

Introduction: Witnesses to Witnessing

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What happens when the invisible is made visible, when knowledge relegated to society's margins or swept under its carpet is suddenly inserted into the public domain? The iconic images of German civilians forced to view the newly liberated Nazi camps, standing at the edges of hastily dug trenches full of emaciated bodies are emblematic of an era in which we have faced not only previously unimaginable episodes of mass violence, but have been consternated by how we might engage with these pasts: who should look, at what, how, and to what end? There is an enduring sense that reluctant publics must be forced to confront horrific realities with which we may be somehow complicit—if only in our desire not to really know.

Yet in an age saturated with media images of human suffering and ever-democratizing technologies for their dissemination, simply making people face the horrors humans are capable of perpetrating seems to have lost some of its galvanizing force. The much-repeated mantra “Never Again” has transmuted into a resigned recognition of the potential for “ever again.” In this context, a shift of focus can be discerned among memory-workers, away from the inevitably stymieing preoccupation with the graphic, the incomprehensible, the unrepresentable. It has been made depressingly clear that depictions of humanity's vilest deeds do not diminish our capacity for future crimes. If knowledge of the facts of atrocity is no longer seen as a panacea, neither is confrontation the sole communicative posture of endeavours to leverage the past in the present. Memory-workers have begun to explore other modes, including attempts to kindle social aspirations like empathy, identification, cross-cultural dialogue, to recognize multiple perspectives, or to catalyze action.

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In the early 1990s in newly post-communist Eastern Europe, the power of public deployment of historical images to re-shape public consciousness was brought home through simple yet compelling initiatives. In May 1990 in Prague, a row of kiosks lined Wenceslas Square, plastered with images and documents about World War II, the 1952 Slánský show trial, and the 1968 Prague Spring. Any “difficult knowledge” of these devastating, generation-defining events (in this case meaning any knowledge beyond “the party line”) had been removed from public circulation for decades. As Praguers awoke and wandered toward the kiosks in the pale morning light, they clustered in excitement, discussing their feelings and the implications of these new public revelations. Thus, a silenced history resurfaced.¹

In 1996 the Polish exhibit *And I Still See Their Faces: Images of Polish Jews* was a tour-de-force of memory curation and activation, a photography exhibit whose participatory process of creation was as powerful and provocative as the final product.² Compiled from a nationwide call for “photographs of Jews,” the resulting 9000 pre-Holocaust images evoked a lost world. But its greater power lay in the countless moments of discovery and witnessing that must have occurred as thousands of Poles opened dusty boxes, unsealed yellowed envelopes, paged through old albums with a fresh eye, phoned aged relatives to ask after unknown names or faces—and the dinner-table conversations and late-evening soul-searching that one can only imagine ensued. The notes mailed in by participants along with the outpouring of photographs offer a glimpse of the textures of remembering: *When the Germans came and the Jews had to go into hiding, Lejzer's son came a few times for hot tea. We would cry to think how cold they were. / Throughout the occupation, I worked in the Zawiercie steel-works. To clean the machines, we used clothing from the liquidated ghetto. This photo was among the remains.*³

Halfway across the world in Latin America another wave of difficult transitions was taking place. Southern Cone countries experimented with truth commissions of various sorts as a means of excavating their authoritarian pasts, accompanied by creative public pathways to consider and debate these histories (Bilbija et al., 2005). In 2003, Peruvians were invited to a dilapidated home on the outskirts of Lima to view photographs—made by photojournalists, members of a social photography workshop, families, and others—of “the faces of suffering, the visible proof of the injustices committed” during the previous two decades of internal conflict (Lerner Febres, 2004: 136–7). The exhibit, called “Yuyanapaq,” the Quechua term for “to remember/remembling/to wake up/waking up,” was a multi-sensory experience: the derelict structure housing the

exhibit embodied the ruined nation; the need for reconstruction from the ground up spoke wordlessly through its physical fissures. The photos, ranging from small, intimate frames to larger than life, were set off by diaphanous drapes conveying both transparency and healing gauze. The curators made their objective clear: “To look, to understand, to process by way of images and testimonies implies a concern of Peruvian society to know the history of what happened. In this sense, the decision to walk through this house requires a decision to remember.”⁴

As scholars working in post-Holocaust, post-communist Eastern Europe and post-authoritarian Latin America respectively, our own encounters with these potent attempts to re-frame and activate the past anew led us to the present project: a wide-ranging consideration of the goals and challenges, the possibility and the pitfalls, of “curating difficult knowledge.”

Curating difficult knowledge

Unique challenges arise in attempts to frame memories and documents of violence for public display, and these have inspired innovations in exhibition, museology, public cultural interventions and the activation of memorial sites. And new knowledge emerges when we consider memory—in its spatial, material, public dimensions—not simply as latent in the social fabric, nor only in top-down efforts by the state to encode preferred memory, but also as it is mindfully deployed by individuals and groups in attempts to provoke, enable, and transform. We call, then, for an understanding of museums, monuments, and heritage sites not only as texts that visitors read, but also as sites of practice that are social, embodied, and generative. Such sites spur dialogues in familiar forms like contemplation and discussion, but memory and meaning are also made and contested through commodification, graffiti, and vandalism.

Accordingly, this volume attempts to open a space at the intersection of multiple discussions. We are convinced that some of the most interesting perspectives on memory work are emerging on the borders where academic and other spheres of cultural practice meet: the museum, the memorial site, the heritage tour. We draw on academic literature and public discussion of critical museology, heritage management, collective memory, public scholarship, and transitional justice, as common themes swirl beneath these domains and the disciplines that engage them. We ask where we are—as scholars, curators, artists, activists—in our imperfect attempts to “bear witness” to conflicts that have passed, even as their echoes, or in some cases the structures that gave rise to them, persist.

Questioning curation

Taking the word “curate” in its root meaning of “caring for” allows us to expand our discussion outward from museums and exhibitions to encompass heritage sites, memorials, and other (including virtual) locations along the increasingly interlinked spectrum of spaces dedicated to connecting publics with difficult histories—anywhere that attempts are made to “[present] combinations of images, objects, text, and sound within a particular *mise-en-scene*,” as Roger Simon puts it (this volume). This is to say that to “care for” the past is to make something of it, to place and order it in a meaningful way in the present rather than to abandon it. But how does one “care for” the past? What custodial or curatorial practices and decisions are involved? How do we—as scholars, curators, artists, activists, survivors, descendants, and other stakeholders—attempt to bear witness, to give space and shape to absent people, objects and cultures, to present violent conflict without perpetuating its logic? These are among the challenges confronting those who wish to invoke the difficult past in order to quell—or do justice to—its hauntings.

Thinking about curation not only as selection, design, and interpretation, but as care-taking—as a kind of intimate, intersubjective, inter-relational obligation—raises key ethical questions relevant in an age of “truth-telling”: What is our responsibility to stories of suffering that we inherit? When do they need to be protected and nurtured, and when might the new truths they give rise to themselves become ossified, calling for “tough love” to re-activate their ethical potential? Is the goal of curation to settle, or rather to unsettle established meanings of past events? Is it to create social space for a shared experience of looking, listening, and talking, creating alternative relationships and publics, for constructive meaning making and action taking? How can we manage the tensions among these impulses? And shadowing all of these questions is the ever-present need to ask which “we” is inquiring, deciding, acting—and on whose behalf.

The notion of curation as “care” is meant neither prescriptively nor timidly. Rather, we use it expansively to draw attention to the profound senses of obligation the authors in this volume express to *deal with* the past where it impinges painfully on the present. Such a “custodial” understanding of curatorial practice simultaneously avoids some of the presumptions embedded in discourses of heritage management that refer to “dark tourism” destined for sites of “difficulty,” “pain,” or “shame.” While suggestive, such frames can be limiting as they risk

presuming affective states and meanings a priori, as if these flowed pre-determined from landscapes or displays, rather than being borne, projected, and negotiated by visitors individually and socially, in terms of culture, ethics, and politics. Often swept up willy-nilly in such negative rubrics are memory practices that, if one scratches their surfaces, may be revealed as neither “dark” nor “tourism.” While visits to sites of former atrocity raise concerns about voyeurism and crass commercialism, they may just as often draw people earnestly seeking to meditate on peace, imagine common futures, and even forge these through dialogue or political action. Our interest is thus less in charting a historical moment of fascination with atrocity than in examining the conceptual strides and challenges presented by this moment’s accompanying innovations in curatorial practice. We are concerned with approaches, ethics, and intentions—in short, with cultural projects—that animate attempts to draw attention to painful pasts.

“New museology” is now a few decades old, and in the throes of further transformation as it meets still newer critical curatorial voices (Macdonald, 2006; Karp et al., 2007). The present museological moment is one of democratization not just of access, but also of authority. There are ever more rationales for—and an expanding corpus of experiments around—breaking down the mono-vocal, authoritative, objectivist, material-centric framework of exhibiting culture that has defined museology since its consolidation as a branch of science and a tool for refining the citizenry a century ago. Classically styled museums are still decidedly celebratory, affirming national triumphs and distinct group identities. But museums are increasingly turning to face our communities’ “never agains,” and discussions of difficult subjects have been key drivers of innovative curatorial theory and practice. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett proposes the category of “museums of conscience,” which reflect the intersection of the current museological moment with a shift in commemorative practice to include scrutiny of both the ignominious sides of national histories and the museum’s own previous practices in relation to these (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2002).⁵ Paul Williams notes that it is the high stakes associated with the topics and content of memorial museums, and the drama these can produce, that places them at the forefront of today’s “performative” museological paradigm (Williams, 2007: 96).

We can no longer assume that historians, anthropologists, or curators are, or should be, the sole authoritative producers of narratives about the past. If some in these positions still struggle with the idea of giving up responsibility or expertise, they are nonetheless faced

with newly visible, active categories of stakeholders influencing how curatorial work is shaped, including community groups, the state, and funding agencies. Complicated compromises must be reached vis-à-vis the display and interpretation of artifacts and experiences. Further, the goal of curatorial work is no longer simply to *represent* but to *make things happen*. Audiences are being transformed into participants in ever more dialogic curatorial experiments. Comment books are no longer the sole trace of visitor opinion; indeed, their inscriptions may end up on the exhibition wall as objects in their own right. In the original Peruvian photography exhibit *Yuyanapaq*, a son wrote that his mother was not mentioned among the victims of the internal war. If he were to return to the exhibit today, he would see her name (and his whole comment) prominently displayed on the wall. Visitors are even being called upon to register their responses by re-curating the very objects on display, moving them, sorting them, recording their stories about them. A truck in Sweden brought the exhibit *Difficult Matters: Objects and Narratives that Disturb and Affect* to small towns, where local people were invited to select objects and debate their very appropriateness for display (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2002). In the Manchester Museum's (UK) project "Collective Conversations," invitations went out to members of immigrant groups to be filmed as they discuss the meanings of museum objects to them, in an attempt to make visible and enhance the "contact zone" that exhibitions create.⁶ Heather Igloliorte (this volume) describes how a traveling exhibit is both a catalyst for, and evolves with, input from the Inuit people in Canada's far North who are its subjects and key audiences. So if curators today are no longer simply experts, but increasingly brokers, negotiators, facilitators, and sharers of authority, how—if at all—may evidence of evil be used to create positive change?

This question brings curation into conversation with directed political transformation. Attempts to curate difficult knowledge often take place in the context of transitional justice, as part of the symbolic aspect of efforts at national reconciliation. It is clear that public spaces can become de facto venues for encounter, truth telling, and dialogue, organic means for aggrieved groups to cope with, communicate, or work through the difficult past. But what happens when such spaces are *crafted* in strategic attempts by state, international, or community institutions to engineer (or simply proclaim) a desired social outcome? We may legitimately ask how much—and what kind—of debate and contention we want, recognizing that the curation of difficult knowledge can exacerbate conflict, or keep wounds traumatically open when they

might otherwise heal. Yet curating “reconciliation” risks other erasures, neglects, and negations, potentially inflicting further harm by silencing those living with scars, still-open wounds, or ongoing injustice. There is a need for curatorial work that can both reveal and contain such tensions, highlighting the ways that aggrieved parties live in “contentious coexistence” in the aftermath of violence, while also creating spaces for more robust “dissensual community” to emerge.⁷

Disambiguating “difficulty”

Such discussions of curation link to the second half of this volume’s title: “difficult knowledge.” What kinds of knowledge are difficult? Or rather, what is it that is *difficult* about difficult knowledge? On the most basic level, we might agree that what unites the papers in this volume is the nature of their common historical subject matter: violent, tragic, gruesome, horrific, and painful. Certainly experiences of war, genocide, and human rights violations can be difficult to confront for this reason.

But more difficult, perhaps, are questions of what such knowledge does to us—or what we do with it. Both the lived experience and the politics of such common and seemingly innocuous notions like empathy, identification, comparison, and bearing witness become deeply fraught in the context of the public depiction, transmission, and reception of the suffering inflicted on distinct groups of people. More difficult than regarding other people’s suffering may be scrutinizing our own habituated responses to it (Sontag, 2003).

It is troubling, for example, to consider what Edward Linenthal has called “comfortable horrible” memory, or the ways that official narratives of tragedy may not do much beyond confirming what “we,” as a pre-determined collectivity, already know, think, or feel (Linenthal, 1995: 267). Still more disturbing may be the recognition that legitimate processes of mourning and community-building in the aftermath of massive injustice and violence can simultaneously create further exclusions, or retrench old divisions and prejudices of the sort that helped precipitate the original tragedies. Finally, perhaps most difficult is to acknowledge that suffering does not necessarily ennoble, but may more often embitter, isolate, and agitate. In Derrida’s words, “What is most painful is that the painful is not painful for others” (1994: 56).

The notion of “difficult knowledge”—a category capacious enough to accommodate these various aspects, and one that inspired the present volume—can be traced to educational theorist Deborah Britzman, who distinguishes it from “lovely knowledge” (Britzman, 1998; Pitt and

Britzman, 2003). “Lovely knowledge” is easily assimilable, the kind of knowledge that reinforces what we already know and gives us what we are accustomed to wanting from new information we encounter. Lovely knowledge allows us to think of ourselves—due to our identifications with particular groups—as, for example, timelessly noble, or long-suffering victims, and to reject any kind of information about ourselves or others that might contradict or complicate the story. The North American pioneer myth of hardy settlers courageously conquering bare wilderness free for the taking, or immigrant narrative of foreigners who were welcomed and succeeded in pulling themselves up by nothing more than their bootstraps (Vukov, 2002) are examples of such lovely tales. The exhibitions described here by Igloliorte and Patterson in North America and Szekeres in Australia disrupt these narratives with more complex, difficult realities.

“Difficult knowledge,” conversely, is knowledge that does not fit. It therefore induces a breakdown in experience, forcing us to confront the possibility that the conditions of our lives and the boundaries of our collective selves may be quite different from how we normally, reassuringly think of them. Such knowledge points to more challenging, nuanced aspects of history and identity, potentially leading us to re-conceive our relationships with those traditionally defined as “other.” Acknowledging that as North Americans we continue to benefit from the colonial projects that created our nations is one kind of difficult knowledge.

In this vein, Roger Simon suggests a productive relationship with “difficulty” based on a “process of confronting and dismantling [of] expectations” upon encountering such unfamiliar knowledge (Bonnell and Simon, 2007: 67). While Simon theorizes this deep, pedagogical approach to curating difficult knowledge in his epilogue to this volume, here we draw attention to some of the concrete, practical challenges and questions that arise in the process of both designing and analyzing such curatorial work. How might one usefully intervene in public sites that function as significant nodes in practices of identity formation? How might we—as scholars, artists, curators—“activate,” “re-activate,” or perhaps “de-activate” public sites of memory in ways that repair severed cultural continuities, enhance inter-group understanding, and destabilize problematic boundaries, especially when such sites have more often been employed in the reproduction of divisive notions of self and other? How might theoretical critiques of the “traumatic repetition” of history in collective identity be translated and enacted as public interventions?

The various disciplinary approaches represented in this volume share some suggestive categories of concern that call for fuller articulation. For

example, there are a variety of *analytical approaches* to sites, objects, and images: Are they texts to be read, representations to deconstruct, screens onto which myriad readings are projected, or agents in their own right, and therefore active players in the social arenas that their presence helps to delineate? There are also questions of *experiential and communicative modes*: What is the relationship between affective and cognitive states, and where might “action” fit in? In trying to curate suffering, is our responsibility to determine and convey—as far as possible—that suffering’s precise ontology? Or is it to turn this suffering into something productive, either to redeem it, or to redeem ourselves?

There are a range of possible *curatorial poetics, and postures* in which heritage, memory, and history can be presented. Truth telling can be confrontational, suggestive, a “call to action” or a documentation of present and past injustices for future memory, as Tamar Katriel illustrates (this volume). Curatorial work can be self-reflexive, highlighting underacknowledged challenges and suggesting its own limitations. It can be partial or encyclopedic, authoritative or dialogic, creating spaces for healing or dialogue. The danger is that attention to one form of “difficult knowledge” may simultaneously obscure, or do violence to, others.⁸ So much is deemed “too difficult” to be viewed in public at all. Is this perspective patronizing? Should curators push back a bit, and audiences simply “toughen up”?⁹ Or are certain displays of violence gratuitous, an added injustice for victims of the original assault, while simultaneously numbing viewers to others’ future suffering, as critic Susan Sontag herself experienced (Sontag, 2003)?

It is primarily the *audience* that defines the success or failure of a curatorial project. Demands are being made for processes of curation to involve local stakeholders, survivors, community members of different generations, funders, collection donors, and in some cases former perpetrators. Given partisan agendas, can the diverse needs of these different constituencies be integrated in still-divided societies? Local, national, and international contexts are often at play, as are differences between elite and vernacular interests.

The emotional as well as the material stakes of a given display may vary widely for different audiences, as visitors inhabit a wide range of subject positions vis-à-vis the content of exhibits. Further, these change over time, as communities engage unevenly in processes of “working through” in relation to their communal tragedies. These differences need to be identified and negotiated. Perhaps a successful curation is one that, at least provisionally, “kindles a sense of ownership” on the part of multiple communities (Brown, 2009).

Finally, what are our *goals*? What do we hope public curation of difficult knowledge can do? Is preserving the past a kind of gift? Photographs, for example, may help “stop the flow of time” in ways that open a space for critical reflection, as Newbury suggests (this volume). But there has been an overwhelming bias in the practice of curation (extending to the discussions in this volume) privileging a Western museological framework, in which preserving the past—at times via technologically heroic measures—is taken as an unquestioned good. Similarly, heritage sites and monuments—including avant-garde “counter-memorials”—still imply strong mandates for remembering, even if remembering is pursued via multiple forms of unsettledness.¹⁰ It is worth considering other notions of the life cycles of objects and the qualities of time, memory, and history that propose different relationships to the past. These may have underappreciated benefits in relation to “difficult knowledge,” especially when communities become trapped in enduring legacies or traumatic cycles. If liberation from the traumatic force of memory is one of the goals, how can curation serve this end? Is it ever acceptable to bury the past, let it go, or put it to rest? While preservation is powerful, there are other gifts.

And life, of course, goes on. In curation and narration, the temporal frames continue to shift, and with them priorities and interests. As Erin Mosely (this volume) illustrates, artists in post-apartheid South Africa felt the ground move under them as they adapted a robust tradition of “protest art” to an emerging era of “truth and reconciliation,” reflecting upon the past and posing hard questions of the “truths” that were emerging, with an ethical voice and aesthetic eye. As messengers who both curate and are curated, artists may bring us “emotionally” closer to discerning the ongoing unknown (Maclear, 1999: 24).

As researchers, curators, and educators, we need to consider these choices carefully. What are we, as spectators, to do in the face of past (and indeed, present) violence? Is Dori Laub’s call, in the context of Holocaust testimonies, “to bear witness to our witnessing,” sufficient (Laub, 1992)? Yet we surely cannot know, understand, or convey all pasts, and in a dogged attempt to do so, we may bind ourselves in a “claustrophobic relationship between ethics, critical analysis and loss” (Salverson, 2009). Tensions exist between the kind of broad public attention to difficult knowledge that we hope for, and the trivializing that often accompanies mass consumption.¹¹ Yet amidst our fears of ignorance, trespassing, appropriation, or even of our own emotions, what roles—or what necessity—might there be for humor, failure, forgetting, and love? It is the fundamental tension spanning the two domains embedded in this volume’s title that fascinates and troubles

us: between *curating/caring for* and the *difficult knowledge* of violence and oppression. There is an uneasy relationship between praise and critique, between deconstruction and reconstruction, that scholarship on the aftermath of violence has yet to fully plumb.

The “difficult knowledge” addressed in each chapter of this volume is difficult in different ways. In its most mundane form, difficult might simply refer to logistical matters: how to arrange a display, how to distinguish this museum or memorial site from others. But these problems quickly become implicated in a range of deeper concerns. Sometimes the key issue is how knowledge is packaged and instrumentalized—politically, commercially, or otherwise. In curating contested histories, whose knowledge should be privileged and whose interests served? Those of curious publics? Of victim communities? Of a transitional government? In other cases the problem may be that the past is presented as a period that is *over*, and our knowledge of it complete; how often are we shown the ways in which some wounds remain open, bleeding into the present? Do we agree on the oft-invoked “lessons of the past” and how we want them enacted? Or what a “successful” memorial act might look like or do? And in the end, our curatorial vision and best efforts notwithstanding, what is the audience’s response? Despite different geographical and disciplinary approaches, the scholars and practitioners in this volume are united in an attempt to be critical, responsible witnesses to projects of “witnessing.”

Organization of the book

The chapters that follow present a rich array of overlapping engagements with the problems of curating difficult knowledge. The prefaces to each section are intended to further enhance the conversations among and within the chapters. While we have arranged the chapters in thematic groups to highlight what we found to be particularly generative constellations, we hope readers will make their own connections between and across categories.

Part I: Bearing Witness between Museums and Communities

This section addresses the difficult negotiations that confront curators and communities who share a sense of ownership of or implication in a historical episode or cultural problematic, but whose goals, attitudes, or methods may be fundamentally or periodically at odds—either with each other, or with engrained exhibitionary traditions. These authors raise novel concerns and illuminate the potential for expanding curatorial vision.

Heather Igloliorte asks what strategies of curation are appropriate for an exhibition aimed primarily at an audience of local survivors, “intended to supplement, assist, and encourage” a range of healing initiatives? In “‘We were so far away’: Exhibiting Inuit Oral Histories of Residential Schools,” she recounts, from the position of exhibition curator, the challenges in developing an exhibit with and for a traumatized community still actively struggling with the privations of the past and their reverberations in the present. Curation of Inuit survivor voices is a process of working to undo multiple silences—those in the Canadian education system, and those among reticent survivors themselves—without doing further damage. The logistical problems in reaching remote Arctic communities that lack traditional exhibition sites and contain a diversity of linguistic proficiencies also present opportunities to develop original modes of communication and help enlarge the “space” available to tell a still largely unarticulated story. Great care has been taken to develop modes of presentation that are culturally appropriate to communities in which the oral tradition is central and that allow the participants to retain ownership of the self-representations they co-created with the curator. Igloliorte suggests further that attentive curation that leaves room for audience dialogue can facilitate the re-claiming of indigenous meaning from problematic colonial imagery, while contributing these hidden meanings back into an evolving historical archive. Amassing these unheard histories provides an additional tool in the ongoing fight for inclusion in government policies of recognition.

In “The Past is a Dangerous Place: the Museum as a Safe Haven,” Vivienne Szekeres illustrates the role a museum can play in bringing social issues to public discussion by helping communities to represent themselves and some of their more difficult stories. Mindful of the inherent fractures and competing agendas within every community, the Migration Museum in Adelaide, Australia works to tell immigration’s “other” stories, stories that are not all about gratitude and easy assimilation. In doing so, the institution has had to navigate a pressurized relationship between national politics and its own projects and possibilities, using the cultural capital associated with museums to create a safe haven for democratic participation. As a responsive, participatory institution, the Migration Museum had long been a barometer of broader public opinion. But the museum was catalyzed to become more explicitly a tool to influence such opinion, using careful strategies to take big political risks. At the same time, below the power politics, the museum quietly grew into a unique ritual space shared by many local communities—a keeper of their stories and a place to make their voices heard.

In her chapter, "Teaching Tolerance through Objects of Hatred: The Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia as 'Counter-Museum,'" Monica Eileen Patterson engages the museum as a technology for confronting painful subject matter and delivering scholarship about it to broader publics. She illustrates how the Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia employs a multifaceted approach to curation that rejects conventional museum categories. Framing an open-ended assemblage of everyday objects, the museum works to highlight links between past and present around a deep-seated and deeply troubling manifestation of racism. The museum's founder has developed a methodology that strives to confront without provoking, to invite and listen while also educating and enlightening, and to illuminate the "fraught nature of racism as experienced by everyday people in real life" by drawing visitors into dialogue about their own experience through material culture.

Finally, Amy Sodaro's chapter, "Politics of the Past: Remembering the Rwandan Genocide at the Kigali Memorial Centre," addresses tensions inherent in an increasingly widespread international model for state regimes dealing with difficult national heritage: the memorial museum. Intended locally as democratic spaces where a citizenry can face and work through the traumatic past (by using diverse media, giving and hearing testimony, and undertaking historical research), these institutions are also political tools in the international arena. A paradigm developed for Holocaust museums, this model may not translate well into a volatile social context like Kigali, where genocidal ideology still bubbles just beneath the officially peaceful surface, justice has in no definitive way been served, and organic local memorials languish for lack of funding. In such a context, commemoration runs the risk of prematurely foreclosing precisely the process of attaining justice (of which it is intended to form a key part) by univocally declaring reconciliation where none has been achieved. Politically expedient on an international stage, where aid is delivered based on perceptions of stability, commemoration by a fragile state can function as a tool of authoritarianism. The lack of blame for the genocide ascribed in the museum exhibit to anything more proximate than the legacy of colonial forces is telling.

Part II: Visualizing the Past

The authors in this section offer fresh viewpoints for considering visual representations of violence and its aftermaths. Their discussions illustrate the value of melding artistic, representational, historical, and ethnographic approaches to apprehend the various levels on which images

make meaning, and offer a glimpse of the social lives of these complex objects. We are shown how gallery spaces, due to both their relative independence and to their particular spatial and temporal qualities, can serve uniquely as public memory sites in ways unavailable to other forms of mass media like television, radio, or the Internet.

Darren Newbury's "Living Historically through Photographs in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Reflections on Kliptown Museum, Soweto" offers a close reading of this mode of representation in a post-apartheid site of memory. Despite controversies around the domination of national memory over local memory or the failure of the larger curated environment to serve the needs of the local traders and residents (due to the privileging of abstract ideas and tourist attention), Newbury presents Kliptown's photographically-based museum as a worthy representational attempt to reinvest the site of a historic subaltern declaration of human rights with the memory of these key political events. He suggests that the Kliptown display may package potentially difficult knowledge too redemptively, by presenting those who suffered apartheid not as victims but as historical agents who opposed it and by making injustice seem like a dark past that has been entirely overcome by the democratic present. Nevertheless, he argues, the Kliptown museum's approach to curating photographs along with information about the ethical conditions of their production offers both "an invitation to live historically" in the present, and a site at which to consider the politics of representation itself. In relation to the latter, he contends that the photographs are staged in such a way as to highlight for the public the danger of turning history into spectacle, and the "incompatibility of looking and acting." Newbury admits that his somewhat optimistic "reading" represents imaginative potential, and not local social actuality.

In "Showing and Telling: Photography Exhibitions in Israeli Discourses of Dissent," Tamar Katriel addresses witnessing in a direct sense, in the context of two projects of dissident activist documentary in Israel today. Both photography exhibitions take a challenging stance vis-à-vis their target audiences in an attempt to "condemn social silences and denials" about the daily reality of military occupation, and to break these silences by inserting harsh hidden realities into the blinkered center of Israeli existence. Viewing exhibitions both as sites of visual representation/communication and as interactive social arenas for performance and interpersonal exchange, Katriel's discussion troubles assumptions about the relationship between commemoration and activism, illustrating the "particular blend of present-oriented activism and future oriented memory" in the life cycle of each project. She points out

how these two modes may pull in different directions, reiterating the potential incompatibility between looking and acting noted by Darren Newbury. Her chapter also raises the uncomfortable question of just who is served by making difficult knowledge public. Are such displays in the interest of those currently *suffering* injustice, or only those struggling with their *knowledge* of it?

In “Visualizing Apartheid: Re-framing Truth and Reconciliation through Contemporary South African Art,” Erin Mosely argues for viewing artists as “conspicuous agents of change” in the transition from violent authoritarianism, who through their unique roles and creative media are positioned to challenge selective, hegemonic narratives of the past. Art’s inherently partial and free-flowing mandate makes it a privileged site for working through challenges and layers of subjective complexity not amenable to more neutral or regimented official venues of truth telling. Yet Mosely suggests that many artists have nonetheless shouldered a mandate of nation building through healing, empathy, community reconstitution, and solidarity with many of the voices left unheard and experiences unacknowledged in the country’s celebrated Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Part III: Materiality and Memorial Challenges

The chapters in this final section reveal the sometimes uncanny ways that places can have a voice in debates about the past, acting as stubborn irritants to attempts at closure, or posing difficult questions that certain groups would wish away.

In “Points of No Return: Cultural Heritage and Counter-Memory in Post-Yugoslavia,” Andrew Herscher offers a sustained theoretical reflection on state-sponsored efforts to curate a multi-ethnic heritage in postwar Kosovo. He shows how these projects of creating appropriately stable, reconciled national subjects meet with popular resistance that both reveals heritage as ideology and refuses state assertions of appropriate memory in favor of a wider range of engaged responses to the past. Herscher critiques the widespread valorization in recent memory studies of “unsettledness” as a fundamentally ethical memorial posture. Indeed, in examining resistance to historic preservation in former-Yugoslavia—from modernist interventions to postmodernist substitutions—he questions the celebration of “memory” as the ultimate outcome of memorials. To this end he offers examples of memory’s displacement, distortion, parody, exaggeration, and other forms of transformation that reach beyond memorialization to “political discourse and action.”

Cynthia Milton parses opposing currents in Peru's collective memory of their bloody internal war (1980–95) through an analysis of acts of vandalism perpetrated against one of the country's few sites of memory, the Eye that Cries (Ojo que llora), in Lima. Originally intended as a space for remembering and paying homage to the victims of the armed conflict, in "Defacing memory: (Un)tying Peru's Memory Knots" Milton illustrates how the site has become a space for contesting disputed memories. While the memorial site is entirely a creation of artistic imagination, repeated attacks on the site have endowed it more directly with socially accrued meaning. The stained and broken stones of the memorial site telegraph the desire on the part of certain groups to stifle the emerging memory of the victims of the war years. Ironically, this potential re-victimization has amplified public discourse and inspired communities of remembering that might never have emerged had the relatively obscure site been left untouched. Yet the ongoing conflicts over the past made visible at this site (over how, what, and whom to remember) point to the limits of memory work in Peru, and the perils of such symbolic endeavours for present-day reconciliation efforts.

Śławomir Kapralski's "(Mis)representations of the Jewish Past in Poland's Memoryscapes: Nationalism, Religion and Political Economies of Commemoration" delineates various modes with which the material traces of Poland's Jewish past are managed in the country's shifting post-war memorial economy. Employing the notion of "memoryscapes," he illustrates how different periods in Poland's recent past (post-Shoah, communism, and democracy) have given rise to different approaches to remembering and representing Jewish Poland: oblivion, erasure, and preservation. He reveals how mono-ethnic, intra-Polish memorial struggles—such as communism vs. ethno-nationalism—have at times overpowered, silenced, and eliminated the space for local reckonings with the Jewish past.

While considering the complexities of difficult knowledge, we ask readers to let themselves be affected by the striking images contained in these chapters, which suggest the unique power of curatorial work:

The small boxes holding Cambodian immigrants' few possessions for their new lives. The U.S. postcard depicting four naked black children on the bank of a river with a caption reading, "Alligator Bait." The stained and broken memorial stones of Peru's "Crying Eye." The color family snapshots of murdered Rwandans free for the taking at a local memorial. The insistence of the Jewish past in Poland in the form of ghostly lettering that brightens and fades with changing regimes of memory. The collection of car

keys confiscated from Palestinian drivers at Israeli checkpoints. The immigrant story told by way of a cell containing only a single naked lightbulb, a chair, and a bucket. Inuit residential school survivor Carolyn Weetaltuk recognizing her mother in an unlabeled photograph of school children during the preparation of an exhibit. Jane Alexander's sculpture "Butcher Boys," half-men, half-beasts whose scars and disfigurements make visible and visceral apartheid's psychic wounds—dark, dormant creatures loitering in everyday places, ominously poised to re-awaken.

We are witnesses as these images and objects, emerging from hateful contexts, are transformed into the visible, material touchstones of new experiences and narratives. We hope their curation may evoke empathy, understanding, self-scrutiny, and a productive struggle with too much difficult knowledge.

Notes

1. The outdoor kiosks led into an indoor exhibit called *Kde Domov Můj?* [Where is My Home?]. Named after the Czechoslovak national anthem and sponsored by the political party *Civic Forum* (Občanský Forum), it was part of the larger movement to return knowledge of national history to the Czechoslovak citizenry.
2. The exhibit, in Polish *I ciągle widzę ich twarze: Fotografia Żydów polskich*, was conceived and created by Golda Tencer, director of Warsaw's Shalom Foundation.
3. The first quote is from photograph contributor Zofia Sobel, Urzędów, Poland. Available at <http://motlc.wiesenthat.com/site/pp.asp?c=jmKYJeNVJrF&b=478594> [Accessed November 10, 2010]. The second one is from Jan Kochanski, Zawiercie, Poland. Available at <http://motlc.wiesenthat.com/site/pp.asp?c=jmKYJeNVJrF&b=478613> [Accessed November 10, 2010]. Emphasis mine.
4. "Yuyanapaq: Para Recordar," exhibition pamphlet, 2003. See also Milton and Ulfe, 2011.
5. See also Sevchenko, 2004.
6. Available at <http://www.museum.manchester.ac.uk/community/collective-conversations/> [Accessed November 10, 2010]. For a discussion of the limits of such attempts at democratic co-production of museum knowledge, see Lynch and Alberti, 2009.
7. Leigh Payne coins the expression of "contentious coexistence" as a potential political model in societies where perpetrators and survivors must live together (Payne, 2008). John Borneman (2002) develops the concept of "dis-sensual community."
8. Dominick LaCapra asks, "What modes of narrative are most suited for rendering traumatic events, especially in ways that do not harmonize, stylize, or even airbrush them and thus border on repression or denial? What non-narrative forms complement, supplement, and contest narrative

- representations?" (LaCapra, 2001: 205). Michael Rothberg adds that certain esthetics or strategies may be more or less "adequate to the task of representing and recalling history's *overlapping* forms of violence" (Rothberg, 2009: 35)
9. This stance was encouraged by one of our conference participants. The call to "toughen up" is complicated by the fact that many public spaces are open to children. The Holocaust Museum in Washington protects children from difficult images by placing them in recessed display cases, out of their reach.
 10. The notion of the "counter-memorial" is from Young, 1992.
 11. As Andreas Huyssen has argued, the commodification of past events does not necessarily diminish their historical importance. All depends on "strategies of representation and commodification pursued and on the context in which they are staged" (Huyssen, 2003: 18–19).

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