Jules, *Remarques diverses sur les théâtres Romains à propos de ceux d'Arles et d'Orange*, Extrait des mémoires présentés par divers savants à l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, Tome XIII (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1914).

Gros, Pierre, *L'Architecture romaine – Les monuments publics* (Paris: Picard, 2002).

Legrand, G., *Recherches sur la scène antique justifié par l'étude du théâtre d'Orange* (Orange: undated manuscript).

Louis, André, "A Paper Conservancy," in *La Revue* 10 (Paris: Musée des arts et des métiers, 1995), 25-29.

Massé, Raphaël. *Annales d'Orange* (Orange: 1950).

Mérimée, Prosper, *Notes d'un voyage dans le Midi de la France* (Paris: 1835).

Millette, Daniel, M. "The Prix de Rome – Three Centuries in the Eternal City," in *The Prix de Rome in Architecture: A Retrospective*, ed. Marco Polo (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2006), 8-22.

Millin, Aubin-Louis, *Voyage dans les départemens du midi de la France – Tome II* (Paris: l'Imprimerie Impériale, 1807).

Milner, Paul, "Further Studies of the Roman Theatre at Orange – A Progress Report for Dr M. Woehl," *Technology Note*, no. TN-00/1 (2000).

Monnier, François, "Cadastre," in *Dictionnaire Napoléon* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1987) 318-20.

Nora, Pierre ed., *Realms of Memory – The Construction of the French Past*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

Olivier Poisson, Olivier, "Le dégagement et la restauration des théâtres antiques d'Orange et d'Arles au début du XIXe siècle," in *Exposition: Le Gout du Théâtre à Rome et en Gaule Romaine*, ed. C. Landes (Lattes: Musée de Lattes; Imago, 1989), 82-90.

Rigord, Agis, "Bibliographie sur Orange et ses Monuments," *Bulletin des Amis d'Orange*, (1964), 36-46.

Sear, Frank, *Roman Theatres – An Architectural Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

Vitet, Ludovic, *Compte rendu de l'ouvrage de M. Caristie sur les monuments d'Orange* (Orange: Archives Municipales d'Orange, 1859).

### Biographical note

Daniel M. Millette teaches architectural theory and history at the University of British Columbia's School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture. His primary focus is on exploring the ways through which architectural theory and knowledge are produced. He questions “standards” such as Vitruvius' *De architectura*, and examines the ways theoreticians and practitioners turn to unquestioned theoretic and then apply the same theories to discourse around design, memory, historic preservation, and architectural conservation. He has published widely on Vitruvius, the collective memory, and the manipulation of the latter. The work has resulted in collaborations with several institutions, including with the Institut de recherche sur l'architecture antique (Aix-en-Provence), La Sapienza University's School of Architecture (Rome), and the Université de Provence's École d'architecture (Marseilles). Current projects involve the “monuments of spectacle” of Africa Proconsularis, and aboriginal “architectures of renewal” in North America, with related publications and an exhibition under development.

Email: millette.daniel@yahoo.com

---

# Connecting with Tragedy Through Landscapes of Memory: Memorial Design, Tourism, and the Post- Genocide Memoryscapes of Cambodia, Rwanda, and Germany

Shannon Davis and Jacky Bowring



---

## Connecting with Tragedy Through Landscapes of Memory: Memorial Design, Tourism, and the Post-Genocide Memoryscapes of Cambodia, Rwanda, and Germany

Shannon Davis and Jacky Bowring

---

### Abstract

In recent years the act and practice of memorialisation has become increasingly complex due to the influence of globalisation. As the world grows ever smaller, the opportunities offered to us to engage the international memoryscape are many and far-reaching. Memoryscapes—memorial landscapes—are today infused by the tension between local needs and global expectations, offering highly concentrated places in which to investigate the physical expression of memory. Multiple pressures (both internal and global)—including the demands of time, religion, politics, and economics—dictate both the form and narrative expressed by memorials in post-genocide societies. With growing tourist industries, countries emerging from regimes of genocide (such as Cambodia and Rwanda) are today engaging the international visitor through their memoryscapes of genocide. This article explores the post-genocide memoryscapes of Germany, Cambodia, and Rwanda, investigating their ability through memorial form (representational or non-representational), to “connect” international visitors with foreign “memory”—a type of memory with which they may have little previous association.

Keywords: memory, memorial, genocide, design, interpretation

## Introduction

Western nations are today loaded with symbolic sites, dates, and events that provide a kind of social continuity that contributes to a collectively shared memory, and establishes spatial and temporal reference points within societal groups.<sup>1</sup> In recent years, the critical view of memorialisation has become increasingly complex, in part due to the influence of globalisation. Architect, Peter Tonkin, and artist, Janet Laurence, state that in the twenty-first century: “We are in the midst of a worldwide obsession with memorializing that has been unequalled since the age of the dictators”.<sup>2</sup> Monuments, history museums, memorial museums, public sculptures, grave-yards, commemorative sites, and memorial landscapes are created and dedicated to people, places, and events. At an unrivalled moment in history, spaces dedicated to the memory of the past are found throughout the world, and seem increasingly to commemorate a past involving mass death.

Historically, individual nations have held sets of meanings and interpretations in relation to their past which were developed into memorials and commemorative spaces to reinforce peoples’ identification with specific social values. In doing so, they create a collective national identity.<sup>3</sup> “Globalisation”, has, however, led to an increased interconnectedness amongst the world’s populations. As William Wishard suggests, globalisation is far more than non-Western nations adopting free markets and democratic political systems: “At its core, [globalisation] means that the full scope of western ideas and modes of living are gradually seeping into the fabric of the world.”<sup>4</sup>

The influence of globalisation, and under particular consideration here, of “Westernisation”, is clear in the expression of public memory of genocide in Cambodia and Rwanda. For example, Serge Thion states that the paradigm of genocide for the West is still very much centred on the Holocaust: “Jews and Khmers do not mourn and bury the dead in the same way and there is a risk that our Western concept of ‘memory’ could be entirely irrelevant to the Khmers who obviously have their own.”<sup>5</sup> Tourism today allows for, and supports, the permeability of our world that globalisation has provided, creating a globe that is fully accessible to those who have the will and means to explore it. It has become clear that tourist interest in recent world tragedies is a growing phenomenon in the twenty-first century.<sup>6</sup>

Memorialisation, and the form that memory takes, is understood within contemporary thought as being unbounded in its expression. From its readily understood and widely accepted expression—through art, music, theatre, literature, sculpture, and architecture, to spatial or experiential places, to the less tangible expressions through the creation of national holidays, appearance on currency, or even an official judicial decision—memorialisation occurs in many forms. The social act of memorialisation, and the physical embodiment of memory in the landscape, as particularly considered here, sees “tragedy” today investigated as a genre of design. This is a category of design that explores and expresses it in both tangible and intangible forms to meet the many needs and expectations of

those involved. From built, spatial, and visual form to symbolic, experiential, or abstract form, the expression of tragedy in our landscape today demands a broader perspective than has been experienced in history: “The romantics thought that memory bound us in a deep sense of the past, associated with melancholia, but today we think of memory as a mode of re-presentation, and as belonging ever more to the present.”<sup>7</sup>

Considered in this way, the act of interpretation therefore sees memorials become as much about the present as they are the past. This article investigates the development of the post-genocide memoryscapes of Cambodia and Rwanda in relation to the evolution and development of the German memorial landscape. It also explores how sites of genocide memorialisation in these countries—sites within a history, culture, and place with which many visitors have little previous personal association—attempt to “connect” the international tourist with tragic history through memorial form and their landscapes of memory.

### Design interpretation

It has long been accepted that architecture and landscapes possess “meaning”; to be more than mere structure or space.<sup>8</sup> It is also held that the creation of meaning within a site is not just about the intended meaning stated by the designer at conception, but that it is created and recreated with every individual experience. Design interpretation opens a project to the wider world, to a larger community, changing and relating to cultural and societal difference throughout time.<sup>9</sup>

As Juan Bonta states, “Interpretations—like forms themselves—fulfil a cultural, historically conditioned role. We interpret buildings in certain ways because in so doing we can throw some light upon aspects of the world in which we live.”<sup>10</sup> We interpret memorials, built or otherwise, for similar reasons—to elucidate in the present, a part of our world for which an expression of memory has been communicated. Coupled with the act of interpretation is the notion of “pre-understanding”, a concept introduced by Martin Heidegger. According to him, this concept acknowledges the fore-structure of how we see and understand things, the cultural historicity we bring with us unreflectively to a reading or act, in this case the act of memorial interpretation.<sup>11</sup>

It could be said, therefore, that the practice of design interpretation becomes more relevant than the design or creation of form itself. The ability of a memorial to “connect” with people and create meaning stands in its ability to be interpreted—to speak to the group or individual through time. Germany, and its treatment of memorialisation during the post-Holocaust period, today provides an example from which memorial development and the opportunity for interpretation can be considered, acting here also as a base from which these can be analysed in Cambodia and Rwanda.

## Creating a memoryscape of genocide—representation and the interpretation of memory through design

In its function as a political tool within post-conflict societies, memorialisation can be used as a form of social remembering and forgetting, often selecting and distorting memory to serve present needs. Today the German memoryscapes of genocide illustrate a progression of time, politics, and societal needs, depicted clearly through the creation, design, and development of an extensive landscape of memorial sites. From the preservation of concentration and extermination camps (such as the Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum), to Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz's anti-memorial, *Monument against Fascism*, and Peter Eisenman's *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe*, Germany has confronted Holocaust memory and its physical expression in many ways over the last 60 years.

While athletes and visitors from all over the world were participating in the 1936 Berlin Olympics, just 20 kilometres north the Sachsenhausen concentration camp was being expanded and developed to serve the Reich capital (Figure 1). Sachsenhausen was a “preventative detention camp” to which the Gestapo took people it regarded as political enemies of the National Socialist regime, and those it persecuted for social, biological, or racial reasons.<sup>12</sup> Of the more than 200,000 inmates held at the camp between 1934 and 1945, tens of thousands died as a result of extreme physical abuse, malnutrition, disease, execution, and medical murder. The second chapter in the history of Sachsenhausen began soon after the camp's liberation in August 1945, when the Soviet Secret Service moved its “Special Camp No. 7” to Sachsenhausen where those who had held official positions in the Nazi state were imprisoned. Remaining operational until 1950, 12,000 prisoners are believed to have died during these five years under Soviet control.<sup>13</sup>

Figure 1. Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp, Oranienburg, Germany. Photo by author (2007).



The Sachsenhausen National Memorial was erected by the German Democratic Republic (1961-1990). During this time its past as a camp run by the Soviet Secret Service was concealed. The official interpretation of the memorial “was to serve solely as a reminder of the concentration camp”.<sup>14</sup> The part played by the Soviet Union in the military downfall of the National Socialists was the central idea expressed by the memorial site’s culture of remembrance.

The memorial constructed at the centre of the site, titled *Tower of Nations* (Figure 2), was the central memorial and emblem of the Sachsenhausen National Memorial during this time. Eighteen red triangles mounted on the obelisk-like structure represent the prisoners’ main countries of origin in remembrance of the camp’s political and foreign prisoners. The memorial was designed to make a heroic statement of the communist resistance in Europe, a concept made particularly clear by Rene Graetz’s sculpture, *Liberation*, that sits in front of the tower and which depicts two liberated prisoners standing next to a Red Army soldier. Jutta Dommaschk states: “The historical topography was transformed by the systematic re-organisation of the site and its conversion into a monumental glorification of the defeat of SS rule”.<sup>15</sup>

For the Sachsenhausen memorial, like many spaces of public memory created during this time in Germany, leaders of the German Democratic Republic were primarily interested in representing “historical policy” and not in preserving the traces of history. As a result, the demolition and elimination of some “specific” history occurred, and entire groups of victims were disregarded and actively forgotten. After the reunification of Germany in 1990, the memorial at Sachsenhausen became the Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum and today houses a series of permanent exhibitions which cover a “more complete” history of the camp from 1936-1957.

Figure 2. Tower of Nations, with sculpture, *Liberation*, in front, Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum, Orenianburg, Germany. Photo by author (2007).



The importance of retaining these concentration and extermination camp memorials throughout Europe is because they are spaces to experience the actual place of suffering, to provide a place to mourn, and to learn about the specific history. Like many memorial sites within Germany, Sachsenhausen today stands as a “representational” memorial dedicated to the preservation and documentation of first-hand evidence. By the 1990s, however, the discussion over how to remember Europe’s murdered Jewish community intensified, and a new national memorial was proposed. In 2005, Eisenman’s *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* was officially dedicated. Unlike the representational, didactic Sachsenhausen memorial, it offers an expression of genocide memory within a “non-representational” abstract form.

Covering an inner-city block, the memorial is surrounded on three sides by busy city streets, and is, on the ground plane, a topography of 2,711 concrete stelae (Figure 3). Astrid Schmeing observes its effect on memory construction:

*It is not a representation of memory so much as it is part of memory. It is an unconventional memorial that does not suggest how to remember. A conventional memorial would perhaps provide a figure to be ‘looked at’. The figurative object, witnessed by the observer’s external perspective, would provide a sense of wholeness of ‘completion’, which would suggest ‘how to remember’. This memorial, however, refuses to do so. There is no figure, and one does not even face an ‘object’. Instead, the individual moves within and inside the components of the memorial. One’s body becomes involved as a part of it, and the memorial is only complete when faced by each, single participating observer. Any form of memory transported to it by the observer becomes part of the memorial.<sup>16</sup>*

Figure 3. Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, Berlin, Germany. Photo by author (2007).



With no site description, the “non-representational” form of the *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* possesses no “official” narrative or interpretation. Peter Eisenman, the architect, stated at the opening ceremony that a key purpose of the memorial was to allow “future generations to draw their own conclusions. Not to direct them what to think, but allow them to think.”<sup>17</sup> Having no single entrance, no centre, no endpoint, and no explanation, the memorial stands today as a prompt for individual interpretation. This architectural awareness, that the needs and challenges that face society change through time, is met through the central aim of the memorial by the invitation to self-reflect.

Indicating the importance of historical layers within the memoryscape, Paul Spiegel, President of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, stated at the opening ceremony of the memorial: “without historical memory, without the authentic places of annihilation, every abstract memorial will, in the long run, lose its effect as a sign against forgetting”.<sup>18</sup> The *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe*, when considered within the wider memoryscape of Germany today, stands as a central point of remembrance: “May it contribute to keeping alive the memory which threatens to grow dim as the voices of the contemporary witnesses to the Holocaust fall silent.”<sup>19</sup>

### Representation and the interpretation of memory—Cambodia

For Cambodia, the official interpretation of memorials developed within the post-genocide period was put forward by the Vietnamese/Cambodian government of the time to display evidence and seek approval for Vietnam’s invasion and subsequent occupation of the war-torn nation.<sup>20</sup> Mai Lam, the Vietnamese war crimes researcher involved in creating both national memorial sites—the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum (Figures 4 and 5) and the Choeung Ek Memorial Centre (Figures 6 and 7)—constructed an official memory for Cambodia. The memorial sites “encouraged viewers to make connections between the DK [Democratic Kampuchea] regime and Tuol Sleng on the one hand, and Nazi Germany ... on the other”.<sup>21</sup>

With little change to the memorial sites over the past 20-30 years this official narrative continues to direct interpretation of the national memorial sites today. Strongly orientated around the preservation and documentation of first-hand evidence—victim remains, clothing, torture equipment, mass graves, and photographs are displayed as central features—the genocide memoryscape of Cambodia is a clear illustration of instructive didactic representational memory. As such, individuals, whether an international tourist or a local citizen, have limited opportunity for individual interpretation.

Figure 4. Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Photo by author (2007).



Figure 5. Portraits of S-21 prisoners displayed as a central focus within the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Photo by author (2007).



Figure 6. The Memorial Stupa at Choeung Ek houses the skeletal remains of 8,000 exhumed victims of the 1970s genocide. Choeung Ek Genocidal Centre, Cambodia. Photo by author (2007).



Figure 7. Interior view of the Memorial Stupa, Choeung Ek Genocidal Centre, Cambodia. Photo by author (2007).



### Interpretation and the representation of memory—Rwanda

Also strongly orientated around aspects of presentation, documentation, and education, the Kigali Memorial Centre in Rwanda (Figures 8 and 9) was designed by a United Kingdom-based genocide prevention charity in conjunction with the Kigali City Council. Today the memorial is a place to bury the dead (258,000 victims of the 1994 genocide rest within the grave terraces). It is a place for family and friends to mourn the victims, and also for visitors to learn about the process and reality of genocide, both local and global.

The memorial states an official aim to educate Rwandans about the processes of genocide in a hope to prevent its return both in Africa and the world. Sarah Steele states:

*... the direct participation of Western consultants and Holocaust survivor artists in the construction of the site, the integration of tri-lingual [Kinyarwandan, English and French] exhibits and the inclusion of materials that seek to involve and engage an international audience suggests that it is not simply an unintended product of Western participation in the building of the Centre, but rather a reflection of a desire to engage a broader visitor base.<sup>22</sup>*



This approach deconstructs the genocide in Rwanda as a “tribal” problem, “By highlighting that genocide is not a symptom of African barbarity, but rather a violence that has been perpetrated in many societies” seeking to “break down ethicised narrative”.<sup>23</sup> Attempting to squash any remnants of genocide ideology within the nation, the Rwandan government and Aegis Trust were acutely conscious of creating a representational memorial that educated on the overall process of genocide, the facts and figures, the personal stories and narratives, and also the international context of genocide during the twentieth century. The government, in attempting to stem the flow of genocide ideology, is actively working to create a genocide education programme which will eventually be aided by the educational facility of the Memorial Centre.

Figure 8. Main exhibition building, Kigali Memorial Centre, Kigali, Rwanda. Photo by author (2008).



Figure 9. Mass Grave terrace, Kigali Memorial Centre, Kigali, Rwanda. Photo by author (2008).



### Memorial design, tourism, and post-genocide memory

The “official interpretation” of these national memorial sites put forward by the respective governments of Cambodia and Rwanda has dominated the memorial form, and therefore the experience and interpretation, of Western visitors to these memorials through the site design and information provided.

Set alongside these strong official narratives and the didactic, representational nature of the memorial form, the national memorial sites of both Cambodia and Rwanda also elucidate clearly a visual and spatial relationship to the Western treatment of memorialising the Jewish Holocaust. The sites therefore transform a distant event for many visitors into one that is more “comprehensible”—through “pre-understanding”. Termed “cues to connect”, the concept of placing an unfamiliar cultural expression within a frame of familiarity for the viewing public is one based on Joan Nassauer’s “cue to care”.

She illustrates how, when placed within a social landscape of “care”, ecologically valuable habitats become visible through the frame of human intention, and culturally acceptable through the familiar cultural language of a tended landscape.<sup>24</sup> Nassauer realised that to get people to engage with a site, it was necessary to have something familiar for them to identify with—a cue.<sup>25</sup> Used within this research, the term “cues to connect” defines those design strategies or site features at genocide memorials in Cambodia and Rwanda that (either consciously or unconsciously) engage Western visitors by placing the “distant” or

“less familiar” history expressed at these sites within pre-understood and culturally acceptable “Western” frames.

In this way, the represented narrative of memorial sites in these two countries was seen to become more accessible to the Western visitor. For example, the octagon is an architectural symbol that crosses both the Jewish and Christian faiths, where the eight-sided form has manifested itself in religious representation in a range of ways throughout time. In the Jewish faith, eight is the number that symbolises salvation and regeneration, and is associated with the eighth letter of the Hebrew alphabet called ‘Chet’ which has the symbolic meaning of “new birth” or “new beginning”.

In early Christianity, eight was the number which symbolised the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the formation of the New Covenant. The eight-sided form can today be seen prominently in European religious architecture, and also in religious forms such as the church font used in baptising Christian children. In relation to genocide memorialisation, the octagon is a prominent form in the architecture of many genocide memorial sites including: the “Hall of Remembrance” at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC, Beth Shalom—the U.K. Holocaust Centre; and the Kigali Memorial Centre, Rwanda (Figure 10).

Examples, where the “less familiar” history of Cambodia and Rwanda is seen to become more accessible to the Western visitor through pre-understood cultural frames (particularly those commonly seen in the memorialisation of the Jewish Holocaust), are numerous. These include the display of victim clothing and genocide artefacts, the lists of victim names engraved into stone walls, rooms of victim photographs, the emotive horror of the display of mass graves, the direct connection made through comparative exhibitions such as the “Genocides of the World” exhibition at the Kigali Memorial Centre, and the emotive wording used in on-site information boards.

Figure 10. The octagonal architectural form plays a prominent role in the symbolic language of the Kigali Memorial Centre, Kigali, Rwanda. Photo by author (2008).



The act of providing (intentionally or not) on-site Western “cues to connect” is a significant aspect of memorial form in both Cambodia and Rwanda, and indeed plays an important role in the international memory of genocide. The case study sites of the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum and the Choeung Ek Genocidal Centre in Cambodia, and the Kigali Memorial Centre in Rwanda, provide powerful experiences for the Western visitor. These facilities direct an interpretive perspective through their representational memorials that encourages a global connection to these places and people through the development of pre-understood Western frames.

Particular examples of this “connection” are seen in the visitor book entries at the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum. With the terrorist attacks of 9/11, and the West’s “war on terror” in Afghanistan and Iraq, the tone of entries in the visitor books speak of a globalised world burdened by the reoccurrence of tragic actions. It also illustrates how international visitors connect with the site through “Western” events and memories. For example, one visitor wrote in 2004: “The USA supported the Khmer Rouge. Now they have their own S-21 in Guantanamo where they keep and torture people without trial.” Another, from Ireland, commented in 2003: “Cambodia will never move forward unless they deal with this history. Why don’t the big shots like Bush and Blair help, instead of starting another war?”

The post-genocide memoryscapes of Cambodia and Rwanda today act as repositories of meaning—potent containers of memory. For Western tourists, corporeal artefacts common to all human civilisations (such as skulls, bones, and clothes presented on-site in these “foreign” nations) cross traditional cultural and linguistic boundaries. They connect the “human” self to site and context through the intrinsic reality of death and what it is to be human. Vitally important to the landscape of memory, these sites are likely to always be sacred places within post-genocide nations. As is seen today, however, with the hopes and expectations of Berlin’s *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe*, a “new” generation of non-representational memorials, dedicated to the practice of individual interpretation, may have the greatest ability to prompt self-reflection—to have “meaning”.

The German memoryscape of genocide, where the informational didactic layers of “architectural parlante” offered by such representational memorials as Sachsenhausen, are today layered with a non-representational memorial space for “willed participation” with the creation of the *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe*. The physical embodiment of genocide memory within the memorial enhances its potential to be sustained. Although this research indicated that Western visitors do engage with the existing representational memorial landscapes of Cambodia and Rwanda, restrictions on the interpretative qualities expressed at these sites sees a vulnerability in their long-term sustainability—in their enduring ability to speak through time and culture—as the needs around them change.

Arthur Danto, philosopher and art critic, wrote: “We erect monuments so that we shall always remember, and build memorials so that we shall never forget.”<sup>26</sup> As war generations disappear, what yesterday and today could be narrated by first-hand witnesses must tomorrow be passed on through memory. Set within

the cultural landscape, genocide memoryscapes are today emerging as key sites of memory in an ever more globalised world. Their role in ensuring the acts of remembering and not forgetting must rest upon their effectiveness as sites which prompt meaningful connection with genocide, giving form to the aspiration of “never again”.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup>Brian S. Osborne, “Landscapes, Memory, Monuments, and Commemoration: Putting Identity in its Place,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies Journal* 33(3), (2001): 40.
- <sup>2</sup>Peter Tonkin and Janet Laurence, “Space And Memory: A Meditation on Memorials and Monuments,” *Architecture Australia* 92(5), (2003): 48.
- <sup>3</sup>Osborne, “Landscapes, Memory, Monuments,” 40.
- <sup>4</sup>William Wishard, “Understanding Our Moment in History: Tapping into the Internal Renewal Dynamic,” *New Renaissance Magazine: Renaissance Universal* 11(39), (2002), accessed November 5, 2011, <http://www.ru.org/society/understanding-our-moment-in-history.html>
- <sup>5</sup>Serge Thion, *Watching Cambodia* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1993), 181-82.
- <sup>6</sup>John Lennon and Malcolm Foley, *Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster* (London: Continuum, 2000), 3.
- <sup>7</sup>Tonkin and Laurence, “Space And Memory,” 48.
- <sup>8</sup>William Whyte, “How Do Buildings Mean? Some Issues of Interpretation in the History of Architecture,” *History and Theory* 45 (2006): 154.
- <sup>9</sup>Justine Clark, “Criticism,” *Architecture Australia* 93(2), (2004): 18.
- <sup>10</sup>Juan Pablo Bonta, “An Anatomy of Architectural Interpretation: A Semiotic Review of the Criticism of Mies van der Rohe’s Barcelona Pavilion,” in *Anatomia de la Interpretacion en Arquitectur* (Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo Gili, 1974), 72.
- <sup>11</sup>Michael Payne, *A Dictionary of Cultural and Critical Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 440.
- <sup>12</sup>Jutta Dommaschk ed., *Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum* (Berlin: Stadtwandel Verlag, 2005) 8.
- <sup>13</sup>Dommaschk, *Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum*, 12.
- <sup>14</sup>Dommaschk, *Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum*, 18.
- <sup>15</sup>Dommaschk, *Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum*, 19.
- <sup>16</sup>Astrid Schmeing, “Eisenman’s Design for the Berlin Holocaust Memorial – A Modern Statement?,” *Architectural Design* 70(5), (2000): 62.
- <sup>17</sup>Peter Eisenman, “Architect,” in *Opening Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe 10 May 2005 Speeches and Pictures* (Berlin: The Foundation for the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, 2005), 31.
- <sup>18</sup>Paul Spiegel, “President of the Central Council of the Jews in Germany,” in *Opening Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe 10 May 2005 Speeches and Pictures* (Berlin: The Foundation for the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, 2005), 26.
- <sup>19</sup>Spiegel, “President of the Central Council,” 27.

- <sup>20</sup>Judy Ledgerwood, “The Cambodian Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide Crimes: National Narrative,” in *Genocide, Collective Violence, & Popular Memory: The Politics of Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, eds. D.E. Lorey and W.H. Beesley (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc, 2002), 103.
- <sup>21</sup>David Chandler, *Terror and History in Pol Pot’s Prison* (Chaing Mai: Silkworm Books, 1999), 5.
- <sup>22</sup>Sarah Steele, “Memorialisation and the Land of the Eternal Spring: Performative Practices of Memory on the Rwandan Genocide” (Paper presented to the PASSAGES: Law, Aesthetics, Politics Conference, Melbourne, 13-14 July 2006).
- <sup>23</sup>Steele, “Memorialisation and the Land.”
- <sup>24</sup>Joan Nassauer, “Messy Ecosystems, Orderly Frames,” *Landscape Journal* 14(2), (1995).
- <sup>25</sup>Nassauer, “Messy Ecosystems, Orderly Frames.”
- <sup>26</sup>Arthur Danto et al., *Wake of Art: Criticism, Philosophy, and the Ends of Taste (Critical Voices in Art, Theory and Culture)*, (1st edn), (Amsterdam, G + B Arts International, 1998), 153.

## Bibliography

- Bonta, Juan Pablo, “An Anatomy of Architectural Interpretation: A Semiotic Review of the Criticism of Mies van der Rohe’s Barcelona Pavilion,” in *Anatomia de la Interpretacion en Arquitectura* (Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo Gili, 1974).
- Chandler, David, *Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot’s Prison* (Chaing Mai: Silkworm Books, 1999).
- Clark, Justine, “Criticism,” *Architecture Australia* 93(2), (2004): 18.
- Danto, Arthur, Gregg Horowitz, Tom Huhn and Saul Ostrow, *Wake of Art: Criticism, Philosophy, and the Ends of Taste (Critical Voices in Art, Theory and Culture)*, (1st edn), (Amsterdam, G + B Arts International, 1998).
- Dommaschk, Jutta ed., *Sachsenhauen Memorial and Museum* (Berlin, Stadtwandel Verlag, 2005).
- Eisenman, Peter, “Architect,” in *Opening Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe 10 May 2005 Speeches and Pictures* (Berlin, The Foundation for the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, 2005).
- Ledgerwood, Judy, “The Cambodian Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide Crimes: National Narrative,” in *Genocide, Collective Violence, & Popular Memory: The Politics of Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, eds. D.E. Lorey and W.H. Beesley (Wilmington, Scholarly Resources Inc, 2002), 103-04.

Lennon, John and Malcolm Foley, *Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster* (London, Continuum, 2000).

Nassauer, Joan, “Messy Ecosystems, Orderly Frames,” *Landscape Journal* 14(2), (1995): 161-70.

Osborne, Brian S., “Landscapes, Memory, Monuments, and Commemoration: Putting Identity in its Place,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies Journal* 33(3), (2001): 39-79.

Payne, Michael, “A Dictionary of Cultural and Critical Theory,” (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).

Schmeing, Astrid, “Eisenman’s Design for the Berlin Holocaust Memorial – A Modern Statement?,” *Architectural Design* 70(5), (2000): 60-65.

Spiegel, Paul, “President of the Central Council of the Jews in Germany,” in *Opening Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe 10 May 2005 Speeches and Pictures* (Berlin, The Foundation for the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, 2005).

Steele, Sarah, “Memorialisation and the Land of the Eternal Spring: Performative Practices of Memory on the Rwandan Genocide,” Paper presented to the PASSAGES: Law, Aesthetics, Politics Conference, Melbourne, 13-14 July 2006.

Thion, Serge, *Watching Cambodia* (Bangkok, White Lotus, 1993).

Tonkin, Peter and Janet Laurence, “Space And Memory: A Meditation on Memorials and Monuments,” *Architecture Australia* 92(5), (2003): 48-49.

Whyte, William, “How Do Buildings Mean? Some Issues of Interpretation in the History of Architecture,” *History and Theory* 45 (2006): 153-77.

Wishard, William, “Understanding Our Moment in History: Tapping into the Internal Renewal Dynamic,” *New Renaissance Magazine: Renaissance Universal* 11(39), (2002), accessed November 5, 2011, <http://www.ru.org/society/understanding-our-moment-in-history.html>

### Biographical notes

Dr Shannon Davis is a lecturer in the School of Landscape Architecture, Lincoln University, New Zealand. Having worked as a Landscape Architect in the U.K. undertaking both urban design and environmental planning projects, she returned to this country in 2006 to complete her PhD. Undertaking doctoral research investigating post-genocide memoryscapes—memorial landscapes, she spent time in Cambodia, Rwanda, and Germany conducting field studies exploring the role of site design in shaping Western tourist experience of genocide memorials. Teaching papers in design theory, spatial planning, and sustainable design, her current

research is focused on investigating sustainability and the rapid urbanisation of the global south, specifically investigating the design and masterplanning of proposed “new” cities.

Email: shannon.davis@lincoln.ac.nz

Dr Jacky Bowring is an Associate Professor, School of Landscape Architecture, Lincoln University, New Zealand, and Editor of *Landscape Review*. Her research investigates the intersection between melancholy and memory. She is author of *A Field Guide to Melancholy* (2008). Jacky has been successful in a number of memorial and cemetery design competitions including finalist Pentagon Memorial (2002), a Cavalier Bremworth Award for a memorial for road workers killed in the Otira Gorge (2000), and the Holy Trinity Cathedral Memorial Garden in Auckland (2007).

Email: jacqueline.bowring@lincoln.ac.nz

---

## Marcel Duchamp: “Twisting Memory for the Fun of It” or a Form of Retroactive Interference? — Recalling the Impacts of Leaving Home on the Readymade

Marcus Moore



---

## Marcel Duchamp: “Twisting Memory for the Fun of It” or a Form of Retroactive Interference?—Recalling the Impacts of Leaving Home on the Readymade

Marcus Moore

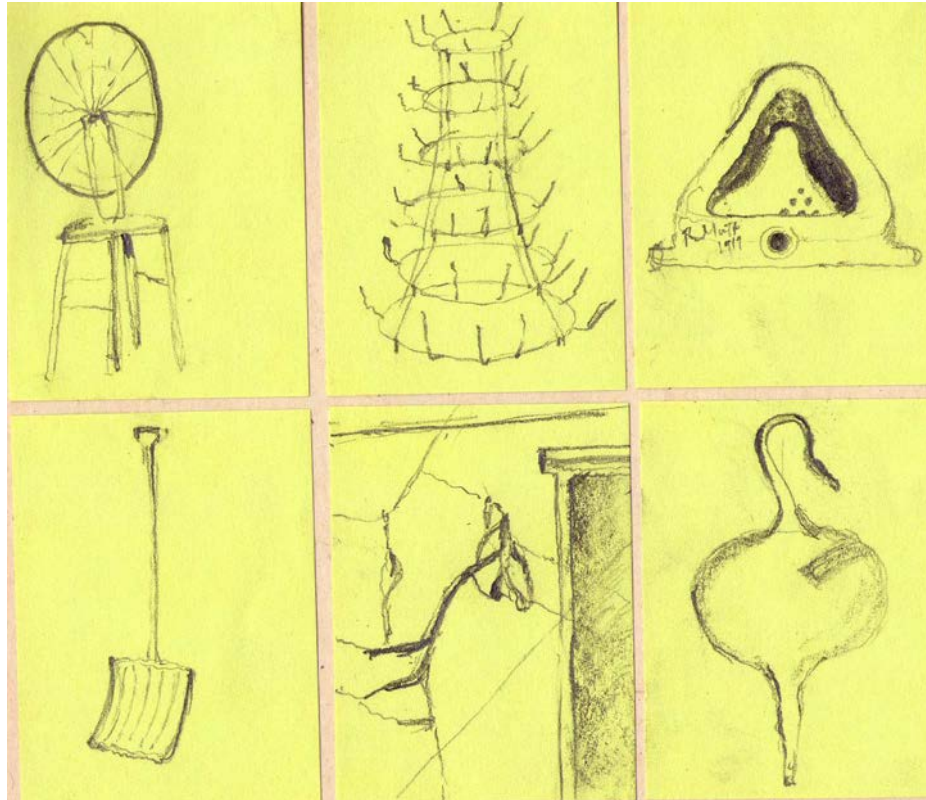
---

### Abstract

In the 1960s, Marcel Duchamp, arguably the most influential artist of the twentieth-century, came into real prominence and unprecedented fame. During this period he gave many interviews in which he often took a capricious stance. One topic was crucial: his comments concerning the origin of readymade works of art—mass-produced everyday objects that he first selected in 1913-1914 in Paris, and then after leaving in 1915 to New York he located other examples. In interviews he referred to the readymade as “a happy idea”,<sup>1</sup> but as material objects they signify and embody Duchamp’s leaving home (T.J. Demos, 2007). When leaving home, an individual works through an acculturation process during which they are never truly settled. This article considers the fate of material objects in relation to the veracity of Duchamp’s memory 50 years after the fact in the 1960s, a time when the artist was also the progenitor of a postmodern position.

Keywords: Marcel Duchamp, readymade, conceptual art, material culture

Figure 1. Esquisses of selected readymades drawn from the author's memory. Clockwise from top left: Bicycle Wheel, Bottle Dryer, Fountain, Paris Air, Sculpture for Travelling, In Advance of the Broken Arm. Pencil on yellow post-it notes, each 50 x 38 mm.



Marcel Duchamp was a new type of modern artist in the twentieth century. His invention of the readymade (souvenirs of the everyday)—*Bicycle Wheel* (1913), *Bottle Rack* (1914), the upturned urinal titled *Fountain* (1917)—were gestures that declared an end to art as humankind had known it. Original versions were thrown away or were returned to domestic use, but despite this loss, their relevance was preserved through other forms (in photographs and replicas) that enabled the legacy of the readymade to become ubiquitous in a history of late twentieth-century art.

T.J. Demos's recent work, *The Exiles of Marcel Duchamp* (2007), has problematised general assertions that the readymade is defined as a mass-produced object selected by an artist and conferred the status of a work of art. He locates different phases of the readymades within the socio-political contexts of their making to assert that these art forms are examples of "aesthetics of homelessness".<sup>2</sup> This is brought about when an artist is displaced from home and in exile. T.J. Demos's concept is an important touchstone for this article which focuses on a number of examples of Duchamp's work to ascertain the implications of his memory of events 50 years after the fact. In these interviews the artist is self-reflexive, eschewing the modernist notion of the primacy of individual authorship.

Two critical moments in the life of Marcel Duchamp need to be introduced; both are departures associated with memory. In 1915 when he went to the new world centre of art, New York, he travelled on board the *SS Rochembeau*. He carried with him artworks and designs that he resumed working on after his

arrival. As the journey got underway, Duchamp wrote a decisive postcard home. He crossed out the image familiar to him on the front of the postcard—the Bordeaux Bridge—deleting it as a referent for remembering home, and added an arrow pointing west “at 1,000 km” to New York and a new life. On the back he wrote: “Je ne peut pas m’apprêter de commencer à apprendre l’anglais de mon petit livre” (“I cannot bring myself to start learning English from my little book”).<sup>3</sup> As the attachment to home is severed, memory of it resides as a trace, both as an attachment to home, yet a separation away from it.

These small but absolutely critical gestures not only acknowledged the act of separation, but also heralded courses of action for future works. The Bordeaux Bridge was familiar to Duchamp, but on 16 June 1915 it went out of view as one of the last man-made structures seen by him before heading north-west, passing the Bay of Biscay, and into the North Atlantic. In six days he would sail past the Statue of Liberty before going through customs and entering the United States.

Twenty-five years later Duchamp would again leave France for New York—at a time when Europe entered a second major conflict. Between 1936 and 1942 he utilised a range of mechanical and artisanal methods to remake 68 of his works in miniature.<sup>4</sup> A number of these included replicas of his original readymades (1913-1921). He put these miniatures in a custom-made case, the *Boîte-en-Valise* (*By or from Marcel Duchamp/Rose Sélavy*), and secured their passage out of occupied France in the domestic luggage of American heiress and art patron, Peggy Guggenheim. Then, with the aid of a passport purporting him to be a cheese merchant, Duchamp found passage through Belgium and followed the secreted suitcase to New York. Once reunited there, he set to work on an edition of 20 originals. The *Boîte-en-Valise* has since been replicated more than 300 times in five editions and dispersed around the world.

These two artefacts—a postcard home and a suitcase containing a portable “museum”—are simultaneously a mnemonic connecting Duchamp (back) to his home and items that signal a degree of control over displacement to another country. They retain connections to a home but their scale belies actual proximity; both are designed for transit and movement (away). Also, the *Boîte-en-Valise* served a critical function in the history of art. By preserving the readymades in a three-dimensional form it helped ensure they were not forgotten.

Here is a curious thing about Marcel Duchamp’s legacy. Recognition of his work did not occur with any substantial momentum between 1913 and 1923 when he first produced the readymades. Their significance emerged after a 50-year delay, from the late 1950s through to the 1970s. During this period, artists and art professionals in galleries and museums began assimilating the significance of his work. In appraising their reception of Marcel Duchamp, the *Boîte* was a material aid to memory because the portable museum overcame physical geographies as well as temporal distance.

In the 1960s, the *Boîte* helped museums come to terms with Duchamp’s delayed influence. For instance, in 1963 when the first retrospective of his work

was staged at the Pasadena Museum of Art, the curator, Walter Hopps, drew directly from the *Boîte-en-Valise* when installing Duchamp's work and took its subtitle as the name for the show: *By or from Marcel Duchamp/Rose Sélavy*. Deferred action—catching up with influences from the past in the present—had the effect of hastening the need to understand events in Duchamp's past. But the veracity of his comments begs the question of historicity.

Enter the 1960s interviews. Historians are cautious in regard to Duchamp's memory of the origin of readymades via his remarks and commentary made in interviews in this decade. Far from a matter of mere record, speaking in this decade about work made 50 years earlier provided Duchamp with a unique opportunity to exploit temporality. This served his philosophical approach to art very well. "There is always a deformation," he remarked in 1967, "a distortion ... you, in spite of yourself, change the story as you saw it, because you have not an exact memory or you want to twist it for the fun of it."<sup>5</sup> Duchamp understood that his biography was not central to understanding his work. He eschewed the modernist position that the author is the key to understanding. Instead his position *became* "postmodern". In 1990 Duchamp scholar, Craig Adcock, observed in his essay, "Duchamp's Way: Twisting our Memory of the Past for the Fun of It":  
*Duchamp makes misinterpretation and misreading part of his meaning ... he adopts history modification as a strategy. Reformation becomes a method of production. He gives the notion of memory—and faulty memory—a philosophical position ... he uses twisted memory on the one hand as a way of keeping interpreters off balance, of avoiding being boxed in.*<sup>6</sup>

In 1960s interviews, he calmly controlled the interview format and would never disagree; believing there was no need to argue. He once stated: "There is no solution because there is no problem."<sup>7</sup> Duchamp did not tell all in a single interview, giving facts out in bite-sized pieces. He would deliberately correct himself across interviews as though laying a trap for interpreters, critics, and commentators. In the same way, one has to work across the range of works in his *œuvre* to arrive at an understanding of his position. One example is sufficient: in no interview in the 1960s did he disclose the fact that he had been working on a large, new artwork for 20 years (1946-1966). This was made in a secret studio that one gained access to through a secret door via a shared bathroom at his apartment on West 14<sup>th</sup> Street, New York. He would look interviewers in the eye and perpetuate the myth of his retirement from art. "Quite simply, I am waiting for death," he once said.<sup>8</sup> Then the year following his death in October 1968, the 20-year project (*Étant Donnés*) was unveiled at the Philadelphia Museum of Art to the incredibility and shock of the art world.

However, did attention directed at Duchamp—a man in his late seventies—give rise in the 1960s to a fate of retroactive interference? This occurs when someone becomes subject to new experience that skews abilities to implement past facts or knowledge. As a term used in psychology it is more than useful to apply to an artist's memory of past events when the artist himself becomes the subject of

attention in popular media.<sup>9</sup> Certainly Duchamp toyed with facts in his past, but the attention placed on him arguably also made it easier to respond with irony than be held account to historical accuracy (such a stance is the postmodern artist's prerogative: to adopt a sceptical view). The relatively newfound experience of aura and fame in the 1960s inflected his replies, arguably altering his capacity to recall from memory and forcing his tongue-in-cheek mythologising of the past.

The relationship memory has to autobiography is a retroactive impulse when writing or speaking about the self. In his seminal essay, "The Autobiographical Pact", Philippe Lejeune defines autobiography as a "retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality".<sup>10</sup> Writing in an era of the "post-self" means the epistemological foundation of the truth of one's self in autobiographical narrative as a credible source of meaning is highly contested. Autobiography is as much character fiction. The historian needs to consider that the Duchamp in the 1960s interviews demonstrates more his character than it reveals historical fact. In a 1965 letter he declared, "I flatly refuse to write an autobiography. It has always been a hobby of mine to object to the written I, I, I's on the part of an artist".<sup>11</sup> For Duchamp meaning was not arrived at through an autonomous expressive individual. He celebrated the polyphony of more than one voice—seen in the invention of aliases such as R. Mutt and Rose Sélavy—the latter name was adopted for his notorious female alter ego, an artist born in 1921. In his influential *Creative Act* lecture (1957) he espoused the role that the audience played in completing the work of art's meaning; and Duchamp knew full well how to exploit the audience in the 1960s as a site of reception.<sup>12</sup>

To talk about the past is to speak back. "Retro" denotes action that is directed backwards or is reciprocal; it is like a hinge backward and yet projects forward. In interviews, Duchamp knew how to "play" the hinge between present and past. He was in a position of authorial power because his invention of the readymade in 1913 remained known at that time only to himself and his sister, Suzanne. Certainly, it is one of the greatest paradoxes in twentieth-century art that arguably the single most influential concept began as an aside. In a 1963 interview with Francis Roberts, Duchamp stated: "In 1914, even 1913, I had in my studio a bicycle wheel turning for no reason at all. Without even knowing whether I should put it with the rest of my works or even call it work."<sup>13</sup>

When interviewed by Pierre Cabanne in 1967 Duchamp stated: "Please note ... when I put a bicycle wheel on a stool, the fork down, there was no idea of readymade, or anything else. It was just a distraction. I didn't have any special reason for doing it, or any intention of showing it, or describing anything. No, nothing at all like that."<sup>14</sup> In a 1968 interview with Calvin Tomkins, the artist described *Bicycle Wheel* as: "Something to have in my room the way you have fire, or a pencil sharpener, except that there was no usefulness. It was a pleasant gadget, pleasant for the movement it gave."<sup>15</sup> His comments when recalling the past need to be treated cautiously, but then wherever the subject of the genesis

of the readymade is concerned we “only” have Duchamp’s word.<sup>16</sup> A letter from Duchamp to Susanne reveals that the term “readymade” did not come to him until later when in New York in 1915.<sup>17</sup> Here, the series of events when leaving Paris in 1915 and arriving in New York are crucial to this narrative. The effects of expatriation and displacement are integral to the readymade as material object, and studying these artefacts illuminates the subject’s responses to passages (geographical, psychological, temporal, and linguistic). As T.J. Demos evokes, Duchamp’s spirit of expatriation serves to recall a subject without a home, and without a fixed place, a fate to which the readymades produced after 1914 equate.

In 1961, when speaking on the subject of being an expatriate, Duchamp commented:

*Perhaps I had the spirit of expatriation, if that’s a word. It was a part of a possibility of my going out in the traditional sense of the word: that is to say from my birth, my childhood, from my habits, my totally French fabrication. The fact that you have been transplanted into something completely new, from the point of view of environment, there is a chance of you blossoming very differently, which is what happened to me.*<sup>18</sup>

T.J. Demos’s extensive reading of the ephemeral readymade *Sculpture for Travelling* (1918) is particularly poignant. He describes it as a turning point as a work that reflects the effects of displacement occurring in Duchamp’s life. Here, memory is inherent in this work’s material form and in the psychology of a subject’s transit. *Sculpture for Travelling* was made from coloured bathing caps cut into various lengths and stretched like lanyards through Duchamp’s New York studio in 1918. The work uses the elasticity of the material which, over time, would programme itself as (sculptural) memory into the readymade object. It survives today only as it is documented in photographs. As the title suggests, it could be packed into his suitcase for travel, as indeed did happen from New York to Buenos Aires in 1918, then in August 1919 on a return trip from New York to Paris.

Furthermore, linguistic play (between French and English) in the earlier readymades of 1915-1916 is also a response to the effects of expatriation; a conversionary force that transformed the physical materiality of a mass-produced object into something more fluid. Through the titles and inscriptions Duchamp gave to selected mass-produced objects when learning the English language in the period 1915-1916, he opened an avenue for other thoughts to inhabit. A specific artwork is rendered more mobile as a direct result of expatriation, because Duchamp is forced to learn English in moving from Paris to New York.

The readymade would appear to encapsulate the unsettling effects of displacement and memory of place. The readymade object is an expression of transition and expatriation. When an object is relocated from one context to another, its identity becomes unfixed in the process—it is not at home when it is made into art, nor is it ever comfortable again when returned to its usual environment. The readymade’s full linguistic conception only occurs as a fate of

expatriation in 1915 when words displace three-dimensional objects. Learning English was a mobile skill—literally learnt on board a trans-Atlantic liner. This triggered Duchamp's decision to give the readymade its first narrative title, *In Advance of the Broken Arm*—a snow shovel from a hardware store became a premonition of an accident (perhaps a slip on the sidewalk when clearing snow). Then in 1916 he inscribed the readymade *Comb* with the precise moment of its selection—"Feb. 17 1916 11 a.m."—thus playing on the legitimacy of an artist's selective sensibility.<sup>19</sup> Duchamp dislocated an object from its accustomed place by choosing to document the moment it is removed or the next moment that can only be anticipated.<sup>20</sup> In both cases, the passage of time is also the means by which the displacement occurs, whereby the inscription memorialises an everyday object as a souvenir of that state.

While not strictly a readymade, Duchamp's 1915 *The* is the result of learning the rules of English grammar upon arrival in New York. *The* is a short one-page text written in October 1915; an asterisk \* replaces the definite article "the" throughout the article. Hence Duchamp's work dislocates the subject: "the" is either spoken or written to define what noun (or noun phrase) the speaker or author refers to. By removing the definite article the person who speaks or writes is implicated by absence (the assuredness of place, the dependence upon memory); the definite article displaced from syntax in the mind of the reader also displaces the person who speaks/writes.

The motivation for Duchamp's earlier readymades in his Paris atelier in 1913 and 1914 was indifferent to such linguistic slippages *because* he was still in place (at home). However, as we know from interviews, even with these there are appreciable degrees of uncertainty. In 1919, this re-emerged when he first returned home and produced a readymade as dysfunctional souvenir (aid to memory). After taking *Sculpture for Travelling* to Buenos Aires, and spending 18 months in the Argentinean capital, on 22 June 1919 he departed on board the *SS Highland Pride*, returning to Paris four years after he had first departed. Symptomatic of the expatriate's first return home, it was a centre with which he no longer identified. This was expressed in a letter he wrote to Walter Pach: "I've been seeing all my friends here one by one. Nobody has changed, they're all still living in the same apartments with the same dust as five years ago."<sup>21</sup> In another letter dated 29 September 1936 to Katherine Dreier, he wrote: "It is a curious thing (again): why I could be so energetic in America and the minute I land in Europe my muscles refuse to function."<sup>22</sup> This comment can be linked directly to *Paris Air* (1919), an assisted readymade; an ampoule emptied of its contents and resealed by a pharmacist with a glass blow torch so as to capture and transport Paris air as a souvenir that he presented as a gift to the Arensbergs.

Was the mothballed air in reference to Duchamp's displeasure at being back in Paris and, consequently, his memories associated with that centre induced lethargy? A clue is in the label that he made and pasted onto the ampoule: "Physiological Serum" is a saline that can be absorbed quickly into the body to

help alleviate dehydrated and tired muscles—"the minute I land in Europe my muscles refuse to function". This was, of course, no assistance to Duchamp's disposition as he had instructed the bottle to be emptied out. With this it is clear that the origins of the readymade in their primary phase (1913-1921) are material objects dependent on his life and movements for their meaning, a topic that stayed the course of Duchamp's life.

Duchamp had so often avoided drawing attention to himself throughout his career, but in the 1960s his hand was forced in the interview chair. Here he toyed with memory, "twisting it" for the "fun of it", because it is not reliable. If compromised by fame to recall accurately from the past, well, with wistful smile he said just enough to keep us (still) holding on.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>First seen in Duchamp's 1951 treatise titled *Apropos of Readymades*. See eds. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson, *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp* (New York: De Capo Press, 1973), 141-42.

<sup>2</sup>See, T.J. Demos, "Duchamp's *Boîte-en-Valise*: Between Institutional Acculturation and Geopolitical Displacement," in *Grey Room* 08 (Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2002): 6-37. Other possible historical influences on Duchamp include seeing examples of collage employed by Picasso, Braque, and other painters of the period 1909-1912, although the philosophical conception of Duchamp's readymade is very different.

<sup>3</sup>Jennifer Gough-Cooper and Jacques Caumon, "Ephemerides," in ed. Pontus Hulten, *Duchamp: Life and Work* (Cambridge Massachusetts and London: MIT Press, 1993), entry for 8 June 1915. Thanks to Dr Patrick Laviolette for his translation from English to French.

<sup>4</sup>Duchamp commented: "Again a new form of expression was involved. Instead of painting something new, my aim was to reproduce the paintings and the objects that I like and collect them in a space as small as possible. I did not know how to go about it. I first thought about a book but did not like the idea. Then it occurred to me that it could be a box in which all my works would be collected and mounted in a small museum, a portable museum so to speak." Quoted in "Duchamp's *Boîte-en-Valise*: Between Institutional Acculturation and Geopolitical Displacement," 13.

<sup>5</sup>Interview with Jeanne Siegal, "Some Late Thoughts of Marcel Duchamp", *Arts Magazine* 43, (December 1968-January 1969): 21-22.

<sup>6</sup>In ed. Thierry de Duve, *The Definitively Unfinished Marcel Duchamp* (Cambridge Massachusetts and London: MIT Press, 1991), 312.

<sup>7</sup>Harriet and Sidney Janis, "Marcel Duchamp: Anti-Artist," *View*, V(1), (March 1945): 24.

<sup>8</sup>"Marcel Duchamp Talking About Readymades," (Interview with Phillipe Collin,



21 June 1967), in ed. Museum Jean Tinguely Basel, *Marcel Duchamp* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2002): 37-40.

<sup>9</sup>Duchamp crossed the North Atlantic on many occasions between 1915 and 1923. In this period he spent six months on each side of the Atlantic because he could only obtain temporary visas to enter the United States.

<sup>10</sup>Trans. Katherine Leary and Philippe Lejeune, "The Autobiographical Pact," in ed. Paul John Eakin, *On Autobiography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 3-30.

<sup>11</sup>Cited by the author in eds. Martha Buskirk and Mignon Nixon, *The Duchamp Effect* (Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996), 104, note 19.

<sup>12</sup>Jennifer Gough-Cooper and Jacques Caumont, "Ephemerides," entry for 28 June 1965.

<sup>13</sup>Quoted in Herbert Molderings, "It Is Not the Objects That Count But the Experiments," in ed. Eckhard Schneider, *Re-Object* (Kunsthau Bregenz, 2007), 152.

<sup>14</sup>Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971), 47.

<sup>15</sup>Rudolf Kuenzli and Francis Naumann eds., *Marcel Duchamp Artist of the Century* (Cambridge Massachusetts and London: MIT Press, 1989), 122, note 11.

<sup>16</sup>Details surrounding the circumstances of Duchamp's first attempt to exhibit examples of the readymades at the Bourgeois Gallery, New York, in 1916 are sketchy at best. The two items were *Traveler's Folding Item* (1916) and *Hat Rack* (1917), positioned near to or behind the entrance door where visitors to the gallery placed their umbrellas and overcoats. Hence, they were inconspicuous and went unregistered.

<sup>17</sup>"15th January, My dear Suzanne, Now if you've been up to my place, you will have seen, in the studio, a bicycle wheel and a bottle rack. I bought this as a readymade sculpture. And I have a plan concerning this so-called bottle rack. Listen to this: here, in N.Y., I have bought various objects in the same taste and I treat them as 'readymades'. You know enough English to understand the meaning of 'readymade' that I give these objects. I sign them and I think of an inscription for them in English ... This long preamble just to say: take this bottle rack for yourself. I'm making it a 'Readymade' remotely." Quoted in Francis Nauman and Hector Obalk, *Affect Marcel: Selected Correspondence of Marcel Duchamp* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000), 43-44.

<sup>18</sup>Jennifer Gough-Cooper and Jacques Caumont, "Ephemerides," entry for 1 January 1961.

<sup>19</sup>Inscription as a means to claim an artwork evolved into full-scale replicas when the lost readymades were remade by artisans in 1964 based on extant photographs of the originals.

<sup>20</sup>David Reed, "The Developing Language of the Readymade," *Art History*, 8(2) (June 1985): 222. Reed writes; "The making of a readymade did not occur when Duchamp chose the comb ... but at the moment of dislocation, when he inscribed it."

<sup>21</sup>Letter to Walter Pach in late August 1919. See Francis Naumann and Hector Obalk, *Affect Marcel*, 89.

<sup>22</sup>Naumann and Obalk, *Affect Marcel*, 211.

## Bibliography

Buskirk, Martha and Mignon Nixon eds., *The Duchamp Effect* (Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996).

Cabanne, Pierre, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971).

de Duve, Thierry ed., *The Definitively Unfinished Marcel Duchamp* (Cambridge Massachusetts and London: MIT Press, 1991).

T.J. Demos, "Duchamp's *Boîte-en-Valise*: Between Institutional Acculturation and Geopolitical Displacement," in *Grey Room* 08 (Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2002).

T.J. Demos, *The Exiles of Marcel Duchamp* (Cambridge Massachusetts and London: MIT Press, 2007).

Eakin, Paul John ed., *On Autobiography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

Harriet and Sidney Janis, "Marcel Duchamp: Anti-Artist," *View* 1 (March 1945).

Hulten, Pontus ed., *Duchamp: Life and Work*, (Cambridge Massachusetts and London: MIT Press, 1993).

Kuenzli, Rudolf and Francis Naumann eds., *Marcel Duchamp Artist of the Century* (Cambridge Massachusetts and London: MIT Press, 1989).

Museum Jean Tinguely Basel ed., *Marcel Duchamp* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2002).

Naumann, Francis and Hector Obalk, *Affect Marcel: Selected Correspondence of Marcel Duchamp* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000).

Reed, David, "The Developing Language of the Readymade," *Art History*, 8(2) (June 1985).

Sanouillet, Michel and Elmer Peterson eds., *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp* (New York: De Capo Press, 1973).

Schneider, Eckhard ed., *Re-Object* (Kunsthau Bregenz, 2007).

Siegal, Jeanne, "Some Late Thoughts of Marcel Duchamp," *Arts Magazine* 43 (December 1968-January 1969).

### Biographical note

Marcus Moore is an academic in the fields of art history, visual culture studies, visual histories, and theory. He currently lectures in visual culture and material culture, and in critical studies, at the College of Creative Arts, Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand. He has researched two "lost" histories of Duchamp's work that came to New Zealand in 1967 and 1982. He is developing an exhibition and publication that accounts for Duchamp's reception in New Zealand and considers how Duchamp's actions in his life and work allow for a re-examination of the power of the centre and its relationship to the periphery (and vice versa). This was the topic of his PhD in Art History.

Email: [M.T.Moore@massey.ac.nz](mailto:M.T.Moore@massey.ac.nz)

---

# Lost and Found Within New Media Design

Tanya Marriott

---

## Lost and Found Within New Media Design

Tanya Marriott

---

### Abstract

The new museum is interactive; it entertains and informs the public about the past and thus connects museum visitors with heritage and history. New-media (or digital) interactive installations are not new to the museological environment. Simulated scenarios, aimed at educating children, have long been implemented in museum learning zones. With digital technology now a part of our everyday interactions, museum visitors of all ages are seeking the same level of immersion from their museum installations. New-media technology has afforded a substantial development to the way museums attribute memory testimony to collections of tangible artefacts. The digital environment enables a multi-layered platform for memory testimony exploration, which connects contextually displaced artefacts to environments, individuals, and society. Modern museums now have the difficult task of reviewing their archives and translating the rich history of this material through an interactive narrative. The successful employment of new-media technology is therefore an ever-evolving paradigm, with some museums implementing it more effectively than others. This article focuses on how new-media technology is currently implemented within museum exhibition design. It examines three projects currently installed within a museum context from the perspective of experience design generation practice and user-driven interactive development. The discussion seeks to identify good practice and formulate key areas in which to engage the audience through the development of new-media design.

Keywords: digital media, new-media technology, museum, interactive installations, augmentation, storytelling, memory media

This article will discuss the different ways that memory testimony is preserved and displayed within a museum context through a digital experiential discourse. First, it will describe what elements make for a good memory experience, and the problems encountered within a digital experience system. It will then discuss the differing levels of successful design implementation through a case study analysis of three interactive interfaces: (1) *Lifeline* at the Churchill Museum in London; (2) *Ourspace* at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa; and (3) *Storytelling Memories*, the author's own work, created in completion of a Master of Design.<sup>1,2,3</sup>

### The new museum

Museum exhibition design is in a state of change as visitors are seeking a more interactive and engaging experience with museum content. In response to this visitor museum experience, museum exhibition designers have implemented elements of new-media technology with varying effects. Museums have traditionally been repositories of collection and cultural preservation; large collections of artefacts and sorties, which cannot all be displayed at the same time due to their scale and quantity. The implementation of new-media technology has the potential to make available to the public vast quantities of content, enable them to view work not currently on display, and provide a more in-depth narrative into the history behind the artefact.

Another element of change is the desire from the public to be educated and entertained (or “edutainment”). This has created a new role and purpose for the museum: one of entertainment, engagement, and education. The application of new-media technology is not without problems. Edutainment is prone to be implemented to the detriment of the discourse of the actual memory in any depth. Technology itself is often implemented inadequately, relying on the interactive “magic” that new-media proclaims, rather than looking at situations where it can be seamlessly integrated into exhibition systems that extend meaningful narratives and display.

### The importance of memory

A museum is a “house of memories”, and these memories exist within every object and collection. They are what give each object a purpose and context within the display and are manifest in many forms (such as oral, physical, and sensory). However, it is still unclear as to how memories are best presented. The method of recording of memories through oral history programmes can inhibit flexibility in the way memory is displayed, due to the risk that descriptions can be portrayed out of context from the original meaning intended by the interviewee.

Many artefacts retained by museums do not contain “explicit memory” and therefore any narrative is implied based on association when displayed. There

is also a risk that, with the sheer number of artefacts collected and stored by museums, some objects are removed in favour of those with more depth of memory testimony and personal connection.

*A museum may record a woman in her home or kitchen, but not her other lives, say as Friday night dancer, or bingo player, or cashier or daughter, or closet Tory, or lay preacher.*<sup>4</sup>

New-media design has the capacity to maintain large databases of objects and associated memory—easily catalogued and accessed by visitors. For example, the Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver recently photographed and made available online their entire collection of indigenous artefacts.<sup>5</sup> Although the visitor can now experience each object, the scope of the database does not provide much depth of memory context behind each submission. Providing access for the visitor to more objects does not necessarily give a stronger picture of the memory testimony of each object. The narratives still need to be curated and formatted in order to create a meaningful experience for visitors.

### What is a memory and what is an experience?

The overriding theme within the development of new museum installations is to create “experiences” and new-media technology provides a flexible and expansive format to recreate “worlds” behind any artefact. However, it is important not to confuse memory with experience. Memory is a witness of a previous experience, prompted by sensory recollection to recreate a scene personal to the remembered. Memories can be passed on and rebuilt from previous memories, but the important factor is that they have a personal connection and are built on the narrative of a personal experience. The sensation of creating a memory is the experience.

Experiences in a new-media context are also a fabrication, but rather than focusing on looking back, experience design is about projecting forwards, providing context for people to immerse themselves within (rather than be receptacles of) reflection and contemplation. If I experience something it is my memory; if I package it for you and tell you about this memory from my perspective, it becomes an experience for you. If the experience generation becomes too much the dominant force, then the visitor just witnesses the experience without any remnant of the original memory.

Modern museums want to engage their visitors, enlighten them, and give them something to take home. However, there is a real risk that if designers focus too much on the creation of the “experience”, they miss the opportunity to exhibit the original experience (and therefore the original memory). It is within this translation that the meaning behind the memory becomes lost and potentially overwhelmed by the experience.

## Usability for all ages

New-media technology in the form of touch screen interactives and digital games has been implemented over the past 10 years within a museum environment, in particular within children’s educational sections. The use of technology such as touch screens, augmented reality, and video games has been regarded as more relevant to younger target groups and for aspects of exhibition design that may not require accurate credibility and seriousness. For example, there is an interactive kiosk within the Te Papa *Passports* exhibition which narrates through a game context how migrants were accepted into New Zealand.<sup>5</sup> The data is factual without reference to personal memories, but has the potential to be enriched with personal testimony. The visual language of the interface and step-by-step navigation enables visitors to gain a valuable insight into migrant culture. However, the interface is targeted towards children, and adults who seek a more mature discourse could disregard its validity as a tool of experience for all ages.

Usability for all ages is a very pertinent issue; younger audiences adapt easily to different forms of interaction, but older generations are also keen to explore new systems. However, modes of activation (from graphic icons to animated reactive content) can still baffle many visitors who do not understand new-media forms of navigation. This can cause visitors to feel marginalised and unable to access the exhibition. Even the use of a mouse to control a computer screen interface can be unintuitive for some visitors. In contrast, other users may become bored if they already have familiarity with more advanced forms of technology.

## The rules for a good experience

According to Nathan Shedroff, a leading researcher in “experience design”:  
*Media has always facilitated the telling of stories and the creation of experiences, but new media technology offers capabilities and opportunities not yet addressed in the history of interaction and performance. ... There are also few sources of information about these issues and the techniques used to meet them. This is new territory that is desperate for some new ideas and convincing explanations. It is also the most critical component to the success of interactive products and experience generation.*<sup>6</sup>

Digital experience design is not really any different in the way that a museum wants to target an audience to any other form of installation design. However, it is a fine line between implementing new-media design effectively, and allowing the media to overshadow the narrative and make an experience out of the technology alone. Another issue with new-media experience systems, as discussed by Carl Carliner in *Sensing Architecture*, is that “as museums attract a large number of diverse visitors, the technological components are not ‘one-size-fits-all’”.<sup>7</sup> This makes the technology difficult to manage by a percentage of visitors unless the



mode of interaction is intuitive. Visitors need to understand how to manipulate the tools they are given.

Another issue surrounds the content itself. It is not enough simply to add content into a database; the artefacts need context, a visual or literal descriptor to give them placement and meaning. Nathan describes data or content as fairly worthless in an experience generation scenario. To give the data any meaning it needs to be “organized, transformed, and presented in a way that gives it meaning”.<sup>8</sup>

In a positive light, new-media interfaces can provide live feedback to the visitor with real-time reactions. For example, when visitors search through files within the Churchill *Lifeline* installation at the Churchill Museum (held in the Cabinet War Rooms in the United Kingdom), the folders automatically open for viewing. New-media can also recreate scenarios long past; Maya Zack’s *Living Room* installation in the Jewish Museum in New York uses digital modelling to recreate a 1930s apartment in Berlin at the time the family fled.<sup>9</sup>

There is a formula to effective experience design, but as the subject is in its infancy, it is not a definitive solution to creating meaningful installations. However, there are several pointers that resonate amongst the research of experience designers. Carliner has summarised several elements pertinent to good new-media application within exhibition design.<sup>10</sup> He suggests that data or “memories” should be presented in a modular form, under an umbrella thematic that ties the shorter elements of narrative together. Data needs to be layered in a hierarchical manner so that the information can be “skimmed” and accessed in differing levels of immersion. The manner in which memories are displayed needs to be engaging and “capture curiosity” so as to encourage visitors to delve deeper to learn more. The technology used needs to be seamlessly “integrated into the exhibition language, so the visitor experiences the exhibit rather than simply a manner of dissemination”.

The development of the Virtual Museum of the Collective Memory of Lombardia (MUVI) project also suggests ways to best implement memory within a new-media design context. Elisa Giaccardi states that within the project there is the suggestion of “interconnection”. This means that the new-media technology has the ability to connect artefacts and memory in innovative ways to “virtually rebuild collections scattered around the world, organize exhibitions that last forever, produce virtual restorations and reconstructions, and have access to specialized information”.<sup>11</sup>

This element of interconnectedness enables the modern museum to transcend physical boundaries of what is able to be exhibited and facilitate virtual representations of memory and objects, both within and without the museum itself. Giaccardi describes “iridescence” as a dominant factor—as a perception of how we “see” an object or a memory and how that object might be “seen” by different visitors. Iridescence in a digital context translates to the ability to have multiple narratives to describe each artefact or memory personal to the witness.

To end this analysis of emergent new-media technique, it is proposed that the following diagram frames the key elements in developing a meaningful memory experience. These factors will be used to discuss the three case studies below.

Figure 1. An analysis and summary of the key points towards the implementation of good experience design within museum memory display.

<b>Context</b>	<i>There needs to be a believable space for the memories to inhabit.</i>
<b>Hierarchy</b>	<i>Memories need to be presented in varying levels of depth to engage all visitors.</i>
<b>Feedback</b>	<i>The interaction needs to have a timely response to the user.</i>
<b>Navigation</b>	<i>The user needs to be able to find their way intuitively through the system-Non-linear Navigation (Storytelling Navigation)</i>
<b>Tangible</b>	<i>The ability to touch and respond to the artefact.</i>
<b>Iridescence</b>	<i>Empowering the relationship between visitors and the experience, beyond the experience.</i>

### Case study analysis

#### *'Lifeline' at the Churchill Museum*

Exhibition designers, Casson Mann, developed *Lifeline*, a 15-metre long reactive table documenting the life of Winston Churchill for the Churchill Museum in London. The surrounding exhibition space shows his life through artefacts that frame the table. The *Lifeline* table places Churchill's milestones alongside world events, each contained within a folder in a large filing cabinet projected onto the table surface.

Figure 2. The author at the Lifeline installation at the Churchill Museum, Cabinet War Rooms, U.K.



Mann argues the need to create a believable space for the memories to inhabit. A visual language was developed which he describes as “a virtual analogue recalling a pre-digital age dominated by paperwork, filing cabinets, folders, maps, telephones, and busy working desks—the stuff of Churchill’s life”. The interactive elements of the interface were readily interpretable by visitors and gave a real sense of physically engaging with someone’s personal files.

The tactile form of interaction with the interface enables a close relationship for the visitors with the real world it synthesises, and also allows digital copies of sensitive documents and memoirs to be displayed without fear of degrading the originals through handling. As Mann notes, there are: “Folders and letters that you open almost by sliding the paper around, so you’re doing a virtual version of what is instinctively a real thing to do.”<sup>12</sup>

The memories needed to be presented in varying depths to accommodate the cursory view of some visitors and a more immersive enquiry of others. Mann describes: “The first challenge was to display a selection of archival material from an archive of over one million documents.” The table provided a non-linear narrative of interaction with no pre-described route of discovery. Visitors could start at any stage of the 15-metre long table. The memories were broken into many small segments, easily navigated, which are juxtaposed with factoids regarding historical chronology.

The iridescent nature of the exhibition exists through the system of weaving Churchill’s personal memoirs with historical facts. *Lifeline* responds to the visitor in unexpected and immersive ways; if you open a file at the date when the *Titanic* sunk, the entire table interface sinks beneath a tide of water which disrupts the files of all visitors (giving a sense of overarching circumstances which affect all people). However, some of the content of the files lacks a depth of content beyond short text snippets and images, and this is an area of immersion into moving imagery and interactive content that the table would have benefitted from.

Visitors can experience something of Churchill’s world, even if they focus on the historical facts rather than his personal memoirs. The exhibition still leaves the visitor with an impression that he lived through a dynamic and eventful time period.

### *Ourspace at Te Papa Tongarewa*

The *Ourspace* installation at Te Papa is designed to collect, preserve, and discuss the collective memory of New Zealand as a nation. The installation consists of an 18-metre long screen mapping this country’s geography within the floor. The surrounding walls play associated still and moving imagery. A digital wall accompanies the interactive map where visitors are invited to “collage” their own memories and stories from a continuous database of heavily mediated images and videos. *Ourspace* is an ambitious project, which does not necessarily achieve good experience design.

Context is an element that has been largely left up to the visitor to form around their experience with the content, but it could be argued that the visitor requires a certain level of context in order to understand the elements which they are witnessing. The image wall offers no explanation as to what the images are and why they have meaning. However, as the images are applied simply as memory triggers, they have potential to enable the visitors to recreate constructed memory and simulate experience.

There is little hierarchy within the composition of the context, as all elements are treated with equal merit. Visitors have the opportunity to format images and video on the “wall” within their own hierarchy. Standing on reactive grids located on the “map” floor activates geographically located images and videos located in the walls.

Although the interactive map is reactive to pressure, the response to visitor activation lacks timely reaction, with feedback making the visitor often question what is supposed to happen when they stand on the map. Equally, when the visitor selects images to display on the wall, they are often displayed with other visitors’ images making formatting and compositing each one’s selected memories difficult. There is also a sense of control and extension given to the visitor (or iridescence), as they become the creator and curator of their own personal memories developed from the gathered media, albeit heavily mediated by the choice of available material and interface function.

Figure 3. Visitors interacting with ‘The Map’ at the Ourspace installation, Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington, New Zealand.



Tangible wand controllers enable visitors to (both digitally and in real time) leave their mark on the wall and compile media with a sense of magic only achieved through the use of wireless controllers. However, the exhibition technology tends to dominate the experience, making playing with the controllers and “tagging” the wall more interesting than the building of memories. This caused one visitor to ask: “Why does the media have to be the message?”<sup>13</sup>

*Storytelling Memories: A tangible connection to Bomber Command veterans*

*Storytelling Memories* is a prototype the author developed for a system of memory display in a museum context focusing specifically on building a closer understanding and empathy with World War II Bomber Command veterans. The brief was to explore systems of memory location within visualisations of context, and how this form of display can enhance and substantiate memory. Although still in a prototype stage, *Storytelling Memories* seeks to implement a good level of experiential design within its development. The memories of each veteran are located within an individual tangible memory box which the visitor can handle. The box itself is the controller for the interface; when the visitor places the cube on the table, associated memories are displayed on the table-top, triggered by whichever time period has been activated.

Each of the cube's six sides relates to a particular time within the veterans' lives (such as from childhood to old age). The interface reflects the symbolism of sitting at the family table laying out photos and memorabilia on its surface. The associated memories are displayed within a visual representation of the locative context: the squadron base or their aircraft designation. These veteran-specific memories are provided further context through their representative association to existing museum archives and artefacts.

Figure 4. Visitors at Massey University interacting with the Storytelling Memories interface.



Users navigate digital artefacts, accompanied by short audio recordings displayed within a non-linear narrative to build a larger picture from the smaller stories. The interface can be accessed at any time from any entry point. Memories and data are located within a three-tiered hierarchy consisting of memories personal to the veteran having prominence to the visitor, through to locative memories about places and events, to impersonal facts regarding technical information.

The interface needs to be activated by the cube and reacts instantly to its placement, giving the visitor a sense of physical control and feedback to their actions. Further interaction is gained through navigating the touch screen, where users can magnify digital representations of photos and objects, while also associating the artefacts with a digital representation of the physical space they inhabited, similar to the project by Maya Zack described earlier. The combination of memory recollection and locative spatial representation helps to invite the visitor into the experience, providing an equal balance between memory and construction, with the opportunity for them to make an informed and meaningful exploration.

## Conclusion

New-media design is fast being implemented within the modern museum to meet the expectations of a technologically advanced and socially aware public. However, although there are several emergent theories as to how this technology can facilitate good memory discourse within museum exhibitions, there are still no clear guidelines about best practice.

Objects, which formally existed with a brief descriptor denoting their status, are now redundant in favour of a more expansive and experiential narrative. Now museums are seeking to build memory around existing collections through an association to a human existence, and are adapting their collection processes to accommodate this new kind of experience. New-media technology offers opportunities to present a wider context and experience around the object. However, this context still needs to be fabricated, curated, and designed, both in appreciation of content and authenticity of how the visitor experiences these artefacts.

This article suggests several key elements to creating a lasting memory experience. Hierarchy and navigation are crucial factors in terms of enabling information that is easily accessed by the public, especially when new-media installations can and want to contain vast quantities of data. The *Lifeline* and *Storytelling Memories* installations each draw on existing analogue systems of containment (the filing cabinet and the memory box) that provide the visitor with known modes of interaction. However, both interfaces tend to play it safe through reconstruction of reality and familiarity rather than provide an innovative form of interface. *Ourspace*, in contrast, did consider new forms of artefact interaction, with the implementation of the interactive wall and giving the role of hierarchy

to the visitor. However, the user often found that the technology becomes more meaningful than the memory itself.

All case studies provided a relative context for memory. However, in a new-media exhibition, context is irrelevant if there is no audible feedback to the visitor's exploration. It is this timely feedback that encourages the visitor to keep exploring the interface. The final element of iridescence is harder to address, and comes from a personal exploration of the memories and how they draw in and relate to the visitor. *Ourspace*, with its open-ended hierarchy of object exploration, gives the most opportunity for iridescence as it provides the tools for the visitor to construct their own meaning from the palate of memories.

The overarching consideration to the implementation of new-media technology is the technology itself. It is not a “one size for all” function, and has the potential to dominate the memory portrayal and undermine the exhibition intention. In this transition, new-media technology is simply just another set of tools in the hands of the curator and designer, but the intent is still the same. It is important to understand the potential for this new set of tools, how the visitor wants to interact with memory artefacts, and what level of meaning and experience the exhibition designer can evoke within an installation, in order to create a memorable experience.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>“The Lifeline, Churchill Museum, Cabinet War Rooms,” Casson Mann, accessed October 14, 2010, <http://www.cassonmann.co.uk/museums/churchill-museum>

<sup>2</sup>“Ourspace, Te Papa Tongarewa,” Te Papa Tongarewa, accessed October 14, 2010, <http://tepapa.govt.nz/WhatsOn/exhibitions/Pages/OurSpace.aspx>

<sup>3</sup>“Storytelling Memories: A Tangible Connection to Bomber Command Veterans,” accessed September 11, 2010, <http://mro.massey.ac.nz/handle/10179/1045>

<sup>4</sup>G. Kavanagh, “Collecting From the Era of Memory, Myth and Delusion” in ed. S.J. Knell, *Museums and the Future of Collecting* (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2004), 266.

<sup>5</sup>“The Vancouver Museum of Anthropology,” accessed September 12, 2010, <http://collection-online.moa.ubc.ca/>

<sup>6</sup>“Passports, Te Papa Tongarewa,” Te Papa Tongarewa, accessed October 14, 2010, <http://tepapa.govt.nz/WhatsOn/exhibitions/Pages/Passports.aspx>

<sup>7</sup>“Applying Virtual Reality to Museums,” *Sensing Architecture*, accessed October 24, 2010, <http://sensingarchitecture.com/568/applying-virtual-reality-to-museum-exhibits/>

<sup>8</sup>N. Shedroff, “Information Interaction Design: A Unified Theory of Design,” in *Information Design*, eds. R.E Jacobson and R. Jacobson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), 269.

<sup>9</sup>“Living Room,” Maya Zack, Jewish Museum, New York, US, accessed September 24, 2011, <http://www.thejewishmuseum.org/exhibitions/zack2011>

<sup>10</sup>“Top 10 Tips to Great Museum Exhibit Design,” accessed October 24, 2010, <http://sensingarchitecture.com/1713/top-10-tips-to-great-museum-exhibit-design/>

<sup>11</sup>E. Giaccardi, “Collective Storytelling and Social Creativity in the Virtual Museum,” *Design Issues* 22(3), (2006): 29-41.

<sup>12</sup>“The Making of the Churchill Museum,” Casson Mann, accessed October 14, 2010, <http://www.cassonmann.co.uk/publications/making-the-churchill-museum.>

## Bibliography

Ashplant, T.G, Dawson, Graham and Roper, Michael, “The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration,” in eds. Ashplant, T.G, Dawson, Graham and Roper, Michael, *Routledge Studies in Memory and Narrative* (Vol 7), (London, U.K.: Routledge, 2000).

Crane, Susan A, *Museums and Memory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000.)

Giaccardi, Elisa, “Collective Storytelling and Social Creativity in the Virtual Museum,” in *Design Issues (MIT Press Journals)* 22(3), (2006): 29-41.

Haywood, Naomi and Cairns, Paul, “Engagement With an Interactive Museum Exhibit,” in eds. Tom McEwan, Jan Gulliksen and David Benyon, *People and Computers XIX: The Bigger Picture: Proceedings of HCI 2005* (Gateshead, U.K.: Springer, 2006) 113-30.

Henning, Michelle. “Museums, Media and Cultural Theory,” in *Issues in Cultural and Media Studies* (New York, US: McGraw-Hill International, 2006)

Kavanagh, Gaynor, “Collecting From the Era of Memory, Myth and Delusion,” in ed. S.J. Knell, *Museums and the Future of Collecting* (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2004), 266.

Kavanagh, Gaynor, *Dreamspaces: Memory and the Museum* (New York, US: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2000).

Nash, Christopher John, “Interactive Media in Museums: Looking Backwards, Forwards and Sideways,” in *Museum Management and Curatorship* 11(2), (1992): 171-84.

Shedroff, Nathan, “Information Interaction Design: A Unified Theory of Design,” in *Information Design*, eds. R.E Jacobson and R. Jacobson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), 269.

Stier, Oren, *Committed to Memory* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009).



### Biographical note

Tanya Marriott is a Digital Media lecturer from the Institute of Communication Design at Massey University in Wellington, New Zealand. Her recent Masters thesis focused on developing innovative ways to access museum artefact archives within an interactive and immersive context. *Storytelling Memories* formulated a platform of inquiry into an innovative way to access digital archives through tangible and contextual navigation. The project resulted in a functioning prototype, which has opened further opportunities for research and development regarding memory collection and presentation within a museum environment. Her other research interests also focus on similar topics surrounding the development of personal understanding and empathy through immersive narrative and character identity. Building on from an ecological artist residency at a closed wildlife reserve on Maud Island, this research suggests ways character development and subsequent narrative through animation can educate social awareness of environmental issues, and enable a more holistic view of native wildlife.

Email: [T.Marriott@massey.ac.nz](mailto:T.Marriott@massey.ac.nz)

8.

---

## RECOVERED MEMORY

---

## When Mad Men Pitches Feminism: Popular Education and Historical Witnessing Through DVD Special Features

Mary Celeste Kearney

---

## When *Mad Men* Pitches Feminism: Popular Education and Historical Witnessing Through DVD Special Features

Mary Celeste Kearney

---

### Abstract

This article analyses *Birth of an Independent Woman*, a 2009 documentary about the U.S. women's liberation movement. An archive of feminist memories produced for mainstream audiences largely ignorant of this past, the film's social, political, and cultural significance is complicated. On the one hand, this documentary's ability to inspire critical consciousness is potentially compromised by its corporate production as well as its distribution on one of *Mad Men*'s DVD boxed sets. On the other, it may signal an emergent form of popular culture that upsets traditional notions of both commercial entertainment and alternative media, not to mention historiography. Drawing on viewers' investments in this popular television series to build knowledge about women's history, gender oppression, and feminist activism, this documentary deserves critical consideration for its potential to facilitate ethical reception that contributes to progressive public memory and social change.

Keywords: active witnessing, DVD special features, feminist documentary, *Mad Men*, performative historiography

*The act of correcting the visual record carries certain expectations about what the past can teach us and how this learning will most appropriately take place. While many agree that we have to attend to knowledge of the past and historical trauma, there are many views on how and why we should proceed.* Kyo Maclear<sup>1</sup>

This article focuses critical attention on an ancillary product associated with *Mad Men*, a U.S. dramatic series that is heading into its fifth season on AMC (American Movie Classics) at the time of this writing. Exploring transformations in the American advertising industry in the 1960s, the show's primary plot concerns the emotional development of its protagonist, advertising executive Don Draper (Jon Hamm). *Mad Men's* stories move well beyond Madison Avenue, however, touching on many other aspects of U.S. society during the Cold War including politics, popular culture, and domestic relations. Given its content, as well as the production company's extensive efforts at \, the drama has inspired considerable discussion both inside and outside the academy about its representations of the past.<sup>2</sup>

Released in July 2009, *Mad Men's* Season Two DVD set gives viewers the option of watching three special features that provide some historical backdrop for the series. One is titled *Birth of an Independent Woman*.

Figure 1. *Mad Men's* Season Two DVD Special Features. Lionsgate. 2009.



Given its title, those who have not seen this extra, but are familiar with *Mad Men*, might think that the “independent woman” to which it refers is Betty, or Joan, or Peggy, the programme’s main female characters. In some ways, such viewers would be correct. Each of these characters becomes increasingly agential over the course of *Mad Men's* second season, and *Birth of an Independent Woman* includes clips demonstrating their development. Nevertheless, this DVD extra is about much more than that.

Produced by Cicely Gilkey (*Mad Men's* DVD Content Producer) for Lionsgate (the series’ production house) at the suggestion of Matthew Weiner (Creator and Executive Producer),<sup>3</sup> *Birth of an Independent Woman* is a two-part, 40-minute documentary that explores the rise of the U.S. women’s liberation movement.<sup>4</sup> The first half, entitled “The Problem”, takes viewers back to post-World War II

America to examine women's frustrations with the suburban housewife ideal and the resurgence of traditional gender norms. The second half, "Independence", continues this presentation of feminism's revival by exploring various socio-cultural transformations that contributed to women's increased agency and public presence in the 1960s.

Although this history is well known to anyone who participated in, or has studied, the women's liberation movement, the material presented in this documentary is not part of most people's knowledge about 1960s America (including most U.S. citizens). Based on surveys of popular history textbooks, this movement was a subject largely avoided in many U.S. history classes before the turn of the twenty-first century.<sup>5</sup>

While the primary function of this DVD extra is to promote *Mad Men* and extend its economic value beyond its broadcast airings, we do well to consider the possible effects *Birth of an Independent Woman* might have, not only on viewers' reception of the series, but more broadly on popular memory of feminist history and knowledge about gender oppression. After all, this documentary is now available to all those who rent, purchase, and borrow *Mad Men's* Season Two DVD set—a figure that will likely reach a few million internationally.<sup>6</sup> Its availability online is sure to increase and expand viewership even further.<sup>7</sup> Not everyone who rents or buys this DVD set will watch this special feature, yet it remains significant in that its distribution (and therefore its potential audience) far exceeds that of most independently released feminist documentaries.

Those individuals intrigued by this phenomenon either know something about the conventions of DVD special features or are familiar with the gender politics of documentary film-making, two of the larger frames through which we might understand *Birth of an Independent Woman's* cultural significance. First, the supplemental material on DVDs is usually comprised of deleted scenes, interviews with producers and cast members, or "behind the scenes" production footage. Reconfiguring such conventions, some recent DVD sets for "quality" television dramas include special features that help viewers understand the finer details of a show's diegesis, such as the science of forensics for *CSI* fans.

These extras, which combine clips from the fictional series with footage of real life experts, function in the liminal space of "edutainment"—informative footnotes for media texts designed to amuse. Not surprisingly, documentaries about political movements are rarely included in such boxed sets. Indeed, *Birth of an Independent Woman* may well be the first.<sup>8</sup>

Second, despite the increased popularity and commercial success of documentary films in the U.S. since *Fahrenheit 9/11's* release in 2004, feminist documentaries have not played much of a role in this trend. This is because directors must often overcome not only political conservatism, but also sexism, to get their work distributed broadly.<sup>9</sup> *Born into Brothels* is one of the very few contemporary feminist documentaries to get widespread theatrical distribution, although its US\$3.5 million in receipts seems rather paltry compared to *Fahrenheit's* US\$119 million.<sup>10</sup> Such contextual factors suggest that *Birth of an Independent Woman* is an extreme rarity in contemporary U.S. media culture.

Indeed, its inclusion in a popular TV show's DVD release up-ends conventional notions of marketing and commercial entertainment, as well as documentary and historiography.

DVD special features always serve an economic function; extending viewers' interest in and loyalty to the original text. This increases its commercial value for the production company and, in the case of broadcasting, the television network and advertisers. Yet an analysis focused solely on political economy would obscure the complexity of socio-cultural significance on some DVD extras, particularly those that fall into the edutainment category.

In addition to extending Kyo Maclear's theory of historical witnessing to media reception, this article expands on Alison Trope's theory of DVD special features as potential "form[s] of popular education" and the possible pedagogic functions of *Mad Men's* DVD extras.<sup>11</sup> Trope's interest is in how such features can facilitate a kind of "do-it-yourself" course in film studies by familiarising viewers with the practices of film-making and formal analysis. My concern is how such extras might impact viewers' knowledge of the political issues and broader socio-historical context referenced in the narrative texts with which they are affiliated.

This history-based pedagogic function of DVD extras is made somewhat explicit in the boxed sets for *Mad Men*, a series well known for its attempts to provide historically accurate representations of U.S. society in the 1960s. Each of the DVD sets for this series includes documentary features that, like sidebars, offer further information on the social, cultural, and political history related to the series' diegesis, from the post-war rise of the divorce rate to the 1963 March on Washington.<sup>12</sup> Despite being an oddity in DVD culture, *Birth of an Independent Woman* is therefore no anomaly within the universe of ancillary products for the *Mad Men* series.

Since *Mad Men*—like other "quality" television dramas—attempts to attract what Ron Becker labels the "slumpy" audience (18 to 49-year-old socially liberal, urban-minded professionals), the educational perspective of the DVD extras produced for this series is not surprising. Most of the special features cover subjects rarely addressed in educational institutions or by those who are not socially liberal. Thus, such features potentially serve a broader socio-political function than most DVD edutainment extras. How then might *Mad Men's* extras serve as both containers and facilitators of critical consciousness and progressive public memory, and what is at stake in these practices?

With these questions in mind, this article analyses how *Birth of an Independent Woman* constructs its histories of post-war gender oppression and feminist activism. I consider the impact that watching this documentary might have on viewers' knowledge of the past, not to mention their critical understanding of, and ethical responses to, the present. I also explore this film's potential signalling of an emergent form of popular culture that upsets not only traditional notions of commercial entertainment and alternative media, but also those of historiography. In doing so, *Birth of an Independent Woman* offers a partial response to the question posed in this article's epigraph about how the record of traumatic histories might be corrected.

## Form

Adhering to many of the conventions of expository documentary delineated by Bill Nichols, *Birth of an Independent Woman* uses archival footage, photographs, and sound recordings of feminist marches and other significant events to recount the rise of the women's liberation movement.<sup>13</sup> The film also includes relevant imagery from Cold War American culture, including advertisements directed towards housewives and promotional shots of popular television shows, such as *Father Knows Best*. Yet *Birth of an Independent Woman* also veers from these documentary conventions in several ways. For instance, much in keeping with the practices of progressive historiography, it avoids constructing a “great men”—or in this case “great women”—narrative of this collective past.

The document also has no voice-over narration, so does not present a uniform historical perspective. Instead, it relies on commentary from six contemporary experts whose age, race, gender, and professional expertise result in multiple, partial, perspectives on this topic: Emily Bazelon, an editor of *Slate.com*; Diana York Blaine, who teaches writing and gender studies at the University of Southern California; Ellen Dubois, professor of women's history at the University of California, Los Angeles; Marcelle Karp, a writer and co-founder of *Bust* magazine; Michael Kimmel, professor of sociology at the State University of New York, Stonybrook; and Michele Wallace, professor of English at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, as well as founding member of the National Black Feminist Organization.

Further complicating any monolithic construction of feminist history, not to mention the conventions of expository documentary, *Birth of an Independent Woman* also incorporates clips from *Mad Men*, re-cutting the series to produce a different narrative of 1960s America where this time women dominate the screen. There is no doubt that such clips are primarily included to promote *Mad Men* and to increase Lionsgate's and AMC's profits. Moreover, they compromise the film's documentary credentials. Yet these narrative bits also construct something along the lines of an “aca-fan vid”, having been poached from the series and repurposed as historical material.<sup>14</sup> Supplementing expert discourse, yet substituting for oral history, these *Mad Men* clips offer evocative displays of women's intimate experiences of gender oppression, which are rarely articulated in mainstream histories of this period.

The result flirts with performative documentary and historiography, as well as what Ann Cvetkovich calls “an archive of feelings”, drawing on viewers' investments in *Mad Men*'s fictional narrative and characters to facilitate both our knowledge and feelings about the real history of sexism.<sup>15</sup> Betty, Joan, Peggy, and *Mad Men*'s other female characters function as stand-ins for the everyday women whose post-war experiences were not deemed worthy enough to be documented and archived. Viewers' identification with and desire for these characters not only facilitate further consumption of, and profits from, *Mad Men* and its ancillary



products. Such reception processes also maximise these characters' function as our avatars in this affective exploration of gender politics and feminist activism after World War II. To borrow from Cvetkovich, *Birth of an Independent Woman* constructs an affective archive for "an earlier generation of struggle that threatens to become lost history".<sup>16</sup> As with the experts who appear in this documentary, *Mad Men's* multiple female characters provide viewers with different and fragmented glimpses into this multi-dimensional history.

### "The Problem"

Helping to immediately situate viewers in feminist discourse, *Birth of an Independent Woman* begins with a montage of images featuring well-known American feminists: Susan B. Anthony, Margaret Sanger, Gloria Steinem, Betty Friedan, and Sojourner Truth. While these individuals will be familiar to some viewers, the documentary misses an opportunity to educate those who lack this knowledge since no titles are included. The different formal qualities of the photographs used, as well as the clothing, hairstyles, and racial identities of the women, work together to suggest that feminists have been around for a long time and that we a diverse group.

As noted, *Birth of an Independent Woman's* first half focuses on "The Problem", as in "the problem that has no name", a phrase made famous by Friedan in the 1960s via her book, *The Feminine Mystique*. To contextualise this problem, the documentary relates the unique challenges and frustrations American women faced after World War II. As veterans returned from fighting battles overseas, women were encouraged via government and marketing propaganda to leave their paying jobs, identify primarily with the roles of housewife and mother, and consider the domestic sphere their primary site of effort and influence. Yet many homemakers felt that something was missing from their lives. Some psychiatrists responded by pathologising such women and increasing their prescriptions for tranquilisers. Despite this depressing history, this half of the documentary concludes on an upbeat note, as it explores how Friedan's book motivated housewives to look to the public sphere for fulfillment.

While a few images of Peggy (Elisabeth Moss) are used in "The Problem" to supplement the experts' commentary about working women, most *Mad Men* clips used in this half feature Betty (January Jones), who becomes increasingly dissatisfied with her role as "Mrs Don Draper" during the second season. Fans invested in the show will likely be moved by the inclusion of these clips, and thus perhaps more energised by *Mad Men's* own exploration of gender politics, if they are not already. Yet even viewers unfamiliar with the series will likely draw critical connections between the experts' comments on the post-war housewife ideal and images of Betty struggling to create a picture-perfect home and family while feeling alienated, isolated, and depressed.

Figure 2. Betty defrosts the fridge. Lionsgate. 2009.



Yet “The Problem” does not restrict its critique of 1960s gender politics to the housewife ideal. In one of the most evocative *Mad Men* clips in this half of the documentary, Joan (Christina Hendricks) sits on her bed massaging her shoulder. Via a slow zoom-in, viewers are made aware of the deep, red imprint left by her bra strap, a shot that subtly (yet poignantly) communicates the burden of heteronormative femininity during the Cold War era.

Figure 3. Joan and the post-war burden of femininity. Lionsgate. 2009.



Melodramatic clips like this and others from *Mad Men* demand more than just viewers’ aural and visual processing of information, the primary objective of expert commentary and archival imagery in documentaries. They challenge us not only to think about post-war gender politics, but also to *feel* their construction and effects.<sup>17</sup> In doing so, they repeat the performative documentary impulse and move viewers into what Kyo Maclear describes as active witnessing, a state that implicates us in the reclamation and remembering of this widely experienced, yet largely unwritten, history. In Maclear’s words, “[W]e are asked to become midwives to memories still caught in the throes of becoming.”<sup>18</sup>

Despite the progressive potential of *Birth of an Independent Woman*'s inclusion of *Mad Men*'s narrative clips, like that of many other histories of American feminism, "The Problem's" memory work is flawed. Most concerning, it paints all women in hues that are specifically white, as well as middle-class, reproductive, and heterosexually monogamous. As a result, this half of the documentary, like the series it promotes, ignores poor women, queer women, and women of colour who also experienced the resurgence of patriarchal gender norms during the post-war era. This seems particularly weak point, especially given that its introduction includes an image of Sojourner Truth and part of a speech by Gloria Steinem on the need to connect sex- and race-based discrimination. Such content suggests that *Birth of an Independent Woman*'s version of feminist history will avoid the homogenising discourse of "sisterhood" that has vexed feminist activism and scholarship.

### "Independence"

As if in response to the exclusion of marginalised women in "The Problem", one-third of "Independence"—the second part of *Birth of an Independent Woman*—focuses on the intersection of the civil rights and women's liberation movements. This may be one of the documentary's most important contributions, since many white-authored histories of feminism ignore the contributions of African American women and the influence of abolitionism and civil rights activism on women's liberation, just as many male-authored histories of the civil rights movement ignore women's contributions and the influence of feminist activism on abolitionism and the liberation of people of colour. Also, the prolonged attention to race and racial politics in "Independence" functions as a significant corrective for the *Mad Men* series, whose diegesis has largely been void of people of colour.

Given that one of the objectives of the DVD extras is to promote *Mad Men*, a series primarily created by and pitched to white people, it is interesting to consider that Gilkey, the film's producer, was able to include such a large portion of this history in *Birth of an Independent Woman*. More intriguing, however, while the documentary's first half includes many clips from the series to demonstrate "the problem that has no name", *Mad Men*'s marginalisation of women of colour required Gilkey to rely primarily on archival footage to demonstrate the experts' comments about black women's activism. Betty, Joan, and Peggy are of no use here, and even Sheila (Donielle Artese), one of *Mad Men*'s two women of colour, barely makes an appearance.<sup>19</sup>

Because women of colour rarely feature in public memories of either the civil rights or the women's liberation movements, this half of the documentary is a significant archival response to historical erasure. Yet there may be risks in this formal decision. Recall that the first part of this film conditions viewers to expect *Mad Men*'s clips to help them relate affectively to the political material discussed by the talking heads. Thus, Gilkey's reliance on archival footage in this

second segment may ultimately work to reinforce some viewers' (especially white viewers') emotional and thus ethical distance from black women's experiences of gender oppression and feminist activism, not to mention the profound intersections of gender and racial politics that impact all women's lives.

An audience study would be necessary to confirm the prevalence of this reading strategy, of course, but the remainder of "Independence" suggests that the containment of particular feminist experiences and memories is at play. The rest of this half of *Birth of an Independent Woman* homogenises feminist concerns by ignoring other feminist groups and ideologies that contributed to the diversity of the U.S. women's movement during this period. Although the film briefly addresses some challenges women faced in the post-war labour market, the remainder focuses almost exclusively on women's increased sexual agency as a result of effective birth control and legalised abortion.

Here, "Independence" is able to rely heavily on clips from *Mad Men*, which regularly draws attention to these issues. Yet while clips of Peggy and Betty masturbating help to disentangle female sexuality from its traditional heterosexual context, the unique issues lesbians and other queer women faced in the post-war era are absent from "Independence", just as they were in 1960s' gay and feminist politics, and just as they are in the first few seasons of *Mad Men*.<sup>20</sup> For a feminist archive that positions the housewife ideal as one of the primary barriers to women's liberation, it is strange that those who most resisted that role are excluded from *Birth of an Independent Woman's* feminist history.

Also unexplored are such common feminist concerns as women's education and the more traumatic, and thus controversial, issues of rape and domestic violence that feminists brought to public consciousness via their adherence to "the personal is political" philosophy.<sup>21</sup> Instead, the film relies on contemporary mainstream rhetoric about women's "choices" to pitch feminism less as an organised, collective movement to end gender oppression than one geared toward individual women's labour and reproductive freedom (a neo-liberal perspective also evident in the film's title). In choosing this particular frame, this half of *Birth of an Independent Woman* ignores the different opportunities available to women in these and other aspects of everyday life as a result of their identity and background. It thus fails to return to the compelling exploration of feminist diversity and collaboration with which it begins.

## Distribution

Despite the potential socio-political effects of *Birth of an Independent Woman's* marginalisation of women's diversity, as well as the feminist movement's more challenging elements, it is necessary to consider the constraints of production on such a text. It is quite likely that these exclusions resulted from Gilkey's attempts to appeal to *Mad Men's* targeted viewers who, although liberal, are also privileged and may therefore find radical histories disturbing. We might also understand such

exclusions as resulting from the film's length and short production schedule.<sup>22</sup> After all, few other documentaries of comparable length have been able to present in its entirety this complex slice of U.S. feminist history, even those with much lengthier running times and production schedules.<sup>23</sup> Nor should such films be expected to. No one text can cover all of the women's movement's history, for historiography should never be univocal if it means to be pedagogically and ethically progressive.

What we might consider then is that *Birth of an Independent Woman's* contribution is as an engaging *introduction* to the rise of the women's liberation movement that lays the groundwork for viewers' further education on this topic. Teachers eager to get students interested in women's history, gender oppression, or feminist politics might use it as a supplementary text. This speculation has as much to do with the nature of the film's distribution and pricing as it does with its content, for the documentary is readily accessible. Collected in a boxed set that retails for about US\$40, *Mad Men's* Second Season DVD (two of which together contain *Birth of an Independent Woman*) can be rented individually for a few dollars from video stores or borrowed for free from many public libraries in the U.S. This documentary is also available online, where it can be viewed at no additional cost.<sup>24</sup> By comparison, most documentaries about feminist history rent for about \$75 apiece and cost over \$200 if purchased new, and very few of these films are part of public library holdings, and none is available online in its entirety.

Yet *Birth of an Independent Woman's* low price and easy access are indicative of only part of this text's significance for feminist historiography, pedagogy, and media. Also crucial to this discussion is the format in which it is distributed and the implications of that format with regard to garnering an audience. Historically, feminist documentaries have served a small, specialised constituency. With the decline of women's bookstores and film festivals since the 1980s, distributors have had considerable difficulty attracting viewers for theatrical screenings of such films. In fact, college classrooms are the primary location for group screenings of feminist documentaries today. As a result, feminist film distributors (such as Women Make Movies) are exploring alternative ways to get such work seen by more individuals, including those who may not identify as feminist.

While the web's potential in this regard is just beginning to be tapped, feminist documentarians have increasingly seen television as a useful platform, since that medium can increase by tens of thousands the average theatrical audience for their films.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, with the expansion of broadcasting via cable and satellite, progressive film-makers in the U.S. no longer have to rely on public television for reaching viewers. Yet, as with theatrical distribution, feminist documentarians interested in using television as a distribution platform have had a very difficult time competing with documentary's male superstars, such as Ken Burns.

As a result of such challenges, most documentaries about feminist history—indeed, feminist documentaries at large—are not broadly, easily, or cheaply available, so have not been primary players in educating the public about gender oppression and this movement. Many feminist film-makers are wary of working within the media industries, due to their histories of sexism and censorship of

radical politics. Yet *Birth of an Independent Woman*'s production by Lionsgate, and inclusion in a popular TV series' boxed set, may signal new possibilities for progressively-minded documentarists.

In particular, this text suggests emergent mechanisms for the production of critically conscious texts from within the culture industries, as well as for the distribution of such material to large audiences. As a result of its mainstream creation and distribution, *Birth of an Independent Woman* is bound to be seen by thousands more viewers than if it had been circulated via the traditional channels of feminist documentary. Clearly, not all documentarists have the same opportunities as Gilkey, whose work as *Mad Men*'s DVD Content Producer is strongly supported by both Weiner and Lionsgate. Nevertheless, her identity as an African American challenges white privilege in the media industries, just as her gender identity and feminist sensibility challenge their historical patriarchy and sexism. Thus, while debate continues among feminist documentarians about the potential effects of commercialism on the content of their films, new forms of progressive intervention from within the culture industries (such as those developed by Gilkey) deserve more critical attention from progressive film-makers and scholars.

## Reception

Empirical audience research is beyond the scope of this article. Yet given the histories of mainstream and feminist media distribution, not to mention sexism, some hypotheses about *Birth of an Independent Woman*'s reception can be offered. Most significant, *Mad Men*'s boxed sets are not available globally, and in those countries where they have been imported, such sets may contain different extras.<sup>26</sup> So, even with its global online presence, the documentary's audience is restricted. It also seems likely that of those who have access to the series' DVDs, few might take time to view all or even part of this film. For while its inclusion in the extras suggests that Weiner and, perhaps, Lionsgate are interested in pitching feminism in more direct ways than they do on *Mad Men*, neither they nor Gilkey can force anyone to watch this special feature. Indeed, many people who stumble upon this documentary's title in the DVD menu may be put off by the phrase "Independent Woman". Even if some viewers begin watching, its division between two discs will likely cause audience attrition for its second half.

At the same time, however, it seems probable that a good number of *Mad Men* fans who self-identify as feminist will watch *Birth of an Independent Woman* if they hear about or happen upon it. Perhaps some viewers who would never step foot in a women's studies class or a feminist film festival will watch it simply *because* it is on a DVD for one of their favourite shows. How those viewers might respond to this documentary, and how it might affect their viewing of *Mad Men*, are questions deserving of much more attention than I am able to offer here. It is my hope, however, that when those viewers watch it, they will respond in the

same way that its primarily male crew members did while they were making it, that is, with surprise that they know so little about post-war gender politics, and with concern that sexism continues to limit the opportunities for some girls and women today.<sup>27</sup>

In conclusion, I want to return to Maclear's theory of witnessing, for I believe it can help us to understand the progressive potential of mainstream documentaries like *Birth of an Independent Woman*. According to Maclear, historical art (and I would add media) that resists the "documentary impulse" of "gathering ... chronological facts and information", that draws attention to the partiality of remembering, and that challenges us to rethink what we know of as knowledge thereby implicates its viewers in the construction of history by facilitating our critical thinking about the past and its connections to the present.<sup>28</sup> Given *Birth of an Independent Woman*'s deviation from the traditions of expository documentary, I remain hopeful that it offers viewers the opportunity not only to develop a better understanding of the rise of the women's liberation movement, but also (and perhaps more important) to reflect on the connections between gender politics past and present.

With this potential in mind, I think *Birth of an Independent Woman*'s use of *Mad Men* clips is most compelling, for by juxtaposing archival footage and expert commentary with scenes of fictional characters that viewers already "know", desire, and identify with, the film's performative historiography encourages our emotional response to its history of gender oppression and thus activates our ethical concern through its construction of an archive of feelings. Because of this, *Birth of an Independent Woman* has the potential to make active witnesses out of all of its viewers, a position of not only expanded knowledge and emotion but also political agency. In other words, the film's use of *Mad Men* clips encourages more than attentive watching and re-watching of the series with new knowledge of the history of gender politics. Rather, it urges us to think critically well beyond our viewing experiences and to translate our knowledge and concern into action.

Attention to this latter step in the reception process is crucial, for as Maclear provocatively challenges viewers of historical texts, "[I]t is not enough to ask whether or not art remembers [the past], or even how it remembers. We need also ask to what ends *we* have remembered, what actions we are prepared to take in light of our new understandings."<sup>29</sup> Whether *Birth of an Independent Woman* leads its viewers to political action and what type of action it inspires are questions unanswerable by the present project. It is my hope that those interested in progressive historiography pay more heed to the possibilities for popular education and public memory made possible via emergent media forms, such as DVD special features.

## Acknowledgements

My thanks to Cicely Gilkey and Debra Zimmerman for answering questions about, respectively, the production of *Birth of an Independent Woman* and other *Mad Men* DVD special features and Women Make Movies' distribution of feminist documentaries.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Kyo Maclear, *Beclouded Visions: Hiroshima-Nagasaki and the Art of Witness* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), 23.

<sup>2</sup>For an example of public discourse about *Mad Men*'s attention to authentic detail, see Gail Pennington, "With Emmy Buzz and Plenty of Revelations, It's a 'Mad' World," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 20 July 2008: F1.

<sup>3</sup>Gilkey shared such information with the author during a telephone interview.

<sup>4</sup>*Birth of an Independent Woman*'s two parts appear on Disc 1 and 2 respectively of *Mad Men*'s Season Two DVD set.

<sup>5</sup>Like many other women's issues, the women's liberation movement has appeared only recently in textbooks for high school classes in U.S. history. See, for example, Jeffrey Allard, Roger Clark, and Timothy Mahoney, "How Much of the Sky? Women in American High School History Textbooks from the 1960s, 1980s and 1990s," *Social Education* 68(1), (2004): 57.

<sup>6</sup>This speculation is based on sales figures for *Mad Men*'s Season Two DVD set. Nearly 300,000 copies were purchased in the U.S. by late September 2009, 11 weeks after its release on 14 July 2009 (The Numbers, "US DVD Sales Chart for Week Ending Sep 27, 2009," Nash Information Services 27 September 2009, accessed March 27, 2010, <http://www.the-numbers.com/dvd/charts/weekly/2009/20090927.php>.) These figures do not include data on international sales or on domestic and foreign DVD rentals and borrowings.

<sup>7</sup>Stagevu, "Birth of an Independent Woman (documentary)," accessed June 29, 2011, <http://stagevu.com/video/uafxtzpkxbyr>; Veoh, "Birth of an Independent Woman," accessed June 29, 2011, <http://www.veoh.com/watch/v18899193gfYEsthH?h1=Birth+of+an+Independent+Woman>.

<sup>8</sup>This speculation can be confirmed only via a review of every DVD set produced to date.

<sup>9</sup>See ed. Alexandra Juhasz, *Women of Vision: Histories in Feminist Film and Video* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

<sup>10</sup>Box Office Mojo, *Born Into Brothels* domestic total gross data, IMDB.com n.d., accessed September 11, 2009, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=bornintobrothels.htm>; Box Office Mojo, *Fahrenheit 9/11* domestic total gross data, IMDB.com n.d., accessed September 11 2009, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=fahrenheit911.htm>.



<sup>11</sup>Alison Trope, “Footstool Film School: Home Entertainment as Home Education,” *Inventing Film Studies*, eds. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008) 353.

<sup>12</sup>In addition to typical content focusing on the series’ production, *Mad Men’s* Season One DVD extras include *The Desire of the American Dream*, which explores transformations in advertising during the 1960s. The Season Two DVD set includes: *Birth of an Independent Woman*; *Time Capsule*, which examines in further depth some historical events featured in *Mad Men*; and *An Era of Style*, which explores 1960s fashion and its influence on contemporary designers. The Season Three DVD set includes: *Medgar Evers: The Patriarch. The Activist. The Hero.* and *We Shall Overcome: The March on Washington*. The Season Four DVD set includes: *Divorce: Circa 1960s*; and *1964 Presidential Campaign*.

<sup>13</sup>Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2001), 105-09.

<sup>14</sup>“Aca-fans” are academics who consider themselves fans of their object of study. A “fan vid” is a video produced by a fan of a particular cultural text and typically incorporates material from that text.

<sup>15</sup>Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, 130-37.

<sup>16</sup>Ann Cvetkovich, “In the Archives of Lesbian Feelings: Documentary and Popular Culture,” *Camera Obscura* 17(1), (2002): 111.

<sup>17</sup>I do not mean to suggest that expert commentary and archival imagery cannot affectively move listeners and viewers, but rather that *Mad Men’s* narrative clips, which have been constructed primarily for eliciting such emotional investment, have been used in this documentary specifically to achieve this effect.

<sup>18</sup>Maclear, *Beclouded Visions*, 20.

<sup>19</sup>By the end of *Mad Men’s* second season, the only black women featured were Sheila, Kinsey’s girlfriend, and Carla (Deborah Lacey), the Draper’s maid.

<sup>20</sup>A lesbian character, Joyce Ramsay (Zosia Mamet), is introduced in Season Four.

<sup>21</sup>The absence of rape as a feminist issue in *Birth of an Independent Woman* seems odd since *Mad Men* had dealt with this issue three times by the end of its second season.

<sup>22</sup>Gilkey reported to the author that she was working on several other *Mad Men* DVD extras when she was making *Birth of an Independent Woman*.

<sup>23</sup>Other documentaries about the U.S. women’s liberation movement include: *Freedom is Contagious*; *Sisters of ’77*; *Some American Feminists*; *Some Spirit in Me*; *Step by Step*; and *Women Now*.

<sup>24</sup>Stagevu, “Birth of an Independent Woman (documentary)”; Veoh, “Birth of an Independent Woman.”

<sup>25</sup>As Executive Director, Debra Zimmerman informed the author that Women Make Movies is currently strategising on how to use the web as part of its promotion and distribution practices.

<sup>26</sup>For example, the film is not available on *Mad Men’s* Second Season DVD set in New Zealand.

<sup>27</sup>Gilkey reported these crewmembers’ reactions to the author.

<sup>28</sup>Maclear, *Beclouded Visions*, 10.

<sup>29</sup>Maclear, *Beclouded Visions*, 24.

## Bibliography

Allard, Jeffrey, Roger Clark, and Timothy Mahoney, "How Much of the Sky? Women in American High School History Textbooks from the 1960s, 1980s and 1990s," *Social Education* 68(1), (2004): 57.

Becker, Ron, "Gay-Themed Television and the Slumpy Class," *Television and New Media* 7(2), (2006): 184-215.

*Born into Brothels: Calcutta's Red Light Kids*, Film (Dir. Ross Kauffman and Zana Briski, THINKFilm, 2004).

Box Office Mojo, *Born Into Brothels* domestic total gross data, IMDB.com n.d., accessed September 11, 2009, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=bornintobrothels.htm>.

Box Office Mojo, *Fahrenheit 9/11* domestic total gross data, IMDB.com n.d., accessed September 11 2009, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=fahrenheit911.htm>.

Cvetkovich, Ann, "In the Archives of Lesbian Feelings: Documentary and Popular Culture," *Camera Obscura* 17(1), (2002): 107-47.

*Fahrenheit 9/11*, Film (Dir. Michael Moore, Lions Gate and IFC Films, 2004).

*Freedom is Contagious: The Women's Movement and Students for Democratic Society (1965-1969)*, Film (Dir. Helen Garvy, Shire Films, 2003).

Friedan, Betty, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1963).

Juhasz, Alexandra ed., *Women of Vision: Histories in Feminist Film and Video* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

Maclear, Kyo, *Beclouded Visions: Hiroshima-Nagasaki and the Art of Witness* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999).

*Mad Men*, Television series (Exec. Prod. Matthew Weiner, Lionsgate, 2007).

Nichols, Bill, *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2001).

Numbers, The, "US DVD Sales Chart for Week Ending Sep 27, 2009," Nash Information Services 27 September 2009, accessed March 27, 2010, <http://www.the-numbers.com/dvd/charts/weekly/2009/20090927.php>.

Pennington, Gail, “With Emmy Buzz and Plenty of Revelations, It’s a ‘Mad’ World,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 20 July 2008: F1.

*Sisters of '77*, Film (Dir. Cynthia Salzman Mondell and Allen Mondell, PBS, 2005).

*Some American Feminists*, Film (Dir. Luce Guilbeault, Nicole Brossard and Margaret Wescott, Women Make Movies, 1980).

*Some Spirit in Me*, Film (Dir. Eva Moskowitz, Film-makers Library, 1993).

Stagevu, “Birth of an Independent Woman (documentary),” accessed June 29, 2011, <http://stagevu.com/video/uafxtzpkxbyr>.

*Step by Step: Building a Feminist Movement* Film (Dir. Joyce Follet, Women Make Movies, 1998).

Trope, Alison, “Footstool Film School: Home Entertainment as Home Education,” *Inventing Film Studies*, eds. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008). 353-73.

Veoh, “Birth of an Independent Woman,” accessed June 29, 2011, <http://www.veoh.com/watch/v18899193gfYEsthH?h1=Birth+of+an+Independent+Woman>.

*Women Now: National Organization of Women*, Film (Dir. Ellen Cooperperson, Make Believe TV, 1978).

### Biographical note

Mary Celeste Kearney is Associate Professor of Radio-Television-Film and Women’s and Gender Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. Specialising in feminist media and cultural studies she is author of *Girls Make Media* (Routledge, 2006), and editor of *Mediated Girlhoods: New Explorations of Girls’ Media Culture* (Peter Lang, 2011) and *The Gender and Media Reader* (Routledge, 2011). Her essays have appeared in *Camera Obscura*, *Cultural Studies*, *Feminist Media Studies*, *Journal for Children and Media*, and the *NWSA Journal*.

Email: [mkearney@mail.utexas.edu](mailto:mkearney@mail.utexas.edu)

---

# Ngā Tohu o ngā Kairaranga: The Signs of the Weavers

Hokimate Pamela Harwood

---

## Ngā Tohu o ngā Kairaranga: The Signs of the Weavers

Hokimate Pamela Harwood

---

### Abstract

The whakapapa (genealogy) and histories of iwi Māori (tribe/peoples) are continued within oral histories, and they are represented in our taonga (Māori treasures) such as toi whakairo (carving), tā moko (tattoo), and whatu raranga (weaving). This article explores findings from the feather identification of Māori kākahu (cloaks) in the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. By examining the techniques and materials used in the making of selected cloaks, I reflect on how this information can potentially tell us about the weaver, the intended wearer, events, and the time and environment in which they were living. I argue that the discovery of possible feather “signatures” in kākahu means that cloaks are a tangible form of retaining histories and memories. Finally, I propose that museums play an important role in unlocking and interpreting the knowledge needed to reconnect these taonga to their origins.

Keywords: whakapapa, taonga, weavers, Māori, cloaks, feathers, signatures, museum

<i>Rarangahia te korari ka kitea te whānau</i>	Weave the flax and find the family
<i>Whakairotia te rākau ka kitea te tupuna</i>	Carve the wood and find the ancestor
<i>Tāmokohia te kiri ka kitea te tangata</i>	Incise the skin and find the person.

### Whatu raranga: he taonga tuku iho

Māori weaving is a taonga handed down the generations. Taonga can be described as having ancestral connections in that they contain histories and knowledge relationships to people and places. As Ngai Tahu historian, Rawiri Te Maire Tau, observes, “Every ‘thing’ was related and all ‘things’ were held together by genealogical connections that eventually referenced back to the self.”<sup>1</sup> Taonga are treasured because they were made, used, worn, and revered by our tūpuna (Māori ancestors); they therefore connect the living to those passed.

Weaving links Māori directly to our ancestors in the retained practices inherited from our origins in eastern Polynesia. The plaiting and finger twining methods of basketry were successfully adapted to produce protective clothing for the harsh temperate New Zealand climate, where the basis for most Māori clothing was created from scraped harakeke (New Zealand flax, *Phormium* spp.), (Figure 1).<sup>2</sup> The single-pair finger twining method (whatu aho pātahi) was employed for the coarser, roughly scraped, harakeke rain capes.

The resulting softer fibre from intense scraping and pounding, referred to as muka, formed the foundation (kaupapa) of the finer warmer Māori cloaks. Double-pair finger twining (whatu aho rua) in which two pairs of horizontal wefts (aho) held together the thicker vertical warps (whenu) to form the kaupapa (Figure 2). This latter weaving method is preferred in decorated cloaks to better secure attachments such as feathers and hukahuka (dyed muka tassels).<sup>3</sup> Decorated cloaks usually begin from the bottom left-hand corner and the attachments are added as each row progresses. The cloak finishes in the top right-hand corner and is then turned upright to wear. Dedication, skill, and time go into preparing the materials to create each kākahu.

Figure 1. Harakeke flax leaves.



Figure 2. Horizontal aho and vertical whenu (warp) threads.



### *The mana and prestige of Māori feather cloaks*

Māori anthropologist and museum ethnologist Te Rangi Hiroa (Sir Peter Buck) wrote in *The Coming of the Maori* (1950) that, “woven garments were ... a form of wealth necessary for social exchange and to provide appropriate gifts at marriages and funerals”.<sup>4</sup> The relationship between cloaks and whakapapa and whānau (family) indicates they also played an important role in birth and death rituals.<sup>5</sup>

Fragments of two South Island burial cloaks found in Otago (Strath Taieri) and Southland (Lake Hauroko), dated around the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, seem to point towards a transitional period in the evolution of Māori feather cloak production. They both employ single-pair twining, but also feature a passive weft (aho) that is wrapped around a running weft.<sup>6</sup> The Strath Taieri cloak integrates the feathers and skins of weka (woodhen, *Gallirallus australis*),<sup>7</sup> albatross (family Diomedidae), and presumably moa (order Dinornithiforme).<sup>8,9</sup> The Lake Hauroko fragments also comprise feathers and skin from kākā (South Island bush parrot, *Nestor meridionalis meridionalis*), kākāpō (night parrot, *Strigops habroptilus*) as well as kurī (Polynesian dog, *Canis lupis domesticus*) skin.<sup>10</sup> It can be assumed that the incorporation of dog and bird skin and feathers provided warmth and insulation, but it is also theorised that these cloaks were highly regarded prestige items based on the cultural value and rarity of the species. Moa became extinct around the period the Taieri cloak was produced.

Cloaks symbolise prestige, status, and authority (mana) with certain cloaks worn only on special occasions. At European contact, mainly men or women of high rank wore kaitaka, a large finely-made cloak decorated with tāniko borders (coloured geometric bands of tightly twined muka strands). Kahu kurī (dog skin cloak) helped to identify rangatira (chiefs) or fighting men of rank. Kurī were highly prized and valued for their hunting abilities, and their skin and hair were desired for cloaks and adornment of taiaha (carved fighting weapons).

### *Kahu/kākahu kura (red feather or chiefly cloaks)*

Feather cloaks were rarely recorded at first European contact. A few red feathered cloaks worn by rangatira were recorded by English naturalist and botanist, Joseph Banks, in 1770 on James Cook’s first voyage to New Zealand. Presumably the red feathers were from the underwing or belly of the kākā (bush parrot, *Nestor meridionalis*); they were highly prized and incorporated into Māori cloaks to indicate the status of the wearer (Figure 3).<sup>11,12</sup> Red feathers are commonly employed in cloak production throughout many Polynesian cultures. The colour red is symbolic in its connection to high chiefs and in having an association to the gods (atua) in New Zealand, Hawai’i, and Tahiti.<sup>13</sup>

Figure 3. North Island kākā orange underwing covert feathers.



Figure 4. South Island brown kiwi back feathers.



### *Kahu kiwi (kiwi feather cloaks)*

Kahu kiwi are one of the most prestigious feather cloaks and exhibit the lustrous brown feathers of the native brown kiwi (*Apteryx* spp.).<sup>14</sup> These birds were treasured and widely sought after for cloak production. The strong, large, brown-back feathers were preferred, and when woven in with the ventral side of the feather facing out (whakaaraara) it made the cloak wearer appear larger (Figure 4).<sup>15</sup> Pure albino (white) kiwi were extremely rare and, therefore, coveted. Before the general decline of brown kiwi populations, wholly white birds were keenly hunted by Māori for their inclusion in cloak designs.

Other rare and culturally significant New Zealand birds—such as the now extinct huia (*Heterolocha acutirostris*), albatross, and kākāpō—were also acquired for personal adornments and Māori clothing until their decline towards the middle of the nineteenth century. Around this time new geometric designs appeared fashioned from feathers of the kererū (New Zealand pigeon, *Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae*), tūi (parson bird, *Prosthemadera novaeseelandiae novaeseelandiae*), weka, and kākārīki (parakeet, *Cyanoramphus* spp.).<sup>16</sup> Time-intensive cloaks, such as the kaitaka and kahu kurī, were also gradually replaced by the more expressive feather cloaks that took less time and effort to create.<sup>17</sup>

The introduction of numerous European and North American game birds and fowl throughout the 1800s resulted in wild populations distributed across New Zealand.<sup>18</sup> The decline and protection of native species saw the introduced ring-necked pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*), peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*), and chicken (*Gallus gallus* var. *domesticus*) being mixed with native species, adding new varieties of colours to feather cloak-making.<sup>19</sup>

Numerous kākahu were gifted and exchanged between iwi (peoples) for other taonga to initiate or maintain important tribal relationships.<sup>20</sup> There are instances of kākahu being buried with people or gifted to bereaved families at tangihanga (funerals).<sup>21</sup> Information about the cloaks (such as the owner, name of the weaver, and origin or date it was produced) was often lost or forgotten. Museums throughout the world hold numerous Māori collections of no known provenance. It is argued it is the role of museums to lead research in the recovery of information regarding taonga Māori by documenting the knowledge of modern practitioners and researching the materials, designs, and techniques used to produce them.



## Feather identification of Te Papa's Māori cloaks

When chronicling the evolution of Māori cloaks in *The Coming of the Maori*, Hiroa states that, “the garments themselves tell us what did occur but to understand them, we must learn their language through the minute details of technique”.<sup>22</sup>

The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa holds over 300 Māori cloaks. In 2007, approximately 110 cloaks containing feathers were identified to species level, where possible, and it is currently accepted that all of them were produced after 1800. Comparative microscopic feather and bird skin image databases assisted in the identification of more than 20 native and 10 introduced bird species, where some species had not previously been recorded in the literature as being used in Māori cloaks.<sup>23</sup> Microscopic feather identification of a museum ethnological collection was a first for Te Papa and New Zealand. Methodologies were replicated from the microscopic feather identification of a native feather blanket in North America, leading to its provenance.<sup>24</sup> Less than one-third of Te Papa's cloaks have a known iwi affiliation or geographic association.

The most common birds recorded in Te Papa's cloaks are the native brown kiwi (52 cloaks), kererū (45), kākā (43), and tūī (35). These birds are ground dwelling or low flying and are easily caught. Before the 1800s they were all common and relatively widespread in their distribution.<sup>25</sup> Other native species identified include albatross, huia, weka, kākāpō (Figure 5), pūkeko (*Porphyrio melanotus melanotus*), kākāriki, Australasian bittern (*Botaurus poiciloptilus*), and swamp harrier (kāhu, *Circus approximans*).

Figure 5. Mottled green kākāpō back feathers.



Figure 6. Male ring-necked pheasant lower back feathers.



Introduced birds were also well represented in Te Papa's Māori cloaks. Feathers from the domestic chicken were identified in 25 cloaks, and also common was the ring-necked pheasant (15) (Figure 6) and peacock (13). To a lesser degree, helmeted guineafowl (*Numida meleagris*), wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*), California quail (*Callipepla californica*), and mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) were also identified.<sup>26</sup>

Findings and an interpretation of the knowledge gained from the feather identification of Te Papa's nineteenth and twentieth-century Māori cloaks are outlined below. Theories discussed intend to demonstrate that through the design, selection of birds, or placement of feathers that weavers communicated

information about the prestige of the cloak, the status of the wearer, and potentially their identity.

## Ngā tohu o ngā kairaranga

### *Culturally significant bird species in Māori cloaks*

Certain birds symbolise important aspects of Māori culture. Brown kiwi are the hidden birds of the atua, Tāne Mahuta (deity of man and the forest). The regal, black and white-tipped tail feathers of the huia are associated to rangatiratanga (chieftainship), while the kōtuku (white heron, *Ardea modesta*) in its flight is connected to Ranginui (the sky father). Soaring albatrosses (toroa) represent strength and grace, while the kāhu and karearea (New Zealand falcon, *Falco novaeseelandiae*) were respected for their strength and fearlessness.<sup>27</sup>

A relatively small kahu huruhuru (feather cloak) in Te Papa's collection (Te Papa ME011987) is intriguing in its design and use of feathers (Figure 7); estimated to have been produced pre-1900, it is single-pair twined which is unusual for a feather cloak. The orange kākā feathers from under the wing, and white kererū belly feathers in the side borders, form a canvas for the black tūi and blue pūkeko feathers that produce a large dark  $\pi$  pattern across the cloak. Small bunches and single feathers from the kākāriki (lime green), peacock, pheasant (a single feather), and reddish brown kākā feathers are scattered throughout.

Figure 7. Kahu huruhuru with feathers from kākā, kererū, tūi, pūkeko, peacock, pheasant, kākāriki, and ruru (Te Papa ME011987).



Figure 8. Close-up of a mottled ruru belly feather in a kahu huruhuru (Te Papa ME011987).



The most significant finds were two single feathers from the ruru (morepork, *Ninox novaeseelandiae*). There is one ruru feather within each of the vertical columns of the  $\pi$  design. The feathers originating from the belly are distinctively mottled white, cream, and brown (Figure 8). The cloak's right-hand side border (facing the garment) has an additional orange band of kākā feathers hidden under the white kererū feathers. Above this hidden band is a single iridescent black peacock feather. Despite its small size, this cloak communicates an interesting story in terms of the feathers and birds used by the weaver. For different iwi the ruru represents the spirits or an atua, for others it is an omen for death, alternatively the feathers could have been inserted as a kaitiaki (guardian).<sup>28</sup> This is the only

occurrence of ruru in the cloak collection, and there is no literature suggesting ruru were used in Māori cloaks.

### *The placement and design of feathers in Māori cloaks*

Feathers of contrasting colours were added for effect in a number of cloaks, apparently to lift the colour away from the darker background of the cloak.<sup>29</sup> This technique is said to have “added interest and variety”.<sup>30</sup> It was also observed that in at least 30 museum cloaks that feathers were hidden and woven in amongst surrounding feathers, visible when surrounding feathers were lifted. Single feathers or small bunches of various species such as huia, chicken, pheasant, albino brown kiwi, and kākā feathers were placed under the feathers of different species. Strands of coloured wool have also been recorded hidden amongst feathers. The deliberate selection of certain birds, and the placement and use of feathers for the purpose of concealment from onlookers, has previously been unrecorded in the literature.

One example is of a kahu kiwi in the museum collection (Te Papa, ME003714) that has hidden bunches of black huia feathers across the kaupapa of the cloak of brown kiwi feathers (Figures 9 and 10). Brown kiwi is the most frequently recorded species in the cloak collection, and are seen in at least 52 of the 110 cloaks surveyed. Both the brown kiwi and huia feathers in this cloak were woven in with the ventral side of the feather facing out. The huia was quite possibly the most valuable bird to Māori, unique to New Zealand before deforestation, predation, and hunting for their feathers led to their extinction by 1907.<sup>31</sup> The tail feathers were coveted by Māori for hair ornamentation.<sup>32</sup> Huia feathers were also remembered for being inserted into kākahu as well.<sup>33</sup>

Figure 9. Kahu kiwi (kiwi feather cloak) with brown kiwi and huia feathers (Te Papa ME003714).

Figure 10. Close-up of hidden huia feathers amongst dark brown kiwi feathers (Te Papa ME003714).



It is likely that hidden feather “signatures” were very personal information that was not discussed freely amongst weavers. The feathers can be seen only when the surrounding kiwi feathers are lifted up. As cloak feathers are plucked and painstakingly sorted and bunched, or butted according to size and colour; it is therefore unlikely that feathers of another species and colour could be woven in accidentally. It is argued here that there is knowledge and personal information contained in the species or feather placement. Some single feather patterns across a cloak could represent landscapes, constellations, or relate to events or people that are known to the weaver. Patterning in cloaks often communicates information. Geometric tāniko designs have associations to whakapapa and landscapes in the

form of tribal motifs.<sup>34</sup> It is unlikely that these odd feathers are mistakes or a lapse in concentration for such skilled practitioners, particularly as it can take up to nine months to produce a modern cloak.<sup>35</sup>

Discussions with modern weavers have given further insight and support to this theory. There are contemporary examples of weavers inserting different coloured feathers into cloaks to honour people that have passed away. One weaver was known to use red thread in her cloaks as an individual sign that she had created it. Another used a specific species of bird in their piece in memory of a relative who had passed away. This hypothesis can be further tested with ongoing feather cloak research in private and museum collections by recording possible comparable “signatures” between collections.

#### *Writing, initials, and symbolism in Māori cloaks*

There are examples of cloaks in the collection that communicate more evident forms of information by weaving in writing. A Te Papa kahu huruhuru (feather cloak) (Te Papa ME010762) contains a Māori word using brown kiwi feathers (Figure 11). Production time for the cloak is estimated to be 1850-1900. Materials comprise of muka (flax) as the kaupapa, feathers, and wool. There are alternating rectangular patterns of green and white kererū, and reddish brown kākā feathers. Each of the white rectangles have small bunches of alternating orange kākā and black tūi feathers located roughly in the centre, and the bottom and two side borders comprise bluish-black tūi feathers.

Figure 11. Kahu huruhuru with kererū, kākā, tūi, and brown kiwi (Te Papa ME010762).



At the top of the cloak tāmoē, brown kiwi feathers form a word. Tāmoē is described as a technique in which the feathers are woven in flat, with the ventral (under) side of the feather facing down as they are on the bird.<sup>36</sup> The letters are facing upright when the cloak is worn, requiring them to be woven in upside

down. Certain letters may be identified (possibly an A and R on the far right). Unfortunately, due to a loss of feathers the word has not been deciphered to date.

Incorporating writing into cloak weaving certainly moved away from what was considered traditional design. Yet, Mead (1968) keenly observed that:

*... weavers loved to decorate their cloaks, especially those worn by chiefs ... [and] ... the desire of chiefs to look resplendent and their wish to outdo others, combined with the technical and artistic skill of their weavers, meant there was always room for improvement and innovation.*<sup>37</sup>

This ongoing change in techniques, designs, and materials from 1800 to the present is unmistakably reflected in the Māori cloaks stored in Te Papa's collections.

Cloaks that contain initials are certainly noteworthy in that they most likely refer to the weaver or the wearer. A korowai (cloak with hukahuka, tassels) in the Te Papa collection (ME014386) features a number of unusual elements and design. It contains distinctive features associated with a korowai, and feathers throughout the kaupapa, but it also has a woollen tāniko bottom border, which is typically seen in kaitaka. First, there are the initials 'H' and 'A' woven in red wool into the corners of the coloured tāniko border at the bottom of the cloak (Figures 12 and 13). The letters are upside down when the cloak is facing the correct way up. When constructing the cloak and attaching the tāniko border to the rest of it, however, these letters would have been the correct way up from the perspective of the weaver, weaving from the garment's bottom left-hand corner to the right.

Figure 12. Korowai with brown kiwi feathers and initials in the tāniko border (Te Papa ME014386).

Figure 13. Close-up of the initial H in bottom corner of tāniko border of cloak (Te Papa ME014386).



Numerous hukahuka are missing, having either disintegrated or been removed. Brown kiwi feathers are sparsely woven in small bunches throughout the cloak, and in some bunches there are also orange and brown kākā feathers. Numerous vertical whenu (warps) have been carefully removed in six bands across the cloak, leaving remnants of the horizontal aho holding the rest of the tightly twined whenu together. It is difficult to ascertain whether this removal was performed by the weaver during production or at a later date. This fragile cloak is unique, with many facets to its design and construction. It is an example of changing techniques and innovative design, underscoring how traditional cloak-making continually changes where new techniques, materials, and designs are often combined. Most importantly from the perspective of researching the origins of this cloak, it

is significant because of the addition of initials that again (if observed in other private or museum collections) could assist with its provenance.

### The role of museums

Feathered cloaks are no longer needed for warmth but they still retain mana and prestige for the wearer at social occasions such as weddings and graduations today. The birds were likely chosen based on a number of factors: essentially whether the bird was culturally or personally significant, its rarity, or the colour of the feathers. The feathers and the birds themselves are therefore a pivotal factor in rediscovering the origins of museum cloaks.

Scientific tools can offer an insight into an environment and time in which the weavers were living and creating kākahu by telling us more about the materials used. These tools give us a further glimpse into the information held within Māori cloaks, essentially conveyed to us by the weavers through non-verbal communication.

Isotopic analyses of feathers has proven to be an effective tool in tracing the geographical origins of birds, and it proposes to assist in helping to provenance cloaks, or at least the birds used in cloaks. The stable isotope composition of bird feathers determined by diet and ingested water signals is a unique geographical marker of the bird's origin.<sup>38</sup> Provenance can therefore potentially be determined by comparing isotopic landscapes along New Zealand against feathers of known geographic origins to the cloak feathers, thus providing the provenance of the birds used. Similarly, the DNA of cloak feathers and muka can be compared to a database of New Zealand birds and flax cultivars, which could determine species, sex, the number of birds in a cloak, and potentially estimate the origin of the birds and muka.<sup>39</sup>

Modern-day weavers play an important role in understanding concepts and their techniques should be documented. The admission of some contemporary weavers that they insert personal information into their cloaks should encourage ongoing research into older museum cloaks, particularly if the same "signature" or anomaly is seen in two or more different garments. It could be an effective tool in locating cloak origins and re-connecting museum weaving to iwi Māori.

### Acknowledgements

I am truly grateful for the help and support of Megan Tamati-Quennell (Te Papa Curator of Contemporary Māori and Indigenous Art) in reviewing and providing critical feedback for this manuscript. Many thanks to the Te Aka Matua (Te Papa) librarians for their assistance. I also acknowledge Awhina Tamarapa (Te Papa Curator of Mātauranga Māori) and Moana Parata (Te Papa Collection Manager,

Māori) for their feedback. He mihi aroha ki a Kohai Grace (Ngāti Porou, Ngāti Toa Rangatira), for teaching me the tikanga and beauty of whatu raranga. Many thanks to the weavers who shared their stories and knowledge with me at the Wairoa National Weavers Hui 2009. Ki ngā kairaranga i ngā wā o mua, ngā mihi ki a rātou mō enei taonga tuku iho.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup>Rawiri Te Maire Tau, “The Death of Knowledge, Ghosts on the Plains,” *The New Zealand Journal of History* 35(2), (2001): 137.
- <sup>2</sup>Mick Pendergrast, *Te Aho Tapu: The Sacred Thread* (Auckland: Reed Methuen, 1987), 6.
- <sup>3</sup>Pendergrast, *Te Aho Tapu*, 14.
- <sup>4</sup>Te Rangi Hiroa, *The Coming of the Maori* (Wellington: Whitcombe & Tombs Ltd, 1950), 177.
- <sup>5</sup>Amiria Henare, “Nga Aho Tipuna (Ancestral Threads): Maori Cloaks from New Zealand,” in *Clothing as a Material Culture*, eds. Susanne Kuchler and Daniel Miller (New York: Berg, 2005), 128.
- <sup>6</sup>T.R. Hiroa (Buck, Peter), *The Evolution of Maori Clothing*, Memoirs of the Polynesian Society (New Plymouth: Printed by Thomas Avery, 1926), 7: 96.
- <sup>7</sup>North Island, western, buff, and Stewart Island weka are included.
- <sup>8</sup>Augustus Hamilton, “Notes on Some Old Flax Mats Found in Otago,” *Transactions of the New Zealand Institute* 25 (1892): 487.
- <sup>9</sup>D.R. Simmons, “The Lake Hauroko Burial and the Evolution of Maori Clothing,” Records of Otago Museum, *Anthropology* 5 (1968): 6.
- <sup>10</sup>Simmons, “The Lake Hauroko Burial and the Evolution of Maori Clothing,” 4.
- <sup>11</sup>Sydney M. Mead, *Traditional Maori Clothing: A Study of Technological and Functional Change* (Wellington: Reed, 1969), 56.
- <sup>12</sup>North Island and South Island kākā are included.
- <sup>13</sup>T.R. Hiroa (Peter H. Buck), “Arts and Crafts of Hawaii,” ed. Bernice P. Bishop, *Museum Special Publication* 45 (1957): 216.
- <sup>14</sup>North Island, Okarito, South Island and Stewart Island brown kiwi are included.
- <sup>15</sup>T.R. Hiroa, “On the Maori Art of Weaving Cloaks, Capes and Kilts,” *Dominion Museum Bulletin* 3 (1911): 84.
- <sup>16</sup>Red-crowned, yellow-crowned and orange-fronted parakeets are included.
- <sup>17</sup>Pendergrast, *Te Aho Tapu*, 106-07.
- <sup>18</sup>John. L. Long, *Introduced Birds of the World: The Worldwide History, Distribution and Influence of Birds Introduced to New Environments* (Sydney: A.H. & A.W. Reed Pty Ltd, 1981).
- <sup>19</sup>Pendergrast, *Te Aho Tapu*, 107.
- <sup>20</sup>Paul Tapsell, “The Flight of the Pareraututu: An Investigation of Taonga from a Tribal Perspective,” *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 106(4), (1997): 338.

- <sup>21</sup>Mead, *Traditional Maori Clothing*, 175.
- <sup>22</sup>Hiroa, *The Coming of the Maori*, 177.
- <sup>23</sup>Hokimate P. Harwood, 'Identification and Description of Feathers in Te Papa's Māori cloaks,' *Tuhinga* 22 (2011): 125-47.
- <sup>24</sup>E. Pearlstein, "Restoring Provenance to a Native American Feather Blanket," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 25(1), (2010): 87-105.
- <sup>25</sup>Christopher Robertson, J.R. Pasi Hyvönen, Mark J. Fraser and Ross Pickard, *Atlas of Bird Distribution in New Zealand* (Wellington: The Ornithological Society of New Zealand Inc, 2007).
- <sup>26</sup>All varieties that interbred with *Anas superciliosa*.
- <sup>27</sup>Margaret Orbell, *Birds of Aotearoa: A Natural and Cultural History* (Auckland: Reed Publishing NZ Ltd, 2003).
- <sup>28</sup>Orbell, *Birds of Aotearoa: A Natural and Cultural History*, 99.
- <sup>29</sup>Te Kanawa, *Weaving a Kakahu* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books Ltd in association with Aotearoa Moananui a Kiwa Weavers, 1992), 26.
- <sup>30</sup>M. Pendergrast, *Kakahu: Maori Cloaks* (Auckland: David Bateman Ltd in association with Auckland War Museum, 1997), 25.
- <sup>31</sup>Barrie Heather and Hugh Robertson, *The Field Guide to the Birds of New Zealand* (Revised edn.), (Auckland: Viking, 1996), 419.
- <sup>32</sup>Orbell, *Birds of Aotearoa: A Natural and Cultural History*, 57.
- <sup>33</sup>Te Kanawa, *Weaving a Kakahu*, 25.
- <sup>34</sup>Sidney M. Mead, *The Art of Taaniko Weaving* (Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed Ltd, 1968).
- <sup>35</sup>Mick Pendergrast, "The Fibre Arts," in *Maori Art and Culture*, ed. Doro C. Starzecka (London: British Museum Press, 1998), 129.
- <sup>36</sup>Hiroa, *On the Maori Art of Weaving Cloaks*, 84.
- <sup>37</sup>Mead, *The Art of Taaniko Weaving*, 24.
- <sup>38</sup>Keith A. Hobson, Steven Van Wilgenburg, Leonard I. Wassenaar, Frank Moore and Jeffrey Farrington, "Estimating Origins of Three Species of Neo-tropical Migrant Songbirds at a Gulf Coast Stopover Site: Combining Stable Isotope and GIS Tools," *Condor*, 109 (2007): 256-67.
- <sup>39</sup>Katie Hartnup, Leon Huynen, Rangi Te Kanawa, Lara Shepherd, Craig Millar and David Lambert, "A Molecular Study of a Rare Maori Cloak," in *Archaeological Science Under a Microscope: Studies in Residue and Ancient DNA Analysis in Honour of Thomas H. Loy, Terra Australis*, eds. Michael Haslam, Gail Robertson, Alison Crowther, Sue Nugent and Luke Kirkwood (Canberra: ANUE Press, 2009), 198-206.

## Bibliography

Hamilton, Augustus, "Notes on Some Old Flax Mats Found in Otago," *Transactions of the New Zealand Institute* 25 (1892): 487.



Hartnup, Katie, Leon Huynen, Rangi Te Kanawa, Lara Shepherd, Craig Millar and David Lambert, "A Molecular Study of a Rare Maori Cloak," in eds. Michael Haslam, Gail Robertson, Alison Crowther, Sue Nugent and Luke Kirkwood, *Archaeological Science Under a Microscope: Studies in Residue and Ancient DNA Analysis in Honour of Thomas H. Loy, Terra Australis* 30 (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2009) 198-206.

Harwood, Hokimate P., "Identification and Description of Feathers in Te Papa's Māori Cloaks," *Tuhinga* 22 (2011): 125-47.

Heather, Barrie and Hugh Robertson, *The Field Guide to the Birds of New Zealand* (Revised edn.), (Auckland: Viking, 1996).

Henare, Amiria, "Nga Aho Tipuna (Ancestral Threads): Maori Cloaks from New Zealand," in eds. Susanne Küchler and Daniel Miller, *Clothing as Material Culture* (New York: Berg, 2005) 121-38.

Hiroa, Te Rangi, "On the Maori Art of Weaving Cloaks, Capes and Kilts," *Dominion Museum Bulletin* 3 (1911): 69-90.

Hiroa, Te Rangi (Buck, Peter), *The Evolution of Maori Clothing: Memoirs of the Polynesian Society* (New Plymouth: Printed by Thomas Avery, 1926).

Hiroa, Te Rangi, *The Coming of the Maori* (Wellington: Whitcombe & Tombs Ltd, 1950).

Hobson, Keith A., Steven Van Wilgenburg, Leonard I. Wassenaar, Frank Moore and Jeffrey Farrington, "Estimating Origins of Three Species of Neotropical Migrant Songbirds at a Gulf Coast Stopover Site: Combining Stable Isotope and GIS Tools," *Condor* 109 (2007): 256-67.

Long, John L., *Introduced Birds of the World: The Worldwide History, Distribution and Influence of Birds Introduced to New Environments* (Sydney: A.H. & A.W. Reed Pty Ltd, 1981).

Mead, Sidney M., *The Art of Taaniko Weaving* (Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed Ltd, 1968).

Mead, Sidney M., *Traditional Maori Clothing: A Study of Technological and Functional Change* (Wellington: Reed, 1969).

Orbell, Margaret, *Birds of Aotearoa: A Natural and Cultural History* (Auckland: Reed Publishing NZ Ltd, 2003).

Pearlstein, Ellen, "Restoring Provenance to a Native American Feather Blanket," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 25(1), (2010): 87-105.

Pendergrast, Mick, *Te Aho Tapu: The Sacred Thread* (Auckland: Reed Methuen, 1987).

Pendergrast, Mick, *Kakahu: Maori Cloaks* (Auckland: David Bateman Ltd in association with Auckland War Museum, 1997).

Pendergrast, Mick, "The Fibre Arts," in ed. Doro C. Starzecka, *Maori Art and Culture* (London: British Museum Press, 1998) 114-46.

Robertson, Christopher J. R., Pasi Hyvönen, Mark J. Fraser and Ross Pickard, *Atlas of Bird Distribution in New Zealand* (Wellington: The Ornithological Society of New Zealand Inc, 2007).

Simmons, David R, "The Lake Hauroko Burial and the Evolution of Maori Clothing," Records of Otago Museum, *Anthropology* 5 (1968): 6.

Tapsell, Paul, "The Flight of the Pareraututu: An Investigation of Taonga from a Tribal Perspective," *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 106(4), (1997): 323-74.

Tau, Rawiri Te Maire, "The Death of Knowledge, Ghosts on the Plains," *The New Zealand Journal of History* 35(2), (2001): 131-52.

Te Kanawa, Diggeress, *Weaving a Kakahu* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books Ltd in association with Aotearoa Moananui a Kiwa Weavers, 1992).

### Biographical note

Hokimate Pamela Harwood (Ngāpuhi) obtained her MSc from the University of Auckland studying the ecology of urban kererū on Auckland's North Shore. Hokimate is currently Mātauranga Māori bicultural science researcher at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa in Wellington, New Zealand. Her interests and research background includes the use of birds by Māori, and is at present identifying the birds in the Museum's taonga Māori collection. Future research opportunities aim to use her findings to assist in geo-locating the origins (provenance) of Māori feather cloaks in national and international museum collections.

Email: [hokimate@tepapa.govt.nz](mailto:hokimate@tepapa.govt.nz)

---

## Contained Memories or Catalysts?: Some Aboriginal Memorials in Australia

Catherine De Lorenzo  
and Vivien Chow

---

## Contained Memories or Catalysts?: Some Aboriginal Memorials in Australia

Catherine De Lorenzo and Vivien Chow

---

### Abstract

Most of the many war memorials in the Australian public domain commemorate wars that were fought offshore. Conversely, memorials dealing with the fractious and sometimes violent interactions between Aboriginal and settler Australians since colonisation are rarely evident. This article examines selected examples of recent public art dealing with Aboriginal-settler issues. Beginning with a study of the *Myall Creek Memorial* (2000) on a remote site in the northern tablelands of New South Wales, Australia, the authors then briefly consider more recent public art projects by indigenous artists that expand the symbolic repertoire of massacre memorials. Examined in terms of their use of material culture and symbolism, the authors also question the degree to which specific art works function as contained memories or as catalysts for cultural change within the rural and urban fabrics.

Keywords: Australian Aboriginal memorials, public art, Myall Creek Memorial, Australian Aboriginal artists, reconciliation and art

Recent research has shown that memorials play significant roles at official, community, and individual levels. This article seeks to build on contemporary historical studies of memorials that commemorate indigenous themes and people in Australia, especially the celebrated Myall Creek Memorial (2000).<sup>1</sup>

Figure 1. Myall Creek Memorial 2000. Photo 2006. All photos by Catherine De Lorenzo.



It does so by expanding the critique from social history into the discourse of art history. This is in part because one legacy of this massacre memorial has been the enabling of major public artworks on similar themes around the country, providing art historians with opportunities to closely examine important cultural drivers behind art production. It is also because there appears to be common ground between the artists and communities behind the making of such artworks, on the one hand, and art historical research, on the other, given that both embrace “obsession, archive and encounter”.<sup>2</sup> We will closely examine the *Myall Creek Memorial*, and then briefly consider two more recent Aboriginal memorials in Sydney. The article will conclude with observations about how some of these works have successfully catalysed projects beyond the imagined specificity of their singular significance.

## Memorials, history, and colonisation

Typically, memorials commemorate the dead. Ken Inglis's study on Australian war memorials—including shrines, statues, and the ubiquitous obelisk found in most town parks—noted these “sacred places” commemorate soldiers who gave their lives to wars fought outside Australia.<sup>3</sup> They not so much “mark the spot” as serve to remind local citizens of a broadly defined point of departure (the town itself), and provide a gathering place for subsequent generations to engage with cultural memory. Invariably, they are settler monuments. Inglis was puzzled that Aborigines raised “no legible monuments to either their own traditional civil wars or their resistance against invaders”.<sup>4</sup> Yet markers of intellectual and cultural pursuits abound within and on the land throughout the country, so one might also have expected to find works that critically addressed cross-cultural experiences.<sup>5</sup>

That the monument-building European newcomers “seldom commemorated conflicts between black and white” was understandable, given that it is difficult to put a heroic gloss on deaths perpetrated by one's cultural forebears.<sup>6</sup> Such traditional memorials as do exist depict Aborigines either in minor roles—“as killers of the innocent, as loyal helpers, and as a race doomed to extinction”—within a grand colonial narrative, or as faithful friends honoured in death through a headstone or a “lonely cairn [that] translated a mark on a map into a place”, both of which were “cheap and easy to erect”.<sup>7</sup>

Remembering the past, especially those aspects William Logan and Keir Reeves have called the “Difficult Heritage”, is something Australians have come to acknowledge only since the early 1990s.<sup>8</sup> It has not always been the case. In 1968, just one year after Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of Australia were finally granted citizenship, anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner identified amnesia as one of the distinctive attributes of non-indigenous Australians.<sup>9</sup> In December 1992 official silence was broken when then Prime Minister Paul Keating, in his Redfern Park speech, recognised the truth of colonial devastation and asked non-indigenous Australians to imagine suffering such injustices.<sup>10</sup>

Throughout the 1990s new laws were passed on indigenous rights and native title,<sup>11</sup> and in February 2008 then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd gave his apology on behalf of all non-indigenous Australians to the indigenous community, for a series of government policies enforced from the late nineteenth century whereby indigenous children were taken from their families by government authorities and usually placed in institutions. Through this means, settler Australians acknowledged the “the pain, suffering and hurt of these Stolen Generations”.<sup>12</sup> Delivered 40 years after Stanner's observation, Rudd's apology on behalf of the nation marked the very significant cultural shift that occurred over these decades.

The profound cultural changes marked by these events are clearly seen in public art museums where, especially since the 1980s, contemporary Aboriginal art is valued, not least for its engagement with politics.<sup>13</sup> One spectacular example is the *Aboriginal Memorial* (1988), conceived by indigenous arts worker, Djon

Mundine, for the 1988 Australia [Sydney] Biennale and now located in the National Gallery of Australia collection. Artists from Ramingining in Eastern Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory made 200 poles, simulating their community's traditional hollow-log bone coffins.<sup>14</sup> Mundine claimed the bicentennial project was like “a large cemetery of dead Aboriginals ... a War Memorial to all those Aboriginals who died defending their country ... [during] two hundred years of white contact and black agony”.<sup>15</sup>

The Ramangining memorial seemed to encapsulate stories of racism and dispossession from around the country that had been documented in numerous histories such as those by C.D. Rowley, Henry Reynolds, and numerous others.<sup>16</sup> So it came as a surprise when in 2001 the newly-opened National Museum of Australia showcased Aboriginal dispossession in the wake of colonial occupation and unleashed a vitriolic tirade by conservative historians who were uncomfortable about oral histories, especially Aboriginal testimonials of colonial cruelty and injustice. The ensuing robust debate known as the “History Wars”, which hinged on the accuracy of historical sources and methodology, was front page news in the country.<sup>17</sup> There were no quibbles, however, about the well documented 1838 Myall Creek massacre because it provoked a seminal and celebrated court case resulting in the white perpetrators being not only tried but, for the first time in Australian history, executed.<sup>18</sup> Because the trial generated detailed records, all historians at least agree on the documented facts of this case, even if interpretations of other frontier massacres differ markedly.<sup>19</sup>

If acknowledgement of colonial conflict was evident in official government statements, the museum, the academy, and the popular press, the same could not be said of memorials in public spaces or public art. The best-documented public memorial to massacred Aboriginals is the *Myall Creek Memorial* (2000), commemorating the 28 Wirrayaraay men and women murdered at Myall Creek in 1838. Building on insights by cultural historian Katrina Schlunke<sup>20</sup> and historians Heather Goodall, Bronwyn Batten, Paul Ashton and Paula Hamilton,<sup>21</sup> as well as our own examination of the site and records of the project, we will begin our brief examination of Aboriginal memorials with this work.

### Myall Creek Memorial

Located in the Gwydir Valley in the northern tablelands of New South Wales, the *Myall Creek Memorial* is roughly eight hours drive north-east of Sydney. Situated within a landscape of rolling hills, and adjacent to a minor highway connecting the tiny township of Bingara (30 kilometres south) to larger towns such as Inverell (less than an hour's drive north-east), the memorial stretches along a half-kilometre winding path. Despite this significant scale it is invisible to passing motorists. At the entrance visitors are invited to “sit and reflect at intervals as [they] proceed along the walkway to the Memorial Rock”. Those who take the

meandering path through tall grasses hear the crunch of the red gravel underfoot and the birdsong in the trees nearby. They are invited to pause at each of the seven intervals, where knee-high granite rocks are twinned with a slab bench for sitting and contemplation.

Figure 2. Myall Creek Memorial, 2000. Photo 2005.



An aluminium plaque on each rock incrementally reveals the story of the massacre using image and text. Images by a local indigenous artist, Colin Isaacs, are amplified by succinct bilingual texts, beginning with “We Remember Them”, in the local Wirrayaraay and English languages.

Figure 3. Myall Creek Memorial, 2000. Photo 2009.





Figure 4. Myall Creek Memorial, 2000. Photo 2007.



At the end of the memorial path stands a majestic boulder about two metres in height, with a bronze plaque proclaiming that the memorial was erected “in an act of reconciliation, and in acknowledgement of the truth of our shared history”. The project was initiated by local indigenous and non-indigenous residents who constituted themselves as a steering committee in order to oversee design development and implementation. Their carefully-minuted meetings and publications confirm they wanted a “fitting national memorial to all the Aboriginal people who died in the massacres”, because it would acknowledge “this history is part of the history of all of us” and that although it is a massacre site, “the memorial should also be a celebrating of life, of resurrection”.<sup>22</sup> One spectacular outcome of the long process of community dialogue and deliberation was that local indigenous people, who used to say “hush-hush” when near the awful site, were able to break the taboo and actively discuss both the massacres and the need for reconciliation, and to do so even on national television.<sup>23</sup> Importantly, from the outset the committee included descendants of both the murdered and murderers. Since its inauguration on 10 June 2000, 152 years to the day after the massacre, an annual commemoration ceremony attracts a crowd from near and far who also want to acknowledge past hostilities and participate in current dialogues.

The history of the site, and its continuing impact on descendants and others today, led the committee to think of it as a “national sacred site”.<sup>24</sup> Its claim to be national alludes in part to the fact that everywhere is Aboriginal at base, and anywhere could be another unmarked massacre site. In that sense the memorial functions synecdochically as a “national” monument: it is a little bit of a much larger whole. A sense of the sacred in this instance stems from three attributes. The first is as a place where spirits of the dead reside. A second is embodied in the natural and designed components of the memorial, including the annual

commemorative ceremony. A third attribute of the sacred foreshadowed in the brief to the architect, Tim Shellshear, was “a building where cultural objects could be stored, pictures and photographs displayed; a place where people ... may come to learn about history”.<sup>25</sup> With an Aboriginal “Keeping Place”, or a repository for sacred and special objects, at its heart, the proposal for such a centre underscores the need to harness a sense of collective memory. In this instance the Myall Creek project would be spared from some of the dangers of what Joanna Sassoon has named a “phantom memory”, because of the awesome and uncontested fact of the massacre site.<sup>26</sup> Like most memorial designs this one combines specific local identity within a “national context of concern”.<sup>27</sup>

Sociality, spirituality, and especially materiality informed the project brief. Carefully referring to minuted meetings, it identified that the memorial be a very large boulder made of natural materials which blend with the landscape, and where trees should be a feature. Plaques, comprising text and pictograms, would tell the full story “for the sake of truth, pride, justice and unity”.<sup>28</sup> Practical details were also itemised, but overwhelmingly the brief underscored particular ethical and historical concepts to be carried by the careful selection of materials. Both the story and the material elements are pared down to the bare essentials, so that the site as a whole exemplifies novelist Milan Kundera’s belief that the artist must clearly strive to “eliminate whatever is secondary” and strive for “*the ethic of the essential*” [italics in original].<sup>29</sup>

### First person account

To date the authors have visited the memorial on at least seven occasions, both as lone visitors and as participants in the annual commemoration service. The first encounter was on a hot summer’s day when there were no other visitors, so solitude and silence seemed all the more intense under the enormous blue sky. On that occasion we observed the memorial had been vandalised by vigorous scratching over the aluminium plaques in an attempt to erase the words “murdered” and “women, children, and old men” from the plaque that describes so minimally the actual event.

Figure 5. Massacre Creek Memorial. 5th rock. Photo 2005.



As seen in Figure 1, in the middle of a hot day the trees cast welcome shade at the rest points. At dusk and dawn low sunbeams catch the tips of grasses and draw long, soft shadows, revealing a special kind of magic. When the annual mid-winter commemoration services are held, the bushland site easily absorbs hundreds of visitors. These events begin with a “welcome to country” from a local indigenous elder, a country-and-western song about the story of the massacre and the redemptive memorial, and a traditional smoking ceremony, which is designed to ritually cleanse participants before stepping onto the memorial walk.<sup>30</sup> Cultural duality echoes throughout the proceedings, with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal school children duly stationed at each stone to read aloud its inscriptions. Upon reaching the large memorial stone, attendees are dabbed on the forehead with white pigment by local custodians before gathering in silence to remember those slaughtered. Marked by this pigment of mourning, participants witness local school children conduct the “Lighting of Candles ceremony”. Every detail of the service is marked by symbolism and imparts to those present a sense of unity. What had begun as a nondescript site is transformed into an unforgettable place, made all the more so by the knowledge that it is but one of many similar massacre sites from this period.

Figure 6. Myall Creek Memorial. Photo 2009.



### From catafalque to catalyst

It is at these annual gatherings, especially when there is a potential for new social relations between participants, that the memorial becomes an agent for change. Philosopher Stewart Martin's redefinition of Nicolas Bourriaud's Relational Aesthetics is especially apt: "*the idea of relational aesthetics is that art is a form of social exchange*" [italics in original].<sup>31</sup> The fact that certain people from the Bingara district came together to propose, strategise, and eventually realise a public project is enough to warrant the term "relational art". That it continues to foster a high level of community participation underscores the claim. Now, over 10 years after its completion, the memorial is not so much hermetic, or self-referential, as it is catalytic: it arose from, and continues to provoke, social exchange.<sup>32</sup>

The *Myall Creek Memorial* has been generative of two additional outcomes. In 2008 the whole precinct, land and memorial, was awarded National Heritage listing under the Commonwealth of Australia's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.<sup>33</sup> Then, in 2009, the grass roots committee engaged architect, Tim Shellshear, to develop plans for a new educational and cultural centre adjacent to the memorial.<sup>34</sup> The centre is intended to house relevant cultural artefacts, be equipped with the latest interactive technologies, and provide a range of facilities for visitors. In 2011, the committee was awarded a grant to develop a business plan to this end.

Before 2000 there were no monuments or memorials in the public domain that specifically addressed indigenous massacres by settlers (the geographical naming of hills and gullies and fields being another matter). There were, however,

public art projects that addressed cross-cultural relations. An outstanding example is Sydney's *Edge of the Trees* (1994), the city's first commissioned public art piece awarded to an indigenous (Fiona Foley) and non-indigenous (Janet Laurence) team. The intention of the unusually-informed and provocative brief for the artwork was to foster curiosity and reflection on first encounters between Aborigines and settlers that must have taken place outside Old Government House, the site on which *Edge of the Trees* stands outside the Museum of Sydney.<sup>35</sup> The Laurence-Foley artwork of wood, steel, and sandstone columns, continues to be acclaimed for its robust conceptual and aesthetic qualities.<sup>36</sup>

Until the Myall Creek project, however, massacres were not addressed in commissioned public artworks. If it is true to contend that the Myall Creek project has spawned the development of other massacre memorials, this legacy has been not so much visual as conceptual. The absence of a massacre memorial tradition in Australia has meant that new typologies have had to be imagined. With no precedents to guide or inspire them, the Myall community employed a typology widely used in the region for placemaking, but hardly the stuff of innovative art practice. That they have managed to reinvent the plaque-on-plinth typology by embracing the land, its trees, grasses, sky, and a silence that settles on the place when the galahs are not screeching, indicates how very ordinary elements can both exceed the sum of the parts yet seem imperceptible. One is reminded of Jochen Gerz's comment about his *Place of the Invisible Memorial: 2146 Stones Against Racism* (1997) in Saarbrücken, Germany, that it was "all but invisible ... out of sight and therefore, *in mind*".<sup>37</sup> What the sprawling *Myall Creek Memorial* lacks in terms of a memorable gestalt is compensated for in a conceptual programme, and it is this aspect, not its appearance, that has been embraced by artists.

### Memorials and black humour

A full investigation of Aboriginal memorials, whether personal tributes or reminders of a "difficult heritage", exceeds the possibilities of a short article. From inner Sydney alone, for example, it would be apposite to include street murals referencing local indigenous luminaries, as well as a memorable temporary piece in 2008 by New York artist, Michael Rakowitz, *White Man Got No Dreaming*, which roughly replicates Tatlin's 1920 *Monument to the 3rd International* using debris from the derelict housing on the Koori-owned land in inner-city Redfern known as The Block.<sup>38</sup> The authors have selected two public artworks in Sydney that best extend ideas of memorialisation. One is a permanent piece that memorialises a friend, and the other a temporary work that addresses unspecified massacres. Unlike the community-developed memorial at Myall Creek, each is artist-driven.

Individual claim to public space to mark the death of a loved friend or relative is most frequently seen in roadside memorials.<sup>39</sup> In 2007, however, Badtjala artist, Fiona Foley and Urban Art Projects were commissioned by landscape architects

Spackman Mossop Michaels in collaboration with the architecture/urban design firm, Bligh Voller Nield, to design play spaces and a waterscape for the redesign and upgrade of Redfern Park, Sydney.<sup>40</sup> Foley seized the opportunity to make the waterscape feature, referred to in the documentation as “Lotus Line”, a memorial to friend and fellow indigenous artist, photographer, and filmmaker, Michael Riley.<sup>41</sup>

Figure 7. Fiona Foley. Bible and Bullets (detail), 2008.



Before he died in 2004, Riley had given Foley a print from his *Flyblown* series, a sepia-toned image of a Bible bearing a Latin Cross, the forlorn book apparently discarded in a pool of water. Foley used the cruciform shape in her waterscape project to mark out a smooth masonry base from which rise 1.6 metre tall bronze poppies. These opium poppies are a potent symbol in Foley’s art, as seen in two earlier works in Brisbane: *Witnessing to Silence* (2004) outside the Brisbane Magistrates’ Court where, under the guise of naming places in Queensland destroyed by flood and fire, she had inserted the names of massacre sites; and *Black Opium* (2006), an installation in the Queensland State Library, which draws attention to the state-sanctioned use of opium amongst Aboriginal communities.<sup>42</sup> Initially called *Lotus Line*, but now *Bible and Bullets*,<sup>43</sup> the water feature is seen to best effect when fine mist descends from the tall poppy heads and random squirts of water eject from holes underfoot to drench the unwary and provoke shrieks of delight, especially from children.

Figure 8. Fiona Foley. Bible and Bullets, 2008.



Viewers have to be close to the work to read text engraved at head and foot of the cross. One acknowledges Riley, including his role as a founding member of Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Cooperative, while the other quotes from Paul Keating's Redfern Park speech, mentioned earlier. Visually the work is simple, an unobtrusive element in the park. Conceptually it is even more complex than the interwoven themes of the personal and national, the elegiac and the ludic. For Foley has injected her signature sting, this time, unusually, directed not at a corrupt white society but at fellow indigenous art workers who, in paying tribute to Riley, have under-acknowledged his fellow artists (including Foley) who helped co-found Boomalli in nearby Chippendale in 1987.<sup>44</sup>

If Foley dared to complement hard-hitting points of memorial and cultural critique with the pleasure of spontaneous laughter, Brook Andrew's Jumping Castle War Memorial (2010), an outdoor temporary installation at the 17th Biennale of Sydney, pushed the coupling of memorial and merriment to an extreme, provoking one writer to proclaim that "Two ideas more at odds with each other are harder to conceive."<sup>45</sup>

Figure 9. Brook Andrew. Jumping Castle War Memorial, 2010.



Unlike the 1988 Ramangining *Aboriginal Memorial* with its fine craftsmanship, this inflatable vinyl castle is decked out in crazy black and white geometric lines that look like a three-dimensional Bridget Riley Op Art painting from 1960s. However, the lines are in fact derived from Wiradjuri designs found on carved trees and other artefacts from central-west New South Wales (that coincidentally includes Myall Creek).

Andrew has placed a towering black man in the middle of the 7 m x 7 m castle, which is defined architecturally by a turret at each corner, each with an upper window containing skulls. The artist instructed that only those over 16 years of age could be allowed to make the decision to jump in the castle, in the hope that jumpers would be conscious of the ironies of having fun while the skulls are flung thither and yon as a consequence of the jumpers' actions. The artist said: "It's a memorial for the people who haven't been the victors of invasion or colonisation, or war." After also adding, "there's incredible irony and fun", it comes as no surprise to hear him reflect, "I want it to create debate."<sup>46</sup> By using black, almost gallows, humour, Andrew also casts virtually all who do the decent thing and refuse to jump as cantankerous agelasts, that is, people who are "incapable of laughter, who do not understand joking".<sup>47</sup>

Like Foley's work, Andrew's memorial is best understood when seen in the broader context of the artist's oeuvre. Two years earlier, at the Museum of Contemporary Aboriginal Art in Utrecht, Holland, his exhibition, *Theme Park*, used design and humour to critique ethnographic archives.<sup>48</sup> At the same time as the *Jumping Castle* was attracting attention at the Biennale his 13 x 6 m, *The Cell*, at the Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation invited the visitor to the prison-like cell to don a costume of similar stripey quality. The artist's idea was that on entering the structure one would feel invisible, worthless, and not unlike an inmate or asylum seeker. These two projects reveal a gravitas to the *Jumping Castle Aboriginal Memorial*, not apparent to the unaware onlooker, and not evident to the writer of the only negative review we uncovered which found the work a "shallow idea full of assumed self-importance".<sup>49</sup>

## Conclusion

So, to what extent might all these memorials be seen as catalysts? A few legacies of the *Myall Creek Memorial* have already been mentioned, not least of which has been to clear the air for open debate on massacres and other atrocities. The genesis of the Myall Creek project revealed to the descendants of the murderers, but also to us all, how liberating it can be to name the awful secret. One committee member noted that when a local Wirrayaraay elder embraced a descendant of one of the perpetrators of the massacre they all felt they had "really taken a step into the future".<sup>50</sup> What began as personal liberation for a few impacted on the nation. The multiple publics in our society, it seems, are recognising that robust public art is not so much meeting health and safety standards as engaging with a broad



spectrum of issues, from the tough to the intangible and often, as seen in each of these works, at one and the same time. Artists are seizing the opportunity to address issues of “difficult heritage” in the public domain. Cities too are seeking to embrace public art that reminds the viewer of Aboriginal heritage and experience.<sup>51</sup> We have seen that projects developed in order to make particular issues visible on sites pertinent to the narratives, have helped generate new public art. What were once contained memories are talking new life. They are set free.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Beryl Henderson ed., *Monuments and Memorials* (Sydney: Royal Australasian Historical Society, 1988); Bronwyn Batten, “Monuments, Memorials and the Presentation of Australia’s Indigenous Past,” *Public History Review* 11 (2004): 100-21; and “The Myall Creek Memorial: History, Identity and Reconciliation,” in *Places of Pain and Shame: Dealing with ‘Difficult Heritage’*, eds. William Logan and Keir Reeves (Hoboken: Routledge, 2008), 82-96; Bronwyn Batten and Paul Batten, “Memorialising the Past: Is There an ‘Aboriginal’ Way?” *Public History Review* 15 (2008): 92-116; Chilla Bulbeck, “Aborigines, Memorials, and the History of the Frontier,” in *Packaging the Past? Public Histories*, eds. John Rickard and Peter Spearitt (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1991), 168-78.

<sup>2</sup>Michael Ann Holly and Marquard Smith, *What Is Research in the Visual Arts?: Obsession, Archive, Encounter* (Williamstown, Mass.: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute; New Haven, 2008).

<sup>3</sup>Kenneth Stanley Inglis, *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape* (Melbourne: Miegunyah Press, 1998).

<sup>4</sup>Inglis, 21; see also Chilla Bulbeck, *The Stone Laurel: Of Race, Gender and Class in Australian Memorials*, Occasional Paper No. 5 (Nathan, QLD: Griffith University, Institute for Cultural Policy Studies, 1988).

<sup>5</sup>Melinda Hinkson, *Aboriginal Sydney: A Guide to Important Places of the Past and Present* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2001); Jon Rhodes, *Site Seeing* (Sydney: Jon Rhodes, 1994).

<sup>6</sup>Tom Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors: The Antiquarian Imagination in Australia* (Cambridge and Melbourne: Cambridge UP, 1996), 145; J. Baker, “Heritage Listing Keeps Proud Memories Alive,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, January 24, 2006: 7.

<sup>7</sup>Inglis: 24; see also Tom Griffiths, “The Language of Conflict”, in *Frontier Conflict: The Australian Experience*, eds. Bain Attwood and S.G. Foster (Canberra: National Museum of Australia, 2003), 143ff; Batten, “Monuments, Memorials,” 105ff. The faithful friend quote comes from Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors*, 159-60.

<sup>8</sup>William Logan and Keir Reeves eds., *Places of Pain and Shame: Dealing with ‘Difficult Heritage’* (Hoboken: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>9</sup>W.E.H. Stanner, *After the Dreaming: Black and White Australians – An*

*Anthropologist's View*, The Boyer Lectures (Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1968).

<sup>10</sup>Paul Keating, Redfern Park Speech launching the International Year for the World's Indigenous People, December 10, 1992, accessed November 2, 2010, [www.australianpolitics.com/executive/keating/92-12-10redfern-speech.shtml](http://www.australianpolitics.com/executive/keating/92-12-10redfern-speech.shtml)

<sup>11</sup>For an overview of the *Mabo v Queensland [No 2]* (1992) and *Wik Peoples v State of Queensland and Others* (1996) legislation see Peter Butt and Robert Eagleson, *Mabo, Wik and Native Title* (Leichhardt: Federation Press, 1998). Also see the ANTAR website, accessed November 11, 2010, <http://www.antarvictoria.org.au/wikmabo.html>; Ronald Wilson [Commissioner], *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry Into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children From Their Families* (Sydney: Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997), accessed June 10, 2011, <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/special/rsjproject/rsjlibrary/hreoc/stolen/>

<sup>12</sup>Kevin Rudd, "Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples," House of Representatives, Parliament House, Canberra, February 13, 2008, accessed November 3, 2010, [http://www.aph.gov.au/house/rudd\\_speech.pdf](http://www.aph.gov.au/house/rudd_speech.pdf)

<sup>13</sup>Recent accounts include Susan Cochrane ed., *Aboriginal Art Collections: Highlights from Australia's Public Museums and Galleries* (Sydney: Craftsman House, 2001); Benjamin Thomas, "Daryl Lindsay and the Appreciation of Indigenous Art at the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne in the 1940s: 'No Mere Collection of Interesting Curiosities'," *Journal of Art Historiography*, 4 (2011) accessed July 3, 2011, <http://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/thomas-on-daryl-lindsay1.pdf>; Odette Kelada, "Opening the 'Wild Room'?: An Encounter With the National Galleries," *Artlink*, 31(2), (2011): 40-43. Also exhibitions: *Balance* (Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery, 1990) and *Cultural Warriors* (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2007).

<sup>14</sup>Image <http://nga.gov.au/ATSIArt/GALLERY.cfm?GALID=1>; Djon Mundine, "200 Burial Poles: An Aboriginal Memorial," *Art Monthly*, 10 (1988): 24-25; "Interview with Djon Mundine [by] Rex Butler," in ed. Rex Butler *Radical Revisionism: An Anthology of Writings on Australian Art*, 88-92 (Fortitude Valley, QLD: Institute of Modern Art, 2005); Terry Smith, "Public Art Between Cultures: The Aboriginal Memorial, Aboriginality, and Nationality in Australia," *Critical Inquiry* 27(4), (2001): 629-61.

<sup>15</sup>Mundine, "200 Burial Poles," 25; Nick Waterlow, *1988 Australian Biennale. From the Southern Cross: A View of World Art c.1940-88* (Sydney: The Biennale of Sydney in association with The Australian Bicentennial Authority, 1988): 230.

<sup>16</sup>See, for example, C.D. Rowley, *Outcasts in White Australia* (Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin Books, 1972); Henry Reynolds, *The Trevor Reese Memorial Lecture 1984. The Breaking of the Great Australian Silence: Aborigines in Australian Historiography 1955-1983* (London: University of London, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, Australian Studies Centre, 1984).

<sup>17</sup>For an overview of the debate see: Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark, *The*

*History Wars* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne UP, 2004); Stuart Macintyre ed., *The Historian's Conscience: Australian Historians on the Ethics of History* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne UP, 2004); Bain Attwood, *Telling the Truth about Aboriginal History* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2005).

<sup>18</sup>R v Kilmeister (No 1) NSW Supreme Court 105 (November 15, 1838), Australian Legal Information Institute, accessed August 15, 2009, <http://www.austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/sinodisp/au/other/NSWSupC/1838/105.html?query=myall%20creek>; R v Kilmeister (No 2) NSW Supreme Court 110 (December 5, 1838), Australian Legal Information Institute, accessed August 15, 2009, <http://www.austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/sinodisp/au/other/NSWSupC/1838/110.html?query=myall%20creek#disp1>; Len Payne, "The Myall Creek Massacre, A Correlation of Known and Attested Facts from the Past and the Present Concerning the Infamous Myall Creek Massacre of 1838", accessed June 15, 2011 <http://www.goodbyebussamarai.com/MyallCreek%20Massacre.doc>

<sup>19</sup>See footnote 17 above.

<sup>20</sup>Katrina Schlunke, "Incommensurate Suffering: 'Making' Women and Children in Massacre," *Australian Feminist Studies* 16(34), (2001): 61-67; Schlunke, "In-Between the Memorial, the Library and the Lesbian," *Cultural Studies Review* 9(1), (2003): 77-84; Schlunke, "Dumb Places," *Balayi: Culture, Law and Colonialism*, 6 (2004): 72-81; Schlunke, "More Than Memory: Performing Place and Postcoloniality at the Myall Creek Massacre Memorial," in ed. Gay McAuley, *Dramaturgies: Unstable Ground* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2006).

<sup>21</sup>Heather Goodall, "Mourning, Remembrance and the Politics of Place: A Study in the Significance of Collarenebri Aboriginal Cemetery," *Public History Review* 9 (2001): 72-96; Goodall, "Too Early Yet or Not Soon Enough? Reflections on Sharing Histories as Process," *Australian Historical Studies*, 118 (2002): 7-24; Batten, "Myall Creek Memorial"; Paul Ashton and Paula Hamilton, "'Unfinished Business': Public History in a Postcolonial Nation," in eds. Daniel J. Walkowitz and Lisa Maya Knauer, *Contested Histories in Public Space: Memory, Race, and Nation* (Durham and London: Duke UP, 2009).

<sup>22</sup>Myall Creek Memorial Committee [MCMC]: Minutes of Interim Planning Committee, 1998-2001, unpublished; MCMC, Brief for Architect, 1999, unpublished; MCMC, *Myall Creek Massacre & Memorial: Our Shared History* (Revised edn), (Bingara, NSW: Myall Creek Memorial Committee, 2008).

<sup>23</sup>Sue Blacklock in the Australian Broadcasting Corporation television documentary *Australian Story: Bridge Over Myall Creek*, July 26, 2001.

<sup>24</sup> MCMC, Brief for Architect.

<sup>25</sup>MCMC, Brief for Architect.

<sup>26</sup>Joanna Sassoon, "Phantoms of Remembrance: Libraries and Archives as 'The Collective Memory'," *Public History Review*, 10 (2003): 40-60.

<sup>27</sup>Sue-Anne Ware, "Anti-Memorials and the Art of Forgetting: Critical Reflections on a Memorial Design Practice," *Public History Review* 15 (2008): 62.

<sup>28</sup>Much of the language used in this paragraph is a précis from the brief.

- <sup>29</sup>Milan Kundera, *The Curtain: An Essay in Seven Parts*, (Trans.) Linda Asher (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), 96-97.
- <sup>30</sup>For details on the Aboriginal Smoking Ceremony and other protocols see the Department of Aboriginal Affairs website, <http://www.daa.nsw.gov.au/data/files//Aboriginal%20CulturalProtocolsandPracticesPolicyFINAL.pdf>
- <sup>31</sup>Stewart Martin, "Critique of Relational Aesthetics," *Third Text*, 21(4), (2007): 370. See also Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, (Trans.) Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods with Mathieu Copeland (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2002).
- <sup>32</sup>For a development of these ideas see Martin, "Critique of Relational Aesthetics".
- <sup>33</sup>Commonwealth of Australia, Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999: Inclusion of a Place in the National Heritage List, *Gazette Special S11608*, July 2, 2008.
- <sup>34</sup>Personal correspondence from Ivan Roberts regarding a public meeting scheduled for October 30, 2010. Received October 20, 2010. The authors have seen the developing designs at the annual 2010 and 2011 commemorations, but they are not yet finalised and hence are not available for publication.
- <sup>35</sup>Stories on the contributions Aborigines made to early memorials in the Sydney region are detailed by Maria Nugent, "Historical Encounters: Aboriginal Testimony and Colonial Forms of Commemoration," *Aboriginal History* 30 (2006): 33-47.
- <sup>36</sup>The Museum of Sydney is built on the site of Old Government House, where one can imagine encounters between the local Gadigal people and the new settler administration. For a detailed study of the art project see Dinah Dysart ed., *The Edge of the Trees: A Sculptural Installation by Janet Laurence and Fiona Foley from the Concept by Peter Emmett* (Sydney: Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, 2000).
- <sup>37</sup>James E. Young, *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2000), 142.
- <sup>38</sup>Koori is a term widely used by indigenous peoples in south-eastern Australia to refer to themselves.
- <sup>39</sup>See Ashton and Hamilton, "Unfinished Business," 11-15; Kate V. Hartig and Kevin M. Dunn, "Roadside Memorials: Interpreting New Deathscapes in Newcastle, NSW," *Australian Geographical Studies* 36(1), (1998): 5-20.
- <sup>40</sup>The Badtjala people are from a coastal region north of Brisbane that includes Hervey Bay and Fraser Island.
- <sup>41</sup>The major publication on Riley is *Michael Riley: Sights Unseen*, ed. Brenda L. Croft (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2006).
- <sup>42</sup>For details on these and other projects see: Fiona Foley ed., *The Art of Politics, the Politics of Art: The Place of Indigenous Contemporary Art* (Southport, QLD: Keeaira Press, 2006); Jay Younger, "Critically Engaged Permanent Public Art in the Context of Art Built-in (1999-2006)," (PhD diss., University of NSW, Sydney, 2011); Louise Martin-Chew, "Public and Political: Recent Major Sculpture by Fiona Foley," *Artlink* 31(2), (2011): 62-65.
- <sup>43</sup>Tess Allas, "History Is a Weapon: Fiona Foley History Teacher," *Artlink* 30(1), (2010): 56-61.

<sup>44</sup>The intent of the artist was gained from personal correspondence September 12, 2007.

<sup>45</sup>Joyce Morgan, “There Might Be Big Artworks But You Can’t Jump In Them: Brook Andrew”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, May 8, 2010: 4.

<sup>46</sup>All quotes from Caris Bizzaca, “Curiosity Ignites Sydney’s Biennale,” *AAP*, May 12, 2010, accessed November 12, 2010, <http://global.factiva.com.wwwproxy0.library.unsw.edu.au/ha/default.aspx>

<sup>47</sup>Kundera, *The Curtain*, 107.

<sup>48</sup>Brook Andrew, *Theme Park* (Utrecht, The Netherlands: Museum Voor Hedendaagse Aboriginal Kunst (Museum of Contemporary Aboriginal Art, 2009).

<sup>49</sup>Adam Gifford, “Languages to Talk About the World,” *New Zealand Herald*, May 22, 2010, accessed November 12, 2010, <http://global.factiva.com.wwwproxy0.library.unsw.edu.au/ha/default.aspx>

<sup>50</sup>MCMC, *Myall Creek Massacre & Memorial*, 19.

<sup>51</sup>For example, the City of Sydney’s *2011 City Art Strategy and Guidelines* (<http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/cityart/about/PublicArtPolicyStrategyGuidelines.asp>) builds on its 2008 strategic plan Sustainable Sydney 2030 and makes use of the concept of an ‘Eora Journey’ through the city to frame an experience that is mindful of Koori culture.

## Bibliography

Allas, Tess, “History Is a Weapon: Fiona Foley History Teacher,” *Artlink* 30(1), (2010): 56-61.

Andrew, Brook, *Theme Park*, Utrecht, The Netherlands: Museum Voor Hedendaagse Aboriginal Kunst (Museum of Contemporary Aboriginal Art), 2009.

ANTAR, accessed November 11, 2010, <http://www.antarvictoria.org.au/wikmabo.html>

Ashton, Paul and Paula Hamilton, “‘Unfinished Business’: Public History in a Postcolonial Nation,” in *Contested Histories in Public Space: Memory, Race, and Nation*, eds. Daniel J. Walkowitz and Lisa Maya Knauer (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009), 71-98.

Attwood, Bain, *Telling the Truth about Aboriginal History* (Crows Nest (NSW): Allen & Unwin, 2005).

Attwood, Bain and S.G. Foster, eds., *Frontier Conflict: The Australian Experience* (Canberra: National Museum of Australia, 2003).

Australian Broadcasting Corporation, “Bridge Over Myall Creek: Transcript of Australian Story, July 26, 2001”, accessed November 25, 2005, <http://www.abc.net.au/austory/transcripts/s332825.htm>

Australian Legal Information Institute, R v Kilmeister (No 1) NSW Supreme Court 105 (November 15, 1838), accessed August 15, 2009, <http://www.austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/sinodisp/au/other/NSWSupC/1838/105.html?query=myall%20creek>

Australian Legal Information Institute, R v Kilmeister (No 2) NSW Supreme Court 110 (December 5, 1838), accessed August 15, 2009, <http://www.austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/sinodisp/au/other/NSWSupC/1838/110.html?query=myall%20creek#disp1>

Baker, J., "Heritage Listing Keeps Proud Memories Alive," *Sydney Morning Herald*, January 24, 2006.

Batten, Bronwyn, "Monuments, Memorials and the Presentation of Australia's Indigenous Past," *Public History Review* 11 (2004): 100-21.

Batten, Bronwyn, "The Myall Creek Memorial: History, Identity and Reconciliation," in eds. William Logan and Kier Reeves, *Places of Pain and Shame: Dealing with 'Difficult Heritage'* (Hoboken: Routledge, 2008), 82-96.

Batten, Bronwyn and Paul Batten, "Memorialising the Past: Is There an 'Aboriginal' Way?" *Public History Review* 15 (2008): 92-116.

Bizzaca, Caris, "Curiosity Ignites Sydney's Biennale," *AAP*, May 12, 2010, accessed November 12, 2010, <http://global.factiva.com.wwwproxy0.library.unsw.edu.au/ha/default.aspx>

Bourriaud, Nicolas, *Relational Aesthetics*, (Trans.) Simon Pleasance, Fronza Woods and Mathieu Copeland (Dijon: Les Presses du réel, 2002).

Butt, Peter and Robert Eagleson, *Mabo, Wik and Native Title* (3rd edn), (Leichhardt NSW: Federation Press, 1998).

Cochrane, Susan, ed., *Aboriginal Art Collections: Highlights from Australia's Public Museums and Galleries* (Sydney: Craftsman House, 2001).

Croft, Brenda L., *Michael Riley: Sights Unseen* (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2006).

Commonwealth of Australia, "Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999: Inclusion of a Place in the National Heritage List," *Special Gazette* S11608, accessed 15 July, 2011, [http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/laws/publicdocuments/pubs/105869\\_01.pdf](http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/laws/publicdocuments/pubs/105869_01.pdf)

Dysart, Dinah ed., *The Edge of the Trees: A Sculptural Installation by Janet Laurence and Fiona Foley from the Concept by Peter Emmett* (Sydney: Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, 2000).

Foley, Fiona, ed., *The Art of Politics the Politics of Art: The Place of Indigenous Contemporary Art* (Southport, QLD: Keeaira Press, 2006).

Gifford, Adam, "Languages to Talk About the World," *New Zealand Herald*, May 22, 2010, accessed November 12, 2010, <http://global.factiva.com.wwwproxy0.library.unsw.edu.au/ha/default.aspx>

Goodall, Heather, "Mourning, Remembrance and the Politics of Place: A Study in the Significance of Collarenebri Aboriginal Cemetery," *Public History Review* 9 (2001): 72-96.

Goodall, Heather, "Too Early Yet or Not Soon Enough? Reflections on Sharing Histories as Process," *Australian Historical Studies* 118 (2002): 7-24.

Griffiths, Tom, *Hunters and Collectors: The Antiquarian Imagination in Australia* (Cambridge and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Griffiths, Tom, "The Language of Conflict," in eds. B. Attwood and S.G. Foster, *Frontier Conflict: The Australian Experience* (Canberra: National Museum of Australia, 2003).

Hartig, Kate V. and Kevin M. Dunn, "Roadside Memorials: Interpreting New Deathscapes in Newcastle, NSW," *Australian Geographical Studies* 36(1), (1998): 5-20.

Henderson, Beryl ed., *Monuments and Memorials* (Sydney: Royal Australasian Historical Society, 1988).

Holly, Michael Ann and Marquard Smith, *What Is Research in the Visual Arts?: Obsession, Archive, Encounter* (Williamstown, Mass.: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute; New Haven: distributed by Yale University Press, 2008).

Inglis, K.S., *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape* (Melbourne: The Miegunyah Press, 1998).

Keating, Paul, "Redfern Park Speech Launching the International Year for the World's Indigenous People," *Australian Politics*, December 10, 1992, accessed November 3, 2010 [www.australianpolitics.com/executive/keating/92-12-10redfern-speech.shtml](http://www.australianpolitics.com/executive/keating/92-12-10redfern-speech.shtml)

Kelada, Odette, "Opening the 'Wild Room'?: An Encounter With the National Galleries," *Artlink*, 31(2), (2011): 40-43.

Kundera, Milan, *The Curtain: An Essay in Seven Parts*, (Trans.) L. Asher (London: Faber and Faber, 2007).

Logan William, and Keir Reeves, eds., *Places of Pain and Shame: Dealing with 'Difficult Heritage'* (Hoboken: Routledge, 2008).

Macintyre, Stuart ed., *The Historian's Conscience: Australian Historians on the Ethics of History* (Carlton (VIC): Melbourne University Press, 2004).

Macintyre, Stuart and Anna Clark, *The History Wars* (Carlton (VIC): Melbourne University Press, 2003).

- Martin, Stewart, "Critique of Relational Aesthetics," *Third Text* 21(4), (2007): 369-86.
- Martin-Chew, Lisa, "Public and Political: Recent Major Sculpture by Fiona Foley," *Artlink*, 31(2), (2011): 62-65.
- Morgan, Joyce, "There Might Be Big Artworks But You Can't Jump In Them," Brook Andrew', *Sydney Morning Herald*, May 8, 2010.
- Myall Creek Memorial Committee, 1998-2001, Minutes of Interim Planning Committee, unpublished.
- Myall Creek Memorial Committee, 1999, Brief for Architect, unpublished.
- Myall Creek Memorial Committee, *Myall Creek Massacre & Memorial: Our Shared History* (Bingara (NSW): Myall Creek Memorial Committee, 2001; Revised edn 2001).
- Mundine, Djon, "200 Burial Poles: An Aboriginal Memorial," *Art Monthly*, 10 (1988): 24-25.
- Mundine, Djon, "Interview with Djon Mundine (by) Rex Butler," in ed. Rex Butler, *Radical Revisionism: An Anthology of Writings on Australian Art* (Fortitude Valley (QLD): Institute of Modern Art, 2005), 88-92.
- Myers, Fred, "Uncertain Regard: An Exhibition of Australian Aboriginal Art in France," *Ethnos* 63(1), (1998): 7-47.
- Payne, Len, "The Myall Creek Massacre, A Correlation of Known and Attested Facts from the Past and the Present Concerning the Infamous Myall Creek Massacre of 1838," accessed August 15, 2005, <http://www.goodbyeussamarai.com/MyallCreek%20Massacre.doc>
- Rudd, Kevin, "Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples," House of Representatives, Parliament House, Canberra, February 13, 2008, accessed 3 November, 2010 [http://www.aph.gov.au/house/rudd\\_speech.pdf](http://www.aph.gov.au/house/rudd_speech.pdf)
- Sassoon, Joanna, "Phantoms of Remembrance: Libraries and Archives as 'The Collective Memory'," *Public History Review* 10 (2003): 40-60.
- Schlunke, Katrina, "Dumb Places," *Balayi* 6 (2004): 72-81.
- Schlunke, Katrina, "More Than Memory: Performing Place and Postcoloniality at the Myall Creek Massacre Memorial," in ed. Gay McAuley, *Dramaturgies: Unstable Ground* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2006), 177-85.
- Schlunke, Katrina, "Incommensurate Suffering: 'Making' Women and Children in Massacre," *Australian Feminist Studies* 16(34), (2001): 61-67.
- Schlunke, Katrina, "In-Between the Memorial, The Library and the Lesbian," *Cultural Studies Review* 9(1), (2003): 77-84.



Smith, Terry, "Public Art Between Cultures: The Aboriginal Memorial, Aboriginality, and Nationality in Australia," *Critical Inquiry* 27(4), (2001): 629-61.

Stanner, W.E.H., *After the Dreaming: Black and White Australians – An Anthropologist's View*, The Boyer Lectures (Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1968).

Thomas, Benjamin, "Daryl Lindsay and the Appreciation of Indigenous art at the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne in the 1940s: 'No Mere Collection of Interesting Curiosities'," *Journal of Art Historiography* 4 (2011), 1-32, accessed July 3, 2010 <http://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/thomas-on-daryl-lindsay1.pdf>

Ware, Sue-Anne, "Anti-Memorials and the Art of Forgetting: Critical Reflections on a Memorial Design Practice," *Public History Review* 15 (2008): 61-67.

Wilson, Ronald [Commissioner], *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children From Their Families* (Sydney: Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997), accessed June 10, 2011, <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/special/rsjproject/rsjlibrary/hreoc/stolen/>

Young, James E., *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000).

Younger, Jay, "Critically Engaged Permanent Public Art in the Context of Art Built-in (1999-2006)," (Sydney: PhD diss., University of New South Wales, 2011).

### Biographical notes

Catherine De Lorenzo, BA (Hons) (U. Syd.), DipEd (U. Syd.), PhD (U. Syd.), is an art historian and senior lecturer in the Architecture Program, Faculty of the Built Environment (FBE), University of New South Wales, Sydney. Much of her research investigates cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary uses of photographs and public art. She publishes in a wide range of disciplinary journals, and is a Contributing Editor to *History of Photography*, an Editorial Advisory Board member of *Visual Studies*, and an Editorial Board member of the *Design and Art of Australia Online* (DAAO). In 2009, she won the Marian Mahony Griffin Award for contributions to interdisciplinary teaching and practice. She is currently working on an ARC Linkage grant investigating the impact of curated exhibitions on Australian art historiography over the last 40 years.

Email: [c.delorenzo@unsw.edu.au](mailto:c.delorenzo@unsw.edu.au)

Vivien Chow, BArch (Hons) (UNSW), MPD (UNSW), is a research associate at the Faculty of the Built Environment (FBE), University of New South Wales, Sydney. Influenced by her professional work across architectural design, planning and development, she is interested in investigating the social impacts of a built environment, and how consultation and collaboration with user groups can be used to enhance design projects. Vivien tutors in design, project management, and sustainable development.

Email: [v.chow@unsw.edu.au](mailto:v.chow@unsw.edu.au)

---

# The Māori Fish Hook: Traditional Materials, Innovative Design

Chris Paulin

---

## The Māori Fish Hook: Traditional Materials, Innovative Design

Chris Paulin

---

### Abstract

Traditional Māori fish hooks made using wood, bone, stone, and shell were discarded after the introduction of metals to New Zealand by Europeans, and the knowledge surrounding their design and use was lost. By using current understanding of the ecology and feeding strategies of New Zealand fishes, the knowledge held within the objects themselves can be used to determine how original or traditional Māori hooks (matau) functioned, identify those made for fishing, and distinguish them from hooks that may be replicas or forgeries made for sale to tourists and collectors by both entrepreneurial Māori and European forgers. It is ironic that present-day fishers consider metal ‘circle hooks’ an advance in hook design, when it is rather a re-discovery of a much older technology. Many hooks (and other traditional tools) have been incorrectly interpreted as decorative, ceremonial, or even magico-religious objects, which has influenced the design of many present-day pendants (hei matau) worn as symbols of Māori cultural revival.

Keywords: Māori, fishing, rotating hooks, hei matau

## Introduction

On James Cook's first Pacific voyage of discovery (1769-1772), Joseph Banks observed Māori fishing and commented that "... Their hooks are but ill made, generally [sic] of bone or shell ...".<sup>1</sup> William Anderson, ship's surgeon on board the *Resolution* during Cook's third voyage (1776-1779), observed that Māori "... live chiefly by fishing, making use ... of wooden fish hooks pointed with bone, but so oddly made that a stranger is at a loss to know how they can answer such a purpose ...".<sup>2</sup> Early explorers, including Pottier de l'Horme, an officer on de Surville's ship *St Jean Baptiste* in 1769,<sup>3</sup> expressed doubt as to the efficiency and function of the traditional hooks. European settlers also dismissed the hooks, stating they were "... very clumsy affairs...".<sup>4,5</sup> Ethnologists and archaeologists throughout the twentieth century questioned the Māori hooks, which were described in such terms as "... impossible looking ..." and "... shaped in a manner which makes it very difficult to imagine could ever be effective in catching a fish...".<sup>6,7,8</sup>

Figure 1. Composite Māori fish hook with carved shank. Date unknown. Museum of New Zealand, Wellington, OL000105.



Following European exploration in the late 1700s, sealers and whalers began visiting New Zealand and traded extensively with Māori for provisions and

other services, providing metal tools as a form of currency.<sup>9,10</sup> Metals imported by Europeans were quickly adopted by Māori for manufacturing fish hooks, and traditional hooks made of wood, bone, stone, and shell were discarded.<sup>11</sup> Other changes in Māori lifestyle associated with the increasing availability of European agricultural cultivars and domestic animals in the nineteenth century, and urbanisation in the twentieth century, led to a general decline in Māori fishing activity and exclusion from large-scale fishing opportunities and investment.<sup>12,13,14</sup>

Although Māori initially continued to make fish hooks following the traditional circle hook design using new materials, the adoption of mass-produced steel hooks soon led to the nature of the original design and function of the traditional hook being lost.<sup>15</sup>

Mātauranga Māori (traditional knowledge) was entirely memorised and transmitted orally by tohunga (experts or priests). In 1879, John White, an ethnographic novelist recognised as a leading authority on Māori, was appointed by the government to write an official history of New Zealand's indigenous people.<sup>16</sup> From the 1840s to the 1890s, he procured information for his history from some 300 Māori by payment, cajoling, and friendship. He described how those who held the sacred knowledge, even after converting to Christianity, were in such awe that to divulge it (the knowledge) to Europeans, or even to the junior branches of his own people, was to incur the penalty of death. The death of many tohunga and elders resulted in a loss of knowledge, including details of how traditional fish hooks were made, and eventually even mātauranga Māori itself was disregarded as a knowledge base.<sup>17,18,19,20,21,22,23</sup>

By using current understanding of the ecology and feeding strategies of New Zealand fish we can unlock the knowledge held within the traditional hooks, determine how original Māori hooks functioned, and identify matau made for fishing. This understanding helps us to determine which hooks in museum and private collections may be replicas or forgeries made for sale to tourists and collectors by both entrepreneurial Māori and European forgers.

### Traditional fish hook design

Fish were traditionally caught by Māori using suspended bait hooks. Sharp points and barbs required for piercing and holding fish on the hook could not be easily manufactured from natural materials such as wood, bone, stone, and shell. Hence traditional hooks were made to a design known as a circle hook and have certain characteristics: the point of the hook is directed inwards, perpendicular to the shank, the gap between the point and the shank is extremely narrow, and the fishing line is attached to a groove at right angles to the direction of the point and leads away from the inner side of the shank.

Circle, or 'rotating', hooks function in a different manner to European J-shaped metal 'jabbing' hooks. The latter are attached to the fishing line with the shank parallel to the point so the angler can 'set' the hook with a sharp upward jerk on

the line to pierce the fish, which is then held on the hook by the reversed barb. A circle hook does not pierce the fish, rather the fish hooks itself and it is held on the hook without the need for a barb. As the fish attempts to remove bait from a circle hook, the jaw slips through the narrow gap between the shank and the point of the hook. Increasing tension on the line then causes the hook to rotate away from the direction of the point as it slides to the corner of the mouth, trapping the fish's jawbone. Thus there was no requirement for a reversed barb or for Māori to use rods for leverage to set the hook.<sup>24</sup>

Following European contact, the superiority of metal over natural materials for working implements quickly became apparent and stone, wood, and bone tools were discarded by Māori. Metal hooks replaced those made of wood, bone, stone, and shell, and by the mid-1800s few traditional hooks were being made. However, demand from tourists and collectors for souvenirs and artefacts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries resulted in the production of numerous replica fish hooks and other artefacts by both Māori and Europeans.<sup>25,26,27,28,29,30,31</sup>

Fish hooks were popular as tourist souvenirs, particularly lures with brightly coloured pāua shell inlays, and wooden hooks with shanks adorned with detailed ornamental carving. However many of these 'souvenir' or 'replica' hooks, now held in museum collections, do not meet the design requirements for a functioning circular hook or trolling lure.

Wood-backed trolling lures (Figure 2) were not reported by European observers prior to the mid-1800s, and were probably not easily made until the introduction of metal tools enabled the delicate shell inlay to be fitted to the wood. Lures with wooden shanks would have floated at the surface and would not attract and catch fish efficiently; earlier lures made using stone, bone or shell shanks would sink in the water column to fish at depth.<sup>32,33,34</sup>

Figure 2. Wood-backed pā kahawai. Dates unknown. Puke Ariki, New Plymouth: A, A57-788; B, A57-876.



Numerous examples of pā kahawai lures made with wooden shanks and inlaid with pāua shell backing were manufactured in the inland Māori village of Parihaka,

Taranaki in the latter part of the nineteenth century and sold through Butterworth's Old Curiosity Shop in the nearby town of New Plymouth.<sup>35</sup> Traditional rotating fish hooks with ornately carved wooden shanks, and wooden trolling lures with pāua shell inlays, are examples of formerly rare categories of taonga which came to be specifically designed and produced for their desirability as trade items.<sup>36</sup> This mirrored a similar process of the most internationally identifiable Māori symbol, the hei tiki.<sup>37</sup>

Commercial long-line fishers have recently adopted the circle hook design. Metal J-shaped hooks rely on a sharp point to penetrate the flesh and the fish is then held on the hook by a reversed barb (Figure 3). This results in injury to the fish, and in long-line situations it often dies and deteriorates before the line is retrieved. The traditional Māori hook did not require the angler to set the hook, as it captured the fish by rotating as tension on the line increased. As the point of the circle hook is not required to penetrate the fish, but holds it securely at the corner of the mouth, the fish is not injured and remains in good condition until the line can be retrieved. Metal circle hooks will penetrate the fish at the corner of the mouth, but rarely cause severe injury.

Figure 3. Modern metal J-shaped hook (left) and circle hook (right). Photograph by Jean-Claude Stahl. Museum of New Zealand, Wellington.



While the introduction of metal in the early 1800s led to traditional tools made of natural materials being discarded, those made of valuable greenstone were often kept as items for personal adornment, their original purpose frequently lost to subsequent generations.<sup>38</sup> Europeans often interpreted unusual items with no apparent function as decorative, ceremonial or even magico-religious objects.<sup>39,40,41</sup> Among these are examples of large flat greenstone tools, possibly used as scrapers or for scaling fish, which superficially resembled small fish hooks. However they were described by European commentators as stylised fish hook pendants (hei matau) in the late 1800s.<sup>42,43,44</sup>



## Conclusion

In pre-European New Zealand, Māori caught fish efficiently and sustainably in a marine environment that has undergone significant changes over the 240 years since the voyages of James Cook and European settlement. The traditional fish hook was made of wood, bone, shell, or stone. Suspended hooks were made to a circle hook design in which the barbless-point of the hook is directed inwards and the line attached leading away from the inner side of the shank causes the hook to rotate backwards to hold the fish, while lures were made using stone, bone, or shell shanks which would sink to fish effectively. By understanding the function of the design encapsulated within traditional hooks, it is possible to distinguish hooks that have been made since European contact that are possibly replicas or forgeries made for tourists and collectors.

The circle hook design was very efficient and ironically has been re-adopted by present-day fishers using modern steel hooks as an ‘innovation’ in recognition of its advantages in holding live fish on the line. Greenstone tools, whose true function has been forgotten, had been interpreted as decorative items or stylised fish hooks by Europeans in the early twentieth century. This interpretation, combined with the unusual Māori fish hook design, has influenced the present-day design and custom of wearing hei matau as personal adornment and a symbol of Māori customary revival.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>J.C. Beaglehole, *The Endeavour Journal of Joseph Banks 1768-1771* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1962), 26.

<sup>2</sup>J.C. Beaglehole, *The Journals of Captain Cook. III. The Voyage of the Resolution and Discovery 1776-1780* (Cambridge: University Press, 1967), 811.

<sup>3</sup>I. Ollivier and C. Hingley, *Early Eyewitness Accounts of Maori Life 1. Extracts from Journals Relating to the Visit to New Zealand of the French Ship St Jean Baptiste, In December 1769 Under the Command of J.F.M. De Surville* (Wellington: Alexander Turnbull Library Endowment Trust in Association with the National Library of New Zealand, 1982), 134.

<sup>4</sup>J.F.W. Baucke, *Where the White Man Treads: Selected from a Series of Articles Contributed to ‘The New Zealand Herald’ and ‘The Auckland Weekly News’; Including Others Published for the First Time* (Auckland: Wilson & Horton, 1905).

<sup>5</sup>J.S. Polack, *New Zealand: Being a Narrative of Travels and Adventures During a Residence in That Country Between the Years 1831 and 1837* (London: Richard Bentley, 1838), 28.

<sup>6</sup>H.G. Beasley, *Pacific Island Records: Fishhooks* (London: Seeley, Service and Co, 1928), 9.

<sup>7</sup>A. Hamilton, “Fishing and Sea Foods of the Maori,” *Dominion Museum Bulletin* 2 (1908): 39.

- <sup>8</sup>B.F. Leach, “Archaeozoology in New Zealand,” accessed on August 24, 1010, <http://www.cs.otago.ac.nz/research/foss/Archaeozoology/archzoo.htm>
- <sup>9</sup> Elsdon Best, *Fishing Methods and Devices of the Maori* (Wellington: W.A.G. Skinner, Government Printer, 1929), 34.
- <sup>10</sup> A. Salmond, *Two Worlds: First Meetings Between Maori and Europeans 1642-1772* (Auckland: Viking, 1991), 134.
- <sup>11</sup> P.H. Buck, *The Maori Craft of Netting* (Wellington: Government Print, 1926), 598.
- <sup>12</sup> J.M. Davidson, *The Prehistory of New Zealand* (Auckland: Longman Paul, 1984), 11.
- <sup>13</sup> C.D. Paulin, “Perspectives of Māori Fishing History and Techniques: Nga Āhua Me Nga Pūrākau Me Nga Hangarau Ika O Te Māori,” *Tuhinga – Records of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa* 18 (2007): 15.
- <sup>14</sup> Arthur Sanders Thomson, *The Story of New Zealand: Past and Present, Savage and Civilized* (London: John Murray, Christchurch Capper Press, 1859), 264.
- <sup>15</sup> C.D. Paulin, “Perspectives of Māori Fishing History and Techniques: Nga Āhua Me Nga Pūrākau Me Nga Hangarau Ika O Te Māori,” *Tuhinga – Records of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa* 18 (2007): 16.
- <sup>16</sup> J. White, *The Ancient History of the Maori, His Mythology and Traditions* (Wellington: George Didsbury, Government Printer, 1887-1891).
- <sup>17</sup> A. Hamilton, “Fishing and Sea Foods of the Maori,” *Dominion Museum Bulletin* 2 (1908): 1.
- <sup>18</sup> J.M. Davidson, *The Prehistory of New Zealand* (Auckland: Longman Paul, 1984), 1.
- <sup>19</sup> Arthur Sanders Thomson, *The Story of New Zealand: Past and Present, Savage and Civilized* (London: John Murray, Christchurch Capper Press, 1859), 300.
- <sup>20</sup> J. Hector, “Anniversary Address of the President,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute* 6 (1874): 369.
- <sup>21</sup> E.J. Hobsbawm and T.O. Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
- <sup>22</sup> R.H. Matthews, “Reminiscences of Maori Life Fifty Years Ago,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute* 43 (1911): 598.
- <sup>23</sup> R.A.A. Sherrin, *Handbook of the Fishes of New Zealand* (Auckland: Wilsons and Horton, 1886), 2.
- <sup>24</sup> C.D. Paulin, “Perspectives of Māori Fishing History and Techniques: Nga Āhua Me Nga Pūrākau Me Nga Hangarau Ika O Te Māori,” *Tuhinga – Records of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa* 18 (2007): 28.
- <sup>25</sup> T. Conly, “Greenstone in Otago in Post-Maori Times Notes on Lapidaries Working in Dunedin,” *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* 57 (1948): 61.
- <sup>26</sup> C.D. Paulin, “Perspectives of Māori Fishing History and Techniques: Nga Āhua Me Nga Pūrākau Me Nga Hangarau Ika O Te Māori,” *Tuhinga – Records of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa* 18 (2007): 38.
- <sup>27</sup> Arthur Sanders Thomson, *The Story of New Zealand: Past and Present, Savage and Civilized* (London: John Murray, Christchurch Capper Press, 1859), 311.

- <sup>28</sup>E.J. Hobsbawm and T.O. Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
- <sup>29</sup>C.D. Paulin, “Māori Fishhooks in European Museums,” *Tuhinga Records of the Museum of New Zealand* 21 (2010): 13.
- <sup>30</sup>N. Prickett, “Early Maori Disc Pendants”, in eds. A. Anderson, K. Green and F. Leach, *Vastly Ingenious: The Archaeology of Pacific Material Culture* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2007), 32.
- <sup>31</sup>James Cowan, *The Maori: Yesterday and Today* (Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1930), 134.
- <sup>32</sup>C.D. Paulin, “Perspectives of Māori Fishing History and Techniques: Nga Āhua Me Nga Pūrākau Me Nga Hangarau Ika O Te Māori,” *Tuhinga – Records of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa* 18 (2007): 33.
- <sup>33</sup>C.D. Paulin, “Māori Fishhooks in European Museums,” *Tuhinga Records of the Museum of New Zealand* 21 (2010): 34.
- <sup>34</sup>E.J. Wakefield, *Adventure in New Zealand From 1839 to 1844 With Some Account of the Beginning of the British Colonization of the Islands* (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1845), 93.
- <sup>35</sup>K. Day, “James Butterworth and the Old Curiosity Shop, New Plymouth, Taranaki,” *Tuhinga – Records of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa* 16 (2005): 97.
- <sup>36</sup>C.D. Paulin, “A Unique Māori Fish-Hook – Rediscovery of Another Cook Voyage Artefact,” *Tuhinga – Records of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa* 23 (in press).
- <sup>37</sup>R.J. Beck and M. Mason, *Pounamu: The Jade of New Zealand* (North Shore: Penguin in association with Ngai Tahu, 2010), 90.
- <sup>38</sup>P.H. Buck, *The Coming of the Maori* (Wellington: Maori Purposes Fund Board, 1949), 264.
- <sup>39</sup>B.F. Leach, “Archaeozoology in New Zealand,” accessed August 24, 2010, <http://www.cs.otago.ac.nz/research/foss/Archaeozoology/archzoo.htm>
- <sup>40</sup>A. Hamilton, “Notes on Maori Necklaces,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute* 25 (1893): 492.
- <sup>41</sup>B.F. Leach, “Fishing in Pre-European new [sic] Zealand,” *New Zealand Journal of Archaeology Special Publication and Archaeofauna* 15 (2006): 131.
- <sup>42</sup>A. Hamilton, “Notes on Maori Necklaces,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute* 25 (1893): 492.
- <sup>43</sup>Elsdon Best, *The Maori As He Was: A Brief Account of Maori Life as It Was in Pre-European Days* (Wellington: Government Printer, 1924), 208.
- <sup>44</sup>C.D. Paulin, “Porotaka Hei Matau – A Traditional Māori Tool?” *Tuhinga: Records of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa* 20 (2009): 17.

## Bibliography

- Baucke, J. F.W., *Where the White Man Treads: Selected from a Series of Articles Contributed to 'The New Zealand Herald' and 'The Auckland Weekly News'; Including Others Published for the First Time* (Auckland, Wilson & Horton, 1905).
- Beaglehole, J. C., *The Endeavour Journal of Joseph Banks. 1768-1771* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1962).
- Beaglehole, J.C., *The Journals of Captain Cook. III. The Voyage of the Resolution and Discovery 1776-1780* (Cambridge: University Press, 1967).
- Beasley, H.G., *Pacific Island Records: Fishhooks* (London: Seeley, Service and Co., 1928).
- Beck, R.J. and M. Mason, *Pounamu: The Jade of New Zealand* (North Shore: Penguin in association with Ngai Tahu, 2010).
- Best, E., *The Maori As He Was: A Brief Account of Maori Life As it Was in Pre-European Days* (Wellington: Government Printer, 1924).
- Best, E., *Fishing Methods and Devices of the Maori* (Wellington: W.A.G. Skinner, Government Printer, 1929).
- Cowan, J., *The Maori: Yesterday and Today* (Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1930).
- Davidson, J.M. *The Prehistory of New Zealand* (Auckland: Longman Paul, 1984).
- Day, K., "James Butterworth and the Old Curiosity Shop, New Plymouth, Taranaki," *Tuhinga – Records of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa* 16 (2005): 93-126.
- Hamilton, A., "Notes on Maori Necklaces," *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute* 25 (1893): 491-93.
- Hamilton, A., "Fishing and Sea Foods of the Maori," *Dominion Museum Bulletin* 2 (1908): 1-73.
- Hector, J., "Anniversary Address of the President," *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute* 6 (1874): 367-76.
- Hiroa, T.R., *The Coming of the Maori* (Wellington: Maori Purposes Fund Board, 1949).
- Hobsbawm, E.J. and T.O. Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
- Leach, B.F. *Archaeozoology in New Zealand*, accessed June 24, 2010, <http://www.cs.otago.ac.nz/research/foss/Archaeozoology/archzoo.htm>

Leach, B.F., “Fishing in Pre-European new [sic] Zealand,” *New Zealand Journal of Archaeology Special Publication and Archaeofauna* 15 (2006): 1-359.

Matthews, R.H., “Reminiscences of Maori Life Fifty Years Ago,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute* 43 (1911): 598-604.

Ollivier, I. and C. Hingley, *Early Eyewitness Accounts of Maori Life 1. Extracts from Journals Relating to the Visit to New Zealand of the French ship St Jean Baptiste, in December 1769 Under the Command of J.F.M. de Surville* (Wellington: Alexander Turnbull Library Endowment Trust in Association with the National Library of New Zealand, 1982).

Paulin, C.D., “Perspectives of Māori Fishing History and Techniques: Nga āhua me nga pūrākau me nga hangarau ika o te Māori,” *Tuhinga: Records of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa* 18 (2007): 11-47.

Paulin, C.D., Porotaka hei matau – A Traditional Māori Tool? *Tuhinga: Records of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa* 20 (2009): 15-21.

Paulin, C.D. Māori Fishhooks in European Museums.” *Tuhinga: Records of the Museum of New Zealand* 21 (2010): 13-41.

Paulin, C.D., “A Unique Māori Fish-Hook – Rediscovery of Another Cook Voyage Artefact,” *Tuhinga – Records of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa* 23 (in press).

Polack, J. S. *New Zealand: Being a Narrative of Travels and Adventures During a Residence in That Country Between the Years 1831 and 1837* (London: Richard Bentley, 1838).

Prickett, N. “Early Maori Disc Pendants, in eds. A. Anderson, K. Green and F. Leach, *Vastly Ingenious: The Archaeology of Pacific Material Culture* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2007), 29-42.

Salmond, A. *Two Worlds: First Meetings Between Maori and Europeans 1642-1772* (Auckland: Viking, 1991).

Sherrin, R.A.A., *Handbook of the Fishes of New Zealand* (Auckland: Wilsons and Horton, 1886).

Thomson, A.S., *The Story of New Zealand: Past and Present, Savage and Civilized* (London John Murray: Christchurch Capper Press, 1859).

Wakefield, E.J., *Adventure in New Zealand From 1839 to 1844 With Some Account of the Beginning of the British Colonization of the Islands* (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1845).

White, J., *The Ancient History of the Maori, His Mythology and Traditions* (Wellington: George Didsbury, Government Printer, 1887-1891).

### Biographical note

Chris Paulin is a marine biologist with the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. His research on the taxonomy and systematics of fishes of the New Zealand region has been published in over 50 scientific papers in national and international journals, as well as numerous popular articles, and six books and identification guides. He was a recipient of the 1996 Royal Society of New Zealand Science Communicator Award. Using his background knowledge of the ecology of New Zealand fishes, Chris has been studying the unique design and function of the Māori fish hook, and in 2009 he received a Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Fellowship to travel to Europe to examine pre-contact hooks collected by James Cook and other explorers in the eighteenth century. He is currently working on a historical project investigating traditional Māori fishing and the development of commercial fisheries in New Zealand since European settlement in the nineteenth century.

Email: [chrisp@tepapa.govt.nz](mailto:chrisp@tepapa.govt.nz)













