It seems unlikely that readers would open a volume on trauma expecting to find an essay on tourism. Tourism is a practice we associate with pleasure and volition while we correlate trauma with pain and duress. The deliberate courting of trauma is a practice we generally find socially unacceptable. Yet each year, millions of tourists choose to visit sites of historical atrocities: war, slavery, genocide, state terrorism etc. A small fraction of these visitors are survivors or family members, those for whom a visit to the site of trauma might be understood in conventional therapeutic terms. The vast majority are those who have no direct personal basis for their visit - they are tourists.

This article seeks to understand how the discourses of trauma are helpful in understanding the experiences that trauma tourists seek and those that they find when they arrive. I propose a model in which closure, disclosure and foreclosure provide frameworks through which we can understand the ways in which ‘places of memory’ represent trauma. Far from mutually exclusive, these three rubrics are overlapping, interlocking and mutually reinforcing. Yet they are helpful in that they represent three different drivers of the performance of memory culture.

This research is based on my visits over the past nine years to more than one hundred trauma memorials in seventeen countries on five continents. What I have learned about trauma tourism through this research is that is it is an inherently contradictory practice. It is made up of - and held in place by - tensions which may emerge around competing interests, contradictory ideologies or incompatible aesthetic sensibilities. The conflicting rubrics of closure, disclosure and foreclosure provide a framework for the operations of this contestation.

In the course of my research, I began to use the term trauma tourism for a practice that is also referred to as dark tourism, death tourism, thanatourism, grief tourism and tragic tourism. While all these phrases have some of the oxymoronic quality that appeals to me about pairing of trauma with tourism, some of the terms imply that such practices are driven by a ‘death wish’ (a thesis that I reject) while others have been used to group trauma memorials with the homes of serial killers and other sensational crime scenes (a grouping that I dispute). More important for the context of this essay, the term trauma tourism specifically invites a dialogue with psychology and psychoanalysis and emphasizes both the prevalence and the utility these discourses in coming to terms with societal trauma.

The Freudian notion of repetition compulsion is a productive framework for understanding the practice of memorial culture. I believe that trauma sites draw tourists because of the persistent and seemingly irresolvable traumas that appear to be fundamental to human society. We live in culture knowing that there is ongoing unspeakable violence, and even when we are not thinking about these places consciously they percolate in our unconscious. We go
to Auschwitz because we don’t know how to intervene in Darfur or Guantanamo. However, I am not suggesting that a visit to a clandestine torture center is a kind of avoidance strategy. Rather, as in repetition compulsion, it is a (re) dramatization of the unresolvable trauma. Furthermore, I believe that we will continue to build memory sites to past atrocities exactly because we still have ‘unrepresentable’ ongoing violence. This is a fundamental reversal of the logic of ‘never again’, which argues that the purpose of memorial culture is to put an end (once and for all) to such events. I am, rather, arguing that we will have trauma tourism for as long as we have ongoing violence and that trauma tourism would no longer be necessary in a world without ongoing violence.

Notably, Freud claimed that repetition compulsion is one of only a few behaviours in which the pleasure principle does not operate. This would mean that visitors to memory sites are not seeking pleasure when they engage with traumatic histories, not even prurient or salacious pleasure. This is consistent with my argument (against Lennon and Foley 2007 and Lippard 1999) that trauma tourism is not part of the same impulse as an attraction to sensational violence. Trauma tourists do not visit memorials in order to be titillated by depictions of torture or suffering. Rather, they go because they cannot help themselves. They are compelled to these sites by their socialization with/in trauma culture. We might, then, think of trauma sites as heterotopias. They are countersites, bracketed-off mirrors of reality where dilemmas of the parallel (real) world are played out within more limited parameters.

As ‘twice-behaved behaviour’, repetition compulsion in this context fits the model that Richard Schechner has articulated for performance (1985: 35-6). We can think of trauma tourism as a kind of restored behaviour similar to practices that we may observe in the theatre or in other heavily ‘matrixed’ performance contexts (Kirby). Performances take place in these countersites on a number of levels. The sites perform a particular version of history. Tourists perform their identities and investments for themselves and for other tourists. Scholars (like me) perform participant observations and critical analysis. Of great importance to all these performances is that they take place in the public sphere. Schechner points out that this allows the behaviours to be ‘worked on’ or socially transformed (36).

But because its public nature is fundamental to trauma tourism, I want to move cautiously when adopting and adapting for the analysis of these social traumas and memorial performances a discourse like psychoanalysis, which was initially devised for the private healing of individuals, however seemingly congruous they are. It does not go without saying that discourses are transferable from the singular to the plural. Social bodies may not perform according to the same ‘laws’ or behaviour patterns as individuals. In generalizing from theories of the individual in order to understand the community, we risk losing sight of the fact that individuals suffer as part of the social trauma, that individual bodies are violated. Individual suffering is unique and idiosyncratic. In this vein, Henrik Rønsbo, at the Centre for Research on Torture and Rehabilitation, argues that torture should not be studied as an abstraction but rather as an accretion of individual acts of violence (Peterson). There is also a danger in a therapeutic model that perpetrators may not be held accountable. This raises the question of whether justice is at odds with healing, because justice is about the impact on the perpetrator while healing is about the impact on the victim. At the very least, we may say that psychoanalysis is not primarily concerned with justice. Moreover, individual-based theories do not take into account the operations of larger social forces like socialization and coercion, e.g., theories of the individual psyche do not account for the brutality of the guards nor the compliance of the prisoners in the Stanford prison experiments.

However, psychoanalysis can also be a part of what Cathy Caruth calls ‘listening beyond the...
pathology of individual suffering’ to serve as ‘a means of passing out of the isolation imposed by the event’ and may allow us to understand the distinct incidents of trauma culture as part of a larger pattern. (1995: 156, 11). As a well-developed discourse that acknowledges the depth of a traumatic rupture, and ‘its resistance to full theoretical analysis’ (10), and that acknowledges that the truth of an event may not be historically accurate, psychoanalysis can be an effective tool for countering the totalizing educative impulse in memorial construction.

In the discussion of the practice of trauma tourism that follows, the framework of closure, disclosure and foreclosure does not map any more neatly onto a theoretical psychoanalytic framework than does the practice of psychotherapy. Practices are unruly. However, if I were to offer a rough cartography, I would suggest that closure is therapeutic (psychological), disclosure is revelatory (psychoanalytic) and foreclosure is pragmatic (ideological). Nostalgia, a discussion of which concludes my section on foreclosure, might also be described as creative (aesthetic) along the lines of Svetlana Boym’s suggestion that ‘a psychiatrist won’t quite know what to do with nostalgia; an experimental art therapist might be of more help’ (2001: 41).

**Closure**

The return to the actual site of trauma by survivors of that particular atrocity in search of some form of healing fits a conventional model of trauma therapy wherein a patient orchestrates a structured visit to the setting of a traumatic experience in order to put to the pain to rest. Closure is one of the most common desires expressed by both developers and visitors to trauma sites and strategies for closure can be found at many trauma memorials. While some sites structurally prioritize this function, other sites show evidence of tourists’ impulse in this direction regardless of the degree to which it is marginalized by the presenters.

About 40 kilometres from Santiago, in Paine, Chile, families have devised a community-driven memorial to the high concentration of local residents who disappeared during the Pinochet dictatorship. Working in family groups, community members constructed seventy mosaics, each of which recalls a missing relative. The memorial is a grassroots effort, local in its conception, financing and design. While the residents of Paine used the memorial construction as an opportunity to reveal information to their children and grandchildren about the histories of their disappeared relatives (which might be classed as disclosure), the goal of the memorial was to find peace within the community. The imagery favours personal memories of the disappeared over politicized accounts of their disappearances. While a few of the panels represent the missing as activists, the vast majority dwell on their identities as farmers, parents, spouses, musicians etc. Tourists from outside the community are welcome but the numbers are minimal because of the out-of-the-way rural location. The majority of the visitors to the site have some direct connection, making this a moving example of a trauma memorial being used by first generation survivors of a trauma to provide closure for their life shattering experiences of state violence.

Along similar lines but on an international scale, numerous travel agencies, sometimes in collaboration with United States military veterans’ organizations, organize trips to Southeast Asia ‘to help veterans and families...
heal and recover from the trauma of the Vietnam War’. One of the most explicit in their mission is Arizona-based Tours of Peace, which promises that veterans and their families will ‘visit areas of personal meaning’, ‘reach out to former enemies’, ‘recover personal effects’ and ‘emotionally process their experiences’. Their website (http://topvietnamveterans.org/) includes testimonials from tour participants who were able to alleviate their emotional distress through these actions. Because Tours of Peace also enables veterans to ‘see Vietnam as it is today’ and to ‘participate in humanitarian projects that help those still suffering from effects of war’, their project blends some elements of the activism discussed at the end of this essay with more conventional therapeutic practices of closure. However, because Tours of Peace emphasizes the therapeutic dimension of these activities rather than their political implications, even these actions (‘providing food, medicine, school supplies, tools and livestock to villages, orphanages, elderly homes, schools, street children homes and schools, and health care facilities’) can be folded into an effort to put to rest a traumatic incident. In other words, the reparations are framed as benefitting the actors as much as the recipients, e.g., ‘Veterans and family members are personally instrumental in improving healthcare, educational and economic conditions of the Vietnamese’ (my emphasis).

Christina Schwenkel, who has written at length about the kinds of return tours Vietnam veterans make, questions what such reconciliation can mean from a Vietnamese perspective. While the Vietnamese people are called upon to play roles in the dramas of forgiveness (from receiving aid to absolving culpability), such performances do not take into account their own needs cultural expectations or therapeutic needs. Moreover, while veterans’ groups implement small scale restoration projects, these are wildly out of the proportion to the harm done by the United States, which has yet to accept responsibility or offer reparations on a governmental scale.

In South Africa’s memorialization process, we have an opportunity to see how disclosure can be an element of closure. Medical professionals tell us about the dangers of closing a wound without first debriding it, of infection left to fester anaerobically. This is a useful metaphor for thinking about the mission of South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, whose terms offered amnesty for all those that came forward to confess their crimes. Its goal was not retribution but rather restoration; society was to be made whole by this process. South African curators and presenters have been the strongest advocates for closure within global debates about the practice of memorial-making and as a result South Africa’s memorial culture is distinct. Its upbeat tone starkly contrasts the prevailing somber stance of global memory culture. Where all other memory sites mourn the horrors of the traumatic events they represent, South African memorials celebrate having overcome the traumas of apartheid. While the memory sites, from the Apartheid Museum to Robben
Island, are forthcoming about the brutalities of apartheid, their ultimate message is redemptive.

The visits by African Americans and Afro-Caribbeans to the ‘castles’ and ‘forts’ of the slave trade in Ghana and Senegal provide an example of how the therapeutic model has been adapted from direct to indirect trauma. The wounds that descendants of slaves are hoping to heal are the legacies of slavery, the violences of racism within their own contemporary societies, but the sites they choose to return to have profound resonances for the foundational trauma of slavery, the trauma that underwrites all those subsequent traumas. At these sites, black North American tourists deliberately sequester themselves from white foreign tourists and from Ghanaian school groups in order to perform healing rituals that include walking through the ‘door of no return’ and honouring the ancestors. Many report ‘overwhelming’ experiences of the presence of ancestral spirits.

Sadiya Hartman eloquently marks the fugitive quality of such redemptive journeys. In her genealogical history, Hartman both vividly imagines her lost history and, at the same time, frankly accounts for the dissonances she experiences as a privileged outsider looking for an ancestral home in an economically and socially challenged contemporary African nation. Similarly, Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer’s Eastern European experiences with the Czernowitz Reunion provide an opportunity to observe how closure projects (inevitably) founder. Sites fail to conform to recollections, and encounters with contemporary residents fail to satisfy desires.

DISCLOSURE

When the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo in Argentina vociferously objected to the construction of the Parque de la Memoria, they did so because they believe that the memorial ‘buries’ the dead when the bodies have not yet been recovered, when no one has yet taken responsibility for the crimes, when the perpetrators have not been identified and brought to justice. This is a paradigmatic example of a memory culture that prioritizes disclosure over closure. The comprehensive cataloguing of the locations of clandestine torture centres is a practice of disclosure as are the tours offered by survivor guides. So is the work of the researchers at the Documentation Center of Cambodia, who are compiling evidence towards the trials of the former Khmer Rouge.
Disclosure advocates argue that the most important function a trauma site can perform is to provide documentation of the trauma. Over the impulse to put the past behind us and get on with our lives, a strategy of disclosure favours learning from the past and perpetual vigilance lest we repeat these crimes. Evidentiary practices are the most common form of disclosure and one of the most pervasive tactics of trauma memorials. Personal effects, photographic archives and human remains are all deployed to verify heinous crimes. At Auschwitz, the exhibit labelled ‘Material Proof of Crimes’ contains volumes of hair, prayer shawls, prosthetic devices, eating utensils, luggage, shoes and cosmetics. At Hiroshima and Nagasaki there are extensive displays of mangled quotidian artifacts (watches and clocks, clothing and eyeglasses, eating utensils and children’s toys) as well as graphic illustrations of the stages of radiation disease. Rwanda and Cambodia house unnerving piles of skulls, femurs and even lime-preserved desiccated corpses. Many trauma sites also display the instruments of torture and architectures of humiliation and annihilation: barracks, prison cells, gas chambers and crematoria.

Because trauma memorials are the de facto repositories of all the residual objects of memory culture, their acquisition strategies are far from intentional, and the stories they tell are far from consistent. In fact, evidentiary projects of disclosure always exceed and at the same time fall short of their goals. As Susan Stewart
has observed, such objects are ‘saturated with meaning that can never be fully revealed to us’ (1993: 133). As a result, we find traumatic remnants highly poignant and deeply moving. But just as often, such relics are mute.

In its insistence on accountability, disclosure is a retributive strategy even in the cases where a perpetrator is not named. In fact, instances of accusation are surprisingly rare at trauma sites, which tend to blame society as a whole rather than holding individuals responsible. Perhaps this kind of ‘passive aggressive’ disclosure accounts for the ‘guilt’ many people report feeling when they visit memorials. Thorough disclosure is complex, and it often requires acknowledgement of complicity, which is as rare as explicit accusation. In my tour of more than one hundred memorials, I saw only a handful of situations where site developers were willing or able to incorporate conflicting narratives.

**FORECLOSURE**

To foreclose is ‘to preclude, to answer or settle by anticipation’ (OED online). In this sense, we can understand that most trauma sites foreclose possibilities by limiting the possible meanings of the event. All ‘successful’ trauma memorials begin with a presumed consensus regarding the onerous nature of the trauma portrayed. It is unthinkable that a holocaust memorial would suggest Jewish culpability, that an exhibit at Hiroshima would imply that radiation burn victims deserved their fate, or that a slave-fort guide would intimate that slaves benefitted from their enslavement. Certainly, such perspectives exist in the world, but they are anathema to memorial culture. It is exactly a lack of consensus (about the meaning more than the fact of the disappearances) that has hindered the development of trauma memorials at the many documented sites of violence throughout Latin America.

But some elements of trauma culture take this implicit consensus to another level, by spinning trauma histories for the purposes of nation building. It is not rare for an ‘imagined community’ to coalesce around victimization (Anderson 1992). A clear example of this can be found in the United States where the strongest nationalist sentiment since World War II was triggered by the collapse of the World Trade Center. By building the memorials that elaborate violations of the Japanese through the deployment of atomic weapons during World War II, it is possible for Japan to downplay the pre-war militarism of the Japanese government throughout East Asia and the horrific violations it involved. In the sequential exhibits of the Yukushan War Memorial Museum, World War II martyrdom is placed at the end of a multi-century exhibit of Japanese heroism.

When they travel to Israel to visit Yad Vashem, tourists not only mourn the losses of the Holocaust but also confirm the ‘necessity’ of establishing a Jewish state. But Holocaust-based Israeli nationalism is also performed throughout Germany and Poland as tour groups of Israeli students can be seen nearly every day wrapping themselves in Israeli flags to tour the concentration camps. Unfortunately, Holocaust memory is also deployed rhetorically on a regular basis to authorize Israeli violations of Palestinian human rights. Filip Reyntjens has argued that both Israel and Rwanda (ab)use ‘genocide credits’ to authorize actions that would otherwise be condemned.
Certainly it is true that in post-genocidal Rwanda, memorialization is used programmatically as part of nation building. Each year, during a governmentally-decreed week of mourning, communities revive memories of the genocide. While lip service is given to harm done on both sides, the reality of the gacaca process is that it is biased towards the violations of Tutsis by Hutus (which reflects the composition of the government as well as international representations in popular media of Rwandan history). In the run-up to elections, so called ‘anti-genocide ideology’ laws are now being used to suppress political opposition. Sara Guyer has suggested that because ‘the skulls and bones’ of the Rwandan Memorials ‘leave visitors speechless’, ‘the traumatic silence that they generate can be difficult to distinguish from the enforced silence that the regime demands’ (2009: 162).

Sites throughout Eastern Europe participate in a nostalgic form of foreclosure when reductive and stereotypical portrayals of absent Jews are performed in restaurants and reconstructed neighborhoods, at festivals and through the marketing of souvenirs. Krakow, Poland, offers ‘nostalgic’ activities in such concentration that they resemble a theme park. The streets of Kazimierz, the former Jewish ghetto, have facades of Jewish business, restaurants serve Jewish foods, festivals perform klezmer music and in the centre of town, vendors sell Jew dolls, stereotypical figures of rabbis, peddlers and money lenders. These sites and services are not marketed as trauma sites, per se. That is, they purportedly celebrate the ways Jews lived, whether by choice or by decree, rather than the ways that they died. However, these venues are very much part of the trauma tourism circuit and, at the same time as they are offensive and reductive, they are also active parts of preservation efforts. For Shelley Salamensky, foreclosure refers to the ways that such ‘sites may not only fail to replace what has been lost but, while recalling aspects of the past for the present, foreclose more of what they purport to represent than they reveal’ (forthcoming: 25). Nostalgia for nineteenth-century stereotypes occludes not only the manner in which the Jewish population died but also the complexity and modernity of their actual lives prior to the Holocaust, the existence of present-day Jewish culture elsewhere in the world, and its absence in Eastern Europe.
Just as the convergence of trauma and tourism defies expectations, so too the presence of so much nostalgia within trauma memorials comes as something of a surprise. Perhaps it is to be expected that the Danish Resistance Museum celebrates the war years with a degree of wistfulness, but if we are honest with ourselves about what is at work at the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam (and in the consumption of her diaries and the spinoff plays and films), we must admit that one there is a certain amount of ‘playing house’ on the part of audience members. Susan Bernstein has written about the kinds of ‘promiscuous identifications’ that Anne Frank’s diary enables. She asks us to question whether the identifications with the ‘young girl’ of the diaries, which people all over the world claim to experience, are really functioning progressively. I want to go beyond the diaries to ask why so many trauma memorials ask us to put ourselves in the place of victims (or perpetrators or bystanders). A core question posed to audiences is ‘what would you have done’ under these circumstances. At Cape Coast, our tour guide took us first to stand in the courtyard where slaves were positioned for selection and then on the balcony from which authorities made their choice. At Hohenschoenhausen, our guide suggested that we take a seat as the interrogator or the detainee in the same room that many of us had just recently seen deployed in the film The Lives of Others (2006). The Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg randomly assigns racial identities to all visitors who must then have different experiences as they enter the museum. The Holocaust Museum in Washington DC gives each visitor an identity card for a Holocaust victim or survivor whose fate is revealed at the end of the visit. Certainly these kinds of identificatory practices are moving but do they produce anything more than emotion?

It is also not uncommon to romanticize deprivation, not only within trauma sites. Simpler times where we had fewer commodities and more community is a common cinematic and literary trope. Also, in their efforts to emphasize what was lost, curators and designers often create highly idealized portrayals of life just prior to the trauma. This is as true at the Jewish Museum in Berlin as it is at the District Six Museum in Capetown. At such sites, a ‘gee whiz’ factor is elicited by the display of obsolete technologies, and this combines with our admiration for the bricolage quality of making-do during wartime to produce the nostalgic effect. Add to this the displays of creativity under duress (blanket sculptures by prisoners at Constitution Hill, mud castles at Majdanek) and we’re lulled into thinking that trauma is not that bad, which was one of the ways that Roberto Benigni’s film Life is Beautiful (1997) was misread.

For Susan Stewart, nostalgia is an ‘inauthentic longing’ for a ‘place of origin’ that is ‘timeless and uncontaminable’. Nostalgia is ‘always ideological’ and ‘hostile to history’ because ‘the past it seeks has never existed except as narrative’ (1993: 23, 68, 65, 23, 23, 23). For Westerners, it’s harder to see what is
unethical about reconstructing torture cells or preserving crematoria than it is to criticize kitschy simulations of atomic bomb blasts or animatronic torture victims. But I would argue that the **tasteful** preservation of the architecture of genocide is not morally different from the construction of immersive, sensory environments. Both intend to make the tourist feel something and participate in both nostalgic and identificatory foreclosures.

Can we attribute the failure of these representations to the putative ‘unrepresentability’ of trauma? I don’t think so. The problem is neither the accuracy nor the affectiveness of the representations. It is with their efficacy. These representations envelop us in the narrative of the site rather than pushing us out into the world. To counter Elaine Scarry’s assertion of the ‘inexpressibility’ of extreme pain, Darius Rejali says, ‘The inexpressibility that matters is not the gap between the brain and the tongue but between victims and their communities.’ ‘What enables us to reconstitute our ability to speak to one another,’ Rejali goes on to argue, ‘is something more fundamentally...’
powerful and fragile, the ability to create a common political space’ (2007: 31)

If, as I suggested at the outset, constructing and visiting memory sites is a form of repetition compulsion driven by the trauma of ongoing atrocity, then our visits to such sites, while compulsive, can never put an end to trauma. Rather, we must act on what we learn as trauma tourists, in the real world, i.e., not as part of a heterotopic redramatization. We must work to create Rejali’s common political space.

Freud’s oft-quoted note that analysis can only ‘transform … hysterical misery into common unhappiness’ is applicable here (1895: 305). Trauma memorials can only replace anxiety with mourning. Or, using terminology that Mick Wallis suggested to me after reading the proposal for this essay, trauma sites cannot offer ‘resolution’, only ‘attenuation’. As in a psychoanalytic framework, trauma-driven repetition compulsion can only be resolved in practice, in changing the pattern in life.

We cannot, ultimately, put an end to ongoing extraordinary rendition by worrying over historical desaparecidos. And we cannot reach a state of ‘never again’ by trauma tourism without concrete political action.

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