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Virtual Dark Tourism

Ghost Roads

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*To my brother Robb,
on whom I can always depend for truth and encouragement—
each valuable on its own, but even more treasured in combination.*

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1

Introduction to Virtual Dark Tourism: Disaster in the Space of the Imagination

Kathryn N. McDaniel

Though you may not know the term “dark tourism,” you have almost certainly participated in this practice, even if only in your imagination. If you have journeyed to a battlefield, a war memorial, a Holocaust museum, or another setting of devastation, you have been a dark tourist. Ranging from the comical to the profoundly moving, such tourist sites connect people to the past in tangible ways through objects, spaces, exhibits, and dramatic recreation. Creating sites memorializing calamity, war, genocide, and tragedy—whether for edification or thrills—the dark tourism industry worldwide is booming.

A major draw of what is also called “thanatourism”¹ is being in the physical presence of objects or spaces connected to atrocities; however, the desire to journey to dark places of the past also extends to the realm of the imagination. Writers, filmmakers, and designers of Internet sites and video games have created virtual dark tourism experiences for arm-chair travelers by devising imaginary voyages to lands and times where terrible acts have occurred. Shaping popular memories of historical

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disasters, these simulated journeys—like the physical ones—bring the past into the present, encourage empathy for past peoples, provide opportunities for public grieving and spiritual questioning, produce vicarious thrills and chills, offer solace for tragic losses, and invite reflection on the possibility of catastrophe in the here-and-now.

The term “dark tourism” has an expansive definition, referring to travel to places that either witnessed or represent death, destruction, suffering, or calamity.² First developed in 1996, the dark tourism concept emerged from several directions at once, including a focus on dark sites,³ an exploration of the history of thanatourism as a human behavioral phenomenon,⁴ and the problem of troubling heritage memorials.⁵ Dark tourist sites include a wide variety of “attractions”⁶: some quite deeply concerned with death and the tourist’s confrontation with its meaning (occasionally referred to as “black tourism”), others more oriented toward fun and entertainment (on the “pale” end of the spectrum).⁷ Some of these sites are intentionally created; others appear spontaneously (as with some pilgrimage sites) or are encountered accidentally.⁸ Some may be more highly commercialized than others, or they may focus on the group experience (or even communal celebration) instead of individual reflection. They may be in a location not physically associated with the atrocity (like the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C.), or they may put tourists in actual danger because of their proximity to the event or conditions that produced the event. Some scholars have questioned whether the term “dark tourism” is too capacious, considering too many types of sites and evoking too many different kinds of experiences and emotions.⁹ Public historians concerned with studying dark tourism have typically approached it from the point of view of managing such sites and providing interpretation: what is termed the “supply side” of the practice. What attracts tourists to these sites (the demand side), what meaning tourists take from them, and how such sites shape ideas of the past’s relation to the present are more thorny questions.¹⁰

Dark tourism scholars have posed a variety of answers for why people are drawn to such macabre sites, including modern secularism,¹¹ contemporary tendencies to sequester death and dying,¹² postmodern anxieties about late-capitalist and post-Cold War developments,¹³ and destabilized national identities amid increasing globalization.¹⁴ Each of these trends

may also be said to encourage the virtual form of thanatourism. Even as transportation technologies have made travel easier and more widely accessible, new media and computer technologies have also increased the variety and availability of high-quality travel simulations.¹⁵ The two also mutually reinforce each other. Those who explore the world's tragedies and traumas in the one form would be likely to experience them in the other as well. Dark tourism scholars acknowledge the importance of this mutual influence and have suggested that travel begins in the imagination because the virtual experience—from news media, travel guides, and other travel literature—usually precedes the physical dark tour.¹⁶ Imaginative expressions of dark tourism also follow such experiences, as people try to put into words or images their dark tourism encounters. Anthropologist Jonathan Skinner's edited volume, *Writing the Dark Side of Travel*, has recognized the importance of rhetorical strategies—including words, actions, graphic novels, and dance—in processing and representing pilgrimages to places of death and destruction.¹⁷

In some ways, the concept of “virtual dark tourism” casts an even wider net than dark tourism, since it does not in fact require travel to the actual site of calamity: the physicality of being in a place associated with death or trauma, or being surrounded by tangible objects tied to such events, has been removed. This limitation in itself helps to mark a boundary dividing dark tourism from virtual dark tourism. Virtual dark tourism need not involve physical travel—the journey is imaginary. It may be that virtual dark tourism focuses even more intensely on traveling (as opposed to destinations) as an important process for understanding death and suffering. And thus, not any experience that takes one's imagination to another place or time qualifies as virtual tourism. The literature, film, Internet site, or game must convey a journey; it must provide some simulation of travel; it must attend deliberately to the notion of providing outsiders (tourists) the feeling of being in a place, without actually being in that place. The last of these might be conveyed by visual or auditory cues, intense levels of detail, layering of the alien with the familiar or identifiable, or even the active participation of the tourist in a game or virtual reenactment of an event. To that end, virtual dark tourism is not likely to occur spontaneously in ways described by dark tourism scholars.¹⁸

On the other hand, the “accidental” character of virtual dark tourism experiences may be enhanced. Unlike dark tourism consumers, virtual dark tourists may not realize initially that they are being taken on a journey related to death, but may simply intend to read a book, watch a film, or play a video game. The consumer’s intentionality may be somewhat or even entirely reduced, while the creator’s purposefulness is heightened. Self-conscious craft goes into design, content, and other features of the virtual tour. Consequently, there is always deliberation in the creation of meaning for those who travel virtually, though the tours themselves may be more or less successful in conveying that meaning. Because virtual dark tourism media intensely engage with questions of death or suffering in other times, those who craft these experiences have conscious messages about memory, about the past, and even about the possible future which they intend to convey to their virtual tourists. Virtual dark tourism is constrained not only by the lack of physical travel, but also by the intentionality of the form and its creators in producing phenomenological, spiritual, and historical interpretations. The artificial nature of these experiences also shapes the meanings intended and received.

Note that the nature of the interpretation does not affect whether a work or experience qualifies as dark tourism, either real or virtual. It makes no difference whether trauma and death are interpreted as unremitting tragedy, or interpreted comically or heroically, ultimately generating a positive conclusion about a terrible time.¹⁹ Regardless of the interpretation advanced, those who visit such sites—physically or virtually—are still participating in dark tourism. In fact, both producers and consumers of dark tourism sites commonly construe scenes of violence, suffering, and death as opportunities for heroism or confronting the absurd.

In short, a work of virtual dark tourism

- is a creative work that substitutes a simulated journey for physical travel;
- recognizes and emphasizes the consumer as a tourist in an alien environment;
- intentionally represents a site—whether real or wholly imagined—of death, destruction, suffering, or calamity;
- purposefully encourages consumers to consider essential matters of life, suffering, and death;
- engages with questions related to history and memory and the importance of the past to present and future identities, events, and actions.

This book represents an initial foray into exploring dark tourism in virtual realms—be they conveyed through literature, film, or new media. Tourism scholars have called the virtual “the next generation of tourism”²⁰ and have sometimes argued that creative simulations offer similar experiences to the physical version.²¹ The authors participating in this volume, ourselves writing from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, find it useful and illuminating to consider creative works through the behavioral, theoretical, and philosophical lens of dark tourism studies. The topics of the chapters, like the subjects of dark tourism, are wide ranging, their approaches to such experiences in varying shades of gray, from comic and entertaining to profoundly affecting and spiritual. We venture as far back as Reformation Europe to witness horror movie approaches to the witch-craze, but also journey to more recent events like the Haiti earthquake in 2010—and even fly toward future atrocities in imagined worlds beyond our own. Exploring such diverse topics elucidates the common purposes, themes, questions, and challenges that unite virtual approaches to dark tourism. This breadth also helps illumine not only where virtual dark tourism flourishes but also where it runs aground.

One of the essential questions about virtual dark tourism is how it compares to “real” (or physical) dark tourism. Surveying the book’s chapters produces a rich variety of answers to this question. Undeniably, there are disadvantages to the virtual form. The absence of physical objects or settings related to death creates a sense of distance between the scene of tragedy and the tourist.²² The lack of full sensory exposure (sight, sound, smell, touch) to the remnants of the atrocity limits immersion in a catastrophic place or time and thereby dampens the effect of confronting horrors associated with past atrocities. That virtual tourists essentially remain in their own space inhibits prolonged and purposeful exposure to an alien environment associated with death. It may all be a little too easy for the virtual tourist: the hardships associated with real travel and physical presence may be an essential part of such experiences.

There may also be less space for individual reflection on the simulated journey. Virtual dark tours are heavily crafted and so the intended interpretation may be impossible to ignore; consumers may feel more consciously manipulated in virtual tours than they are in physical dark tourism settings. Although many dark tourism sites similarly show the

heavy hand of interpretation, others may feel more “real” because little to no interpretative framework has been constructed for tourists. Virtual dark tours may seem less authentic than the “real thing” because of their perhaps more obvious mediation between the event or place depicted and the tourist.²³ Designers of Internet tours of Rwandan genocide sites, Hurricane Katrina devastation in New Orleans, and the Haiti earthquake of 2010, for example, must wrestle with the challenge of conveying authenticity to their audiences. Each responds in a different way, by including sensory stimuli, or explicitly discussing hesitations about the medium’s artificiality, or incorporating audiences into the tours through elements of game-like participation. Despite such techniques, virtual tourists may feel less able to draw their own conclusions about a particular incident or site, and as a result the opportunity for individual and personal reflection may be diminished.

Conversely, the virtual variation on the form has several advantages which make it surprisingly useful and appealing. Most obviously, almost anyone may participate in virtual dark tourism quickly, safely, and inexpensively. It is broadly inclusive. This has a democratizing effect and also expands the potential market for such “death tours.” One compelling reason for the surge of virtual dark tours is the desire to educate a broader audience about historic atrocities. Although few will journey to Normandy to visit places associated with the D-Day invasion, even fewer will travel to Rwanda to witness sites of genocide. Disaster tourism that attracts western tourists to nonwestern death sites has also been controversial; postcolonial communities and scholars argue about to what degree these outsiders exploit with the “tourist gaze” or even create local economic and environmental problems through their presence.²⁴ Consequently, physical travel to disaster sites may present not only logistical but also ethical quandaries for would-be tourists.²⁵ Virtual disaster travel provides an alternative. Creating simulated experiences of past traumas may be even more important for some locales than others. To experience these tragic places virtually unquestionably beats not experiencing them at all. The virtual realm has an important educational role to play, especially as artistic and technological innovations help overcome some of the difficulties of physical distance.

Much like dark tourism, virtual travel to death sites sometimes performs its didactic role well and sometimes poorly. Managed death sites require historical interpretation—and often religious or philosophical interpretation—which may convey problematic messages to student-travelers. Virtual dark tours require deliberate craft and artistry as they simulate thanatourism, and thus their educational messages are carefully shaped as well. Writers like Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, H. P. Lovecraft, and Connie Willis consciously transmit messages about specific historical events and their relationship to the present; often their interpretations reveal contemporary or nationalist prejudices. Such is also the case for films like *The Longest Day*, through which Cornelius Ryan (author of the original book and one of the film's screenwriters) deliberately sought to teach audiences about the individuals who participated in the Normandy invasion by putting moviegoers at the scene of the violence and catastrophe. Certainly, too, Internet tours of disaster sites and computer games like *Never Alone*, about the Inupiaq experience of Alaskan colonization, deliver lessons about historical events and the appropriate responses to unfolding tragedy. These interpretations run the risk of oversimplifying complex events, promoting false narratives, whitewashing traumatic events, actively “forgetting” those people who do not fit with the story's moral, and creating pat resolutions where there may be none.

Also clouding the didactic role of virtual dark tourism, the expanding market for virtual tours attracts those who see them as opportunities for commercial profit. The combination of death experiences with consumerism has raised dilemmas for dark tourism scholars and professionals.²⁶ A. V. Seaton's foundational exploration of the history of thanatourism dates it to the Romantic period (or what he calls “Black Romanticism”), and puts aesthetics, spectacle, and entertainment at the center of death travels in the modern age. As the emphasis on religious pilgrimages waned following the Enlightenment era in Western Europe, more commercial and secular motivations for travel to morbid sites developed.²⁷ We hear echoes of this trend in the following chapters in stories of the Cornish Gothic tradition in nineteenth-century literature and the emergence of Reformation-era witch-hunting movies in the late 1960s that re-enacted pilgrimages in a secular and commercial context. Writers, filmmakers, artists, and game designers attract customers to their virtual tours by giving

people what they want to experience: whether that be stories of heroism in difficult times, cautionary tales about human violence and barbarism, information about past disasters, gruesome spectacles of mass death, fearful images of alien races, consolation and memorialization for lost lives, or opportunities for spiritual questioning about mortality and the human response to it. Creators of simulated dark journeys must hit on some key, attractive element in their tours so that they generate commercial success. Their doing so threatens to distort the historical and philosophical lessons offered by their imagined voyages: unpopular interpretations, though accurate, may not be an easy sell.

The educational and commercial challenges of virtual thanatourism are similar to those of the real thing, though there may be differences of degree.²⁸ But there are unique advantages for the producers and caretakers of virtual dark tours. Beyond possible profits, the practical advantages of managing virtual rather than real artifacts should not be overlooked. More importantly, the ability of the interpreter to control the story associated with the tragedy, in the presentation of content and crafting of message, means that multilayered or nuanced messages about death and suffering may be advanced. Consider in the following chapters the complex interpretations offered by the *Bioshock* and *Fallout* game series, or the sophisticated layering of history and myth in Lovecraft's short story "The Shunned House." Producers of imaginary dark tours can also engage deliberately with a wide variety of genres—including adventure, horror, Gothic, fantasy, and farce—to lure in those who otherwise would not seek out such opportunities to confront death and suffering. Evoking genre provides a narrative frame to connect sites of horror to our common narrative of the past: history. Science fiction, a genre into which several of these virtual dark tours fall, allows us to project these ideas into the future. The book's final chapter about the game *EVE Online*—a multiplayer, online game involving battles in space among players with immortal avatars—demonstrates how real-world players have constructed for themselves dark tourism sites within the game, and reveals that memorialization and dark tourism are important psychological and cultural practices that extend to virtual communities. Far from being inferior to real-world experiences, the realm of the imagination provides fertile ground for contemplating mortality, memory, and one's relationship to the past and the future.

It is fruitful to consider virtual dark tourism as a facet of the dramatic recreation offered by many heritage sites.²⁹ Defining a narrative of events, creating characters (based on real people or fictional ones), giving them words to speak from the time of disaster, and enacting them before an audience of present-day witnesses—all figure into bringing history “back to life,” whether at dark sites or in the realm of the imagination. The virtual tour highlights the performative element in all dark tourism.³⁰ Chapters in this book explore how video games and Internet sites incorporate audience or player performance, but also show the importance of dramatic recreation in written texts and films. Connie Willis’s time-travel novels, witch-hunting films, and the television special “D-Day Revisited” (about the film *The Longest Day*) each contain self-referential nods to the performance of historical drama as a method of reenacting the past for new audiences.

Beyond the comparison of the real with the imaginary tour, the essays in this book demonstrate the complexities with which artists and audiences (or consumers) approach traumatic pasts. Virtual dark tourism offers insights into history, into a shared or an alien past. As a result, it can be used or consumed to shape present and future identities. The interpretations of history offered may argue for common or divergent identities, specify the character of a people (positive or negative), or take a political stand on economic inequality or the marginalization of groups. Several chapters engage with these questions head-on, from the Cornish Gothic as a source of nationalist identity in the nineteenth century to Iceland’s and Northern Ireland’s use of *Game of Thrones* tourism to reconceptualize their identities today. It matters whether insiders or outsiders frame the story.³¹ Developers of the game *Never Alone* worked with the Iñupiaq, an Indigenous people of Alaska, to create a virtual dark tourism experience that reflects their own understanding of their past. In contrast, the website and game *Inside Disaster Haiti*, though constructed with the goal of fostering empathy, has been controversial for reinforcing the western idea of Haiti as a ruinous site. Even farther along the spectrum, the filmmakers of *The Forest* deliberately emphasized the alien nature of the Japanese to create a horror film for western audiences. Western colonialist attitudes toward nonwestern peoples and places can be reinforced and spread—consciously or unconsciously—by way of such virtual tours.

Even imaginary pasts (or future-pasts) can be used to speak to politically and emotionally charged contemporary issues. Although heroism and hope for progress are common themes, virtual dark tourism interpretations are not always progressive, nor are they necessarily optimistic. The problem of the exploitative tourist's gaze remains, despite the virtual nature of the interaction. Xenophobia, ethnocentrism, violence, militarism, and cynicism may all emerge from virtual dark tourism interpretations. Some virtual dark tours emphasize the alien and unfamiliar for effect, as in the film *The Forest*, and as a result demonize or reinforce stereotypes of particular people. Others, however, quite successfully promote mutual understanding among groups and evoke empathy toward those in tragic situations, like *Never Alone* or Martin Edström's virtual tour of a Rwandan genocide site. Some, like those provided by Connie Willis's time-travel novels, envision a happier future based on historical empathy; others, like those in the games *Bioshock* and *Fallout*, present dystopian visions of capitalist destruction. The imaginary nature of these tours—especially when consumers are literally “playing” the character of a foreign other—allows a compelling sense of interconnection with those in the volatile and dangerous past, such that the foreign and distant mingles with the familiar and proximate. Traveling without going anywhere, being both “there” and “not there” simultaneously, creates potential for deep insight into one's own mortality as well as the mortality of those who have come before.

Importantly, as several of the book's contributors note, the virtual realm of dark tourism does not replace physical dark tourism. Those who participate in the one are likely to participate in the other. The two may also promote each other intellectually, socially, or commercially. For example, YouTube tours of Hurricane Katrina sites are designed to encourage in-person tourism to these locales. H. P. Lovecraft's exercise in virtual dark tourism in “The Shunned House” has inspired tours in the story's setting, Providence, Rhode Island. In a strange twist, the fictional realm of Westeros from *Game of Thrones* has promoted real-world tourism to sites of the historic tragedies represented in the television show, as well as to locations where the series is filmed. Commerce and art both benefit from reinforcing connections between the physical or tangible and the virtual.

Imaginary pilgrimages take many forms, and this volume explores a variety of ways creative works attempt to replicate dark tourism experiences. The book is divided into four sections according to the expressive medium used, from the more traditional to the more technologically cutting-edge. Part I begins our foray into virtual thanatourism with the “Literary Journeys” provided by short stories, travel literature, and novels. Travel narratives are a time-honored form of virtual tourism and, like real-world tours, also display a concern to (figuratively) take their travelers to sites of death and destruction. Fiction writers, too, have commonly used techniques to transport their readers to disasters in a different place and time, so that we can experience danger, uncertainty, and horror vicariously. Amy H. Sturgis in “‘Some Lingered Influence in the Shunned House’: H. P. Lovecraft’s Three Invitations to Dark Tourism” shows how Lovecraft merges the mythic, the historical, and the scientific in his story “The Shunned House.” His tale takes both the protagonists and the story’s readers to a real, abandoned house in Providence as a location for contemporary anxieties about violent legacies. In “‘Imagined Ghosts on Unfrequented Roads’: Gothic Tourism in Nineteenth-Century Cornwall,” Joan Passey argues that both travel literature and fiction in the nineteenth century (like the tales of Wilkie Collins and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle) used virtual journeys to Cornwall to shape its identity as at once a salutary place free from industrial development, an industrial ruin left from the abandonment of the mining industry, and a site of the “uncanny” and horrific from its distinctly un-English past. My own chapter, “Through the Looking Glass Darkly: The Convergence of Past and Present in Connie Willis’s Time-Travel Novels,” analyzes the way that science fiction time-travel literature facilitates dark journeys to the past in order to foster empathy and spiritual reflections on the importance of history and memory in creating life after death. Each of these chapters explores the importance of genre—be it science fiction, horror, the Gothic, mystery, or farce—in the interpretation of past events portrayed in these literary dark tours. In each case, dark tourism writers use both genre conventions and the journey motif to create an atmosphere that directs readers toward thoughtful interaction with remembered trauma.

Part II explores the “Film Trips” offered by both television and movies. Genre serves an important role in these chapters, too; film techniques are

designed to allow audiences to witness past atrocities and develop interpretations of them. Jana Mathews, in her chapter “Cinematic Thanatourism and the Purloined Past: The ‘*Game of Thrones* Effect’ and the Effect of *Game of Thrones* on History,” shows how the popular television series based on George R. R. Martin’s books has collapsed many dark sites and events into one (fantastic) space and time. More importantly, Mathews’s essay explains how film locations of those historical-fictional massacres and battles have been merged with actual historical events to generate tourism for Iceland and Northern Ireland, bringing money into their economies and also allowing them to craft national identities in which they can feel pride. Virtual and real-world tourists to these locales show the connections between commerce, tragedy (invented and historical), and national identity. Next, audiences travel to Reformation Europe to serve as witnesses to the “witch-craze” era via “hexploitation” horror films of the late 1960s and early 1970s in Gavin F. Hurley’s “Touring the ‘Burning Times’: The Rhetoric of Witch-Hunting Films, 1968–1973.” Hurley argues that these films, despite or perhaps even by way of their grotesque displays of violence and sexuality, invite contemplation of Christianity and western rationality that express modern anxieties about religiosity, death, and spectacle.

Bringing us into the modern era, Matthew Young in his chapter “Did Those Portly Men Over There Once Rush This Position?: Virtual Dark Tourism and D-Day Commemorations” examines how D-Day films and documentaries created virtual tours of the Normandy invasion in order to shape collective memory of its importance as a World War II watershed. Because this interpretation has not always seemed obvious, Young’s essay demonstrates how successfully virtual tours can shape popular memories of war tragedies. Finally in this section, we see how film can be used to create a sense of distance and otherness for thrilling effect in Emma Frances Bloomfield’s “Thanaviewing, the Aokigahara Forest, and Orientalism: Rhetorical Separations between the Self and the Other in *The Forest*.” Promoting alienating cultural stereotypes about the Japanese people, the filmmakers of *The Forest* use a story about a common suicide site to inspire unearthly horrors in western audiences, and thereby suggest destruction at the hands of an unknowable foreign place and people. Whether historical drama, horror movie, or documentary, films highlight

the commercial element involved in interpreting and manufacturing historical spectacles that horrify, educate, or inspire audiences, who then become living witnesses to past calamities.

Part III, “Internet Tours,” presents essays on three quite distinct approaches to online Internet tours of disaster sites. In “Experiencing Rwanda: Understanding Mass Atrocity at Nyamata,” Michelle Bentley examines photographer Martin Edström’s efforts to take virtual travelers to a church in Nyamata, Rwanda, in which people were brutally slaughtered in the 1990s and which has been left as a memorial to the atrocity. Using interactive controls, sound effects, and evocative words along with his photographs, Edström seeks to educate particularly western audiences about the genocide and to make viewers feel “as if they were there.” The Hurricane Katrina disaster shows us how tourism companies have found the dark side of their business—as well as the virtual side of it—profitable and meaningful. Diana I. Bowen and Susannah Bannon in “Hurricane Katrina Goes Digital: Memory, Dark Tours, and YouTube” analyze the rhetoric of virtual dark tour videos to show the uneasy relationship between commerce, tragedy, and historical narrative—especially as the virtual tours focus on the suffering of white, middle-class New Orleanians instead of that of working-class people of color. The last chapter in this section demonstrates the difficulties of crafting a tour of a foreign disaster that educates without exploiting. Kasia Mika’s chapter, “A Virtual Dark Journey Through the Debris: Playing *Inside the Haiti Earthquake* (2010),” examines the didactic purpose (and qualified success) of an online, interactive documentary about disaster relief in the wake of the recent tragedy, which allows players to pretend to take on certain roles in the wake of the disaster. Although the virtual approaches differ in each case considered by these chapters, they collectively demonstrate the way that Internet sites combine a variety of media—photography, film, text, and even gaming—to create authentic, sensitive, and meaningful experiences with places of calamity and death.

The last section of the book, Part IV, “Gaming Travel,” takes virtual tours in an even more conceptual direction, into fantastic universes and dystopian futures, and reveals what the future of virtual dark tourism may look like. Interactive games create more agency for virtual tourists than they have when using other virtual media to tour sites of destruction; this

heightened degree of control is designed, like the game element in *Inside the Haiti Earthquake*, to deepen the internalization of the games' lessons about the past, trauma, and death. Juliane Schlag demonstrates in "Surviving the Colonial Blizzard: The Alaskan Native Game *Never Alone* as a Walkthrough in Cultural Resistance" the effective collaboration between game designers and Indigenous people to produce a memorial of colonial trauma and a record of Inupiaq language, storytelling, and culture. The game does not resolve the tragic losses of Native peoples, but guides players into and through trauma via a dark journey that conveys important psychological, cultural, and historical lessons. Taking us into the realms of dystopian alternate pasts and futures created by counterfactual history in "Virtually Historical: Performing Dark Tourism through Alternate History Games," Caleb Andrew Milligan shows how the *Bioshock* and *Fallout* series' "what if" projections lead players through valuable experiences that facilitate their understanding of historical events—and promote positive future action. Finally, Daniel Fandino takes us into the complex world of online gaming in "Remembering Fictional History and Virtual War in *EVE Online*." Flying through space and freed from the possibility of death (because avatars regenerate), game developers as well as the players themselves have engaged in memorializing practices, erecting cemeteries and monuments and leaving wreckage behind for other players to tour. These chapters suggest that, despite being untethered from physical spaces, the virtual worlds built through video games invite and inspire dark tourism practices that tie players to past, present, and future identities and events.

From Providence, Rhode Island, to futuristic worlds, this book aims to take you on virtual journeys to morbid sites—and to show you the diverse byways through which you may encounter such death tours. Because they exist in the realm of the imagination, these roads may feel insubstantial, their modes of transport hidden. Because they explore disasters resulting from both human and natural causes, these voyages force us to confront the potential for surprising, horrific evils not only in the collective past but also in our present and future. Because they educate us about human nature and human history, they impel us to consider not only our identities but also how we might act in similar circumstances—heroically, self-interestedly, with violence, or with compassion—to promote dominating

powers or the forces of resistance (“never again”). Because they deal with essential matters of mortality, those ghostly visitations encountered inspire us to contemplate the inevitability of death and our own eventual passage to the other side of the veil. Ultimately, like the pilgrimages of earlier times, such experiences offer opportunities for each of us to remember and, in light of remembrance, to contemplate the mysteries of the human condition and our part in shaping it—all without physically traveling anywhere.

Notes

1. This term was coined by A.V. Seaton in “Guided by the Dark: From thanatopsis to thanatourism,” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 2, no. 4 (1996): 234–244. He defines it as “travel to a location wholly, or partially, motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death, particularly, but not exclusively, violent death,” and thus construes the tourist’s intentions and behaviors to be central to the practice (240).
2. For a summary of the various definitions and terms used for “dark tourism,” see Richard Sharpley, “Shedding Light on Dark Tourism: An Introduction,” *The Darker Side of Travel: The Theory and Practice of Dark Tourism*, ed. Richard Sharpley and Philip R. Stone (Bristol, UK: Channel View Publications, 2009), 9–12.
3. Malcolm Foley and J. John Lennon, “Editorial: Heart of Darkness,” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 2, no. 4 (1996): 195–197. See also their later book defining the concept: John Lennon and Malcolm Foley, *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster* (London: Continuum, 2000).
4. See Seaton, “Guided by the Dark.”
5. J. E. Tumbridge and G. J. Ashworth, *Dissonant Heritage: Managing the Past as a Resource in Conflict* (Chichester: John Wiley, 1996). For a brief review of the literature see G. J. Ashworth and Rami K. Isaac, “Have We Illuminated the Dark? Shifting perspectives on dark tourism,” *Tourism Recreation Research* 40, no. 3 (2015): 316–317.
6. Foley and Lennon question the applicability of this word in reference to death sites in “Editorial: Heart of Darkness.”

7. Philip R. Stone, "A Dark Tourism Spectrum: Towards a Typology of Death and Macabre Related Tourist Sites, Attractions and Exhibitions," *Tourism* 54, no. 2 (2006): 145–160.
8. In this volume we embrace Sharpley's and Stone's more expansive definitions for dark tourism, which allow for accidental encounters with dark spaces, rather than Seaton's definition that demands intention on the part of the traveler, or Lennon and Foley's that requires the events related to the dark tourism site to have occurred during living memory.
9. Ashworth and Isaac, "Have We Illuminated the Dark?," 323.
10. For a good summary of the scholarship in this area see R. Hartmann, "Dark Tourism, thanatourism and dissonance in heritage tourism management: New directions in contemporary tourism research," *Journal of Heritage Tourism* 9, no. 2 (2014): 166–182. See also Ashworth and Isaac, "Have We Illuminated the Dark?," 316–318.
11. Seaton, for example, suggests that Western Europe's movement away from religiously framed understandings of death by the nineteenth century set the stage for people to seek out death experiences for aesthetic reasons as a part of "Black Romanticism" (238).
12. Philip R. Stone, "Making Absent Death Present: Consuming Dark Tourism in Contemporary Society," *The Darker Side of Travel: The Theory and Practice of Dark Tourism*, ed. Richard Sharpley and Philip R. Stone (Bristol, UK: Channel View Publications, 2009), 23–38.
13. Lennon and Foley, *Dark Tourism*, 11.
14. Kendall R. Phillips and G. Mitchell Reyes, "Introduction: Surveying Global Memoryscapes," *Global Memoryscapes: Contesting Remembrance in a Transnational Age*, ed. Kendall R. Phillips and G. Mitchell Reyes (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2011), 7–13.
15. Daniel A. Guttentag, "Virtual Reality: Applications and Implications for Tourism," *Tourism Management* 31 (2010): 637–651.
16. Lennon and Foley suggest that dark tourism developed alongside revolutions in media technologies like photography, radio, and film, as people sought out sites they had initially seen via global media (*Dark Tourism*, 8–9). See also Erika M. Robb, "Violence and Recreation: Vacationing in the Realm of Dark Tourism," *Anthropology and Humanism* 34, no. 1 (2009): 51–60. Robb further argues that "Imaginary tourism transcends the visual and includes fully somatic fantasy about what places of violence might smell or feel like" (53).
17. *Writing the Dark Side of Travel*, ed. Jonathan Skinner (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012).

18. Sharpley explores these issues in the realm of dark tourism in “Shedding Light on Dark Tourism,” 12–22. An exception to this unlikelihood of spontaneous virtual dark tourism is presented in Chap. 14 in this volume, as online game-players have erected cemeteries and memorials to space battles in *EVE Online*.
19. Sharpley describes some dark tourism sites as celebratory and associated with communal “play,” in “Shedding Light on Dark Tourism,” 17–18.
20. A. P. Williams and J. S. P. Hobson, “Tourism—the next generation,” *Tourism: the state of the art*, ed. A.V. Seaton et al. (Chichester: John Wiley, 1994).
21. For late twentieth-century predictions about the incorporation of virtual reality in the tourism industry, see Paul Williams and J. S. Perry Hobson, “Virtual Reality and Tourism: Fact or Fantasy,” *Tourism Management* 16, no. 6 (1995): 423–427. On the potential for films to serve as part of the dark tourism experience, see Lennon and Foley, *Dark Tourism*, 5.
22. Robb notes, for example, that dark tourism sites “hold a special power; they are believed to be locales where the veil between a violent past and present can be transcended” (52).
23. Studies on virtual reality and tourism suggest that whether such virtual reality tours are considered authentic depends subjectively on the individual’s experience, and thus varies widely. See Guttentag, “Virtual Reality,” 645.
24. Anthony Carrigan, “Dark Tourism and Postcolonial Studies: Critical Intersections,” *Postcolonial Studies* 17, no. 1 (2014): 236–250. On tourism as voyeurism, see also Robb, “Violence and Recreation,” 53–54.
25. See Phaedra C. Pezzullo, *Toxic Tourism: Rhetorics of Pollution, Travel, and Environmental Justice* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2007). Pezzullo nevertheless connects tourism of toxic sites with a potential for environmental activism (10).
26. Philip R. Stone discusses the critique regarding the emergence of a “grief industry,” whose blend of commerce and media spectacle has been characterized as unseemly. “Dark Tourism: Morality and New Moral Spaces,” *The Darker Side of Travel: The Theory and Practice of Dark Tourism*, ed. Richard Sharpley and Philip R. Stone (Bristol, UK: Channel View Publications, 2009), 56–60.
27. Seaton, “Guided by the Dark,” 238.
28. Scholars of virtual reality and its possibilities for tourism have explored similar issues of authenticity, accessibility, educational value, and commercial constraints. See Guttentag, “Virtual Reality.”

29. Emma Willis contemplates connections between dark tourism and theatrical performance her thought-provoking work *Theatricality, Dark Tourism and Ethical Spectatorship* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
30. Leslie Hill offers an intriguing exploration of performance, place, and placelessness in *Performance and Place*, ed. Leslie Hill and Helen Paris (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).
31. Carrigan, "Dark Tourism and Postcolonial Studies," 246.

Part I

Literary Journeys



2

“Some Lingering Influence in the Shunned House”: H. P. Lovecraft’s Three Invitations to Dark Tourism

Amy H. Sturgis

If I have indulged in dark tourism myself, it’s the fault of the pioneer and champion of the weird tale, H. P. Lovecraft (1890–1937).

A few years ago, I had the privilege of being invited to lecture for a summer seminar series held at Brown University in Lovecraft’s beloved hometown of Providence, Rhode Island. I made plans to dedicate one of my talks to the revolutionary nature of Lovecraft’s cosmic fiction—a nature that earned Lovecraft the title of “Literary Copernicus” in 1949 from author/critic Fritz Leiber, because many of Lovecraft’s stories “shifted the focus of supernatural dread from man and his little world and his gods, to the stars and the black and unplumbed gulfs of intergalactic space.”¹ Before the seminar began I devised a walking tour for my students that included key places related to his life and stories, complete with relevant excerpts from his texts to read at the sites they described.

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Then I made the pilgrimage to Providence and spent a memorable afternoon testing out my tour and documenting it in photographs.

Much of the seminar, and indeed that summer and year, now fades into pleasant and ever-more-distant memory. The tour, however, remains preternaturally clear in my mind. In particular, I recall the thrill—and, despite the unwelcome heat wave the city was suffering, the chill—of standing at 135 Benefit Street, contemplating the now respectable-looking home that inspired his tale “The Shunned House.”

More precisely, the Benefit Street home is one of two that spawned Lovecraft’s story. He encountered the other during a 1924 trip to Elizabeth, New Jersey. In a letter to his aunt, Lillian D. Clark, he describes “a terrible old house—a hellish place where night-black deeds must have been done in the early seventeen-hundreds ... suffocatingly embowered in a tangle of ivy so dense that one cannot but imagine it accursed or corpse-fed.”² That home on the corner of Bridge Street and Elizabeth Avenue, known as the Andrew Joline House—which Lovecraft says in his letter reminded him of the Benefit Street home in Providence—no longer stands,³ however, leaving those who would visit the shunned house today with only one destination.

As I paused there on Benefit Street sidewalk, I was reminded of a line from Lovecraft’s tale: “What I heard in my youth about the shunned house was merely that people died there in alarmingly great numbers.”⁴ I couldn’t help but wonder how long it would be before another of Lovecraft’s readers would pass by to get a closer look at the site of such (fictional) terror.

In short order I had my answer. As I turned to continue my walk, I saw a young man appear up the street, map in hand. There was no need to ask what had brought him there. I had seen him an hour or so earlier, crouching before the Lovecraft Memorial Plaque in front of Brown University’s John Hay Library.

H. P. Lovecraft may have led me to dark tourism, but I am not the only one.

Invitation 1: The Setting, “The Ancient City of Providence”⁵

Lovecraft opens “The Shunned House” by observing, “From even the greatest of horrors irony is seldom absent.”⁶ Perhaps the same is true for the greatest of horror *stories*, because the history behind “The Shunned House” possesses more ironies than one.

For example, “The Shunned House” originally was supposed to have been Lovecraft’s first published book, but as fate would have it, it was never released during his lifetime. Publisher W. Paul Cook printed approximately 250–300 copies of the text for his Recluse Press, complete with an introduction by Lovecraft’s friend and fellow author Frank Belknap Long, in 1928. Cook’s personal misfortunes permanently delayed the book, however, and eventually the surviving printed sheets made their way to Arkham House, which sold some unbound in 1959 and the remainder bound in 1961. Ultimately *Weird Tales* was responsible for the first publication of “The Shunned House”; the story appeared in its October 1937 issue, seven months after Lovecraft’s death in March.

More relevant to the point of dark tourism, “The Shunned House” represents, to use the words of Lovecraft scholar and biographer S. T. Joshi, Lovecraft’s “first significant tale to be set in Providence and to evoke its history and topography,”⁷ a trend he would continue with later works such as “The Call of Cthulhu” (1928) and *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* (1941). And yet, despite its rich detail and remarkable sense of place, it was written during the one brief period in Lovecraft’s life when he did not reside in his hometown.

From a different angle, however, this timing appears less incongruous. Lovecraft moved to New York City upon his March 3, 1924, marriage to Sonia Greene. By October of that year, the initial excitement of his union and relocation had passed, and his pining for Providence led him to revisit its streets and unpack its past imaginatively through “The Shunned House.” As scholar Timothy H. Evans observes, “Lovecraft’s antiquarian writings and his fiction are difficult to separate. He wrote fiction during his travels, he wrote travelogues at home....”⁸ In a very real sense, writing “The Shunned House” allowed Lovecraft, acutely aware that he was *not*

home, an opportunity to travel there virtually and to bring his readers along for the tour. In the end, he managed to stay away from Providence for a total of only two years. The “I AM PROVIDENCE” carved on Lovecraft’s headstone reminds us that he believed the city provided him context and meaning; apart from it, he was not himself.

“The Shunned House” accomplished more than simply providing a balm to Lovecraft’s homesick soul. He reports to his Aunt Lillian that when he read his manuscript of the story to his literary friends in New York, they “waxed incredibly enthusiastick [sic] in affirming that it is the best thing I ever writ.”⁹ This isn’t difficult to believe. “The Shunned House” captures the audience from its opening paragraphs, offering a seductive invitation to follow the unnamed narrator as he walks the streets he knows so intimately—and one street in particular, leading to one house—in “the ancient city of Providence.”¹⁰

What immediately ignites the imagination is Lovecraft’s choice of the information he shares as he constructs his fiction on a factual foundation. He chases the mundane and matter-of-fact details of how the house at 135 Benefit Street conforms to the architectural style of its era and manifests “the average New England colonial lines of the middle eighteenth century” with this historically accurate observation:

Its construction, over a century and a half ago, had followed the grading and straightening of the road in that especial vicinity; for Benefit Street—at first called Back Street—was laid out as a lane winding amongst the graveyards of the first settlers, and straightened only when the removal of the bodies to the North Burial Ground made it decently possible to cut through the old family plots.¹¹

There is nothing otherworldly in this example of early urban planning. That said, noting in the opening lines of the tale that the shunned house came into being on the site of an old cemetery after the city had relocated its dead certainly sets a tone.

Lovecraft builds up this foundation of facts about the house and surrounding Providence in service of the “scientific attitude” he so admired in the works of Edgar Allan Poe, who he believed “established a new standard of realism in the annals of literary horror.”¹² A number of scholars

and critics have noted echoes of Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher” in “The Shunned House,” and this is no accident. In his 1927 essay *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, Lovecraft considers that in Poe’s carefully crafted tale “one finds those very summits of artistry whereby Poe takes his place at the head of fictional miniaturists.”¹³ As scholars Dennis R. Perry and Carl H. Sederhelm point out in “Cosmic ‘Usher’: Lovecraft Adapts His ‘God of Fiction,’” Lovecraft develops Poe’s “Usher” further in “The Shunned House.” He locates his own authorial voice by starting “where Poe left off. While Poe would explore the weird in a house he only imagines (Usher), Lovecraft contributes to the conversation with Poe by exploring the potential for cosmic horror through a specific house.”¹⁴

If in “The Shunned House” Lovecraft utilizes details to create the sense of realism he admired in Poe, and takes Poe’s realism a step further by focusing on a genuine location he knew well, then it is only fitting that Lovecraft also features Poe as a tourist within his story. To Lovecraft’s narrator, the great irony of the shunned house is that Poe walked past it often during his Providence visits (which he undertook during his courtship of the poetess Helen Whitman, who lived nearby) without awareness of its evil. The menace is Lovecraft’s invention, but Poe’s walks along Benefit Street are a matter of historical record.

In this walk, so many times repeated, the world’s greatest master of the terrible and the bizarre was obliged to pass a particular house on the eastern side of the street; a dingy, antiquated structure perched on the abruptly rising side-hill, with a great unkempt yard dating from a time when the region was partly open country. It does not appear that he ever wrote or spoke of it, nor is there any evidence that he even noticed it. And yet that house, to the two persons in possession of certain information, equals or outranks in horror the wildest phantasy of the genius who so often passed it unknowingly, and stands starkly leering as a symbol of all that is unutterably hideous.¹⁵

The first invitation to dark tourism that Lovecraft extends in “The Shunned House,” then, involves not only following in his footsteps, but also in Poe’s.

Returning to the history of Benefit Street, Lovecraft lends the portrait he paints of the shunned house additional verisimilitude. He accurately

describes how the widening of the street “about the time of the Revolution” exposed its foundation, “so that a brick basement wall had to be made, giving the deep cellar a street frontage with door and two windows above ground, close to the new line of public travel,” and the later addition of a sidewalk removed “the last of the intervening space.” He thus confirms that the street-level view of the basement available to his contemporary audience (and, indeed, his current-day audience) is the same view Poe once had: “Poe in his walks must have seen only a sheer ascent of dull grey brick flush with the sidewalk...”¹⁶

The summons embedded in the opening pages of “The Shunned House” is clear. Through this story, we may walk in Providence where Poe walked, led by a most knowledgeable and invested local guide, one “in possession of certain information” who will transform the mundane into the “unutterably hideous.”¹⁷

Invitation 2: The Research, “The Hoarded Lore I Sought”¹⁸

In “The Shunned House,” Lovecraft first tries to lure his audience into dark tourism through his development of the immediate setting (quite literally walking the reader through it): Providence, Benefit Street, and the foreboding house itself. In his second invitation, he adds enticement for readers by sharing research gathered by the narrator’s uncle, professional physician and amateur local historian Dr. Elihu Whipple, and expanded upon by the narrator himself regarding the past owners of and deaths in the old home. The first invitation is the physical tour of the setting; the second is the uncovering of its titillating historical backstory. In the process, the author mines the details of actual legends, superstitions, and individuals that really did inform “an undercurrent of folklore” in places beyond Providence.¹⁹ In short, Lovecraft offers a one-stop shopping opportunity for virtual dark tourism; he imports the darkness found in stories from Schenectady (New York), Exeter (Rhode Island), and Caude (France), and he folds those shadows into his Providence tale.

Enter the fictional Dr. Whipple. It is tempting to interpret the eighty-one-year-old Whipple as an amalgam of Lovecraft’s beloved grandfather

(Whipple Phillips, 1833–1904) and uncles-in-law (Dr. Franklin Chase Carter, 1847–1915, and Edward Francis Gamwell, 1869–1936), just as the unnamed narrator behaves much like a proxy for Lovecraft himself. The narrator’s reverence and love for the aged man shines through in the story clearly; the bond between the two characters is arguably the most emotionally resonant in all of Lovecraft’s writings. According to the narrator, Whipple’s long-lived interest in the shunned house was not fanciful, but practical, and “postulating simply a building and location of markedly unsanitary qualities, had nothing to do with abnormality.”²⁰

Whipple withheld his research-filled notebooks from the narrator during the latter’s childhood, assuming that “the very picturesqueness which aroused his own interest would in a boy’s fanciful mind take on all manner of gruesome imaginative associations.”²¹ Even so, the narrator developed a morbid curiosity about the shunned house from an early age, fueled by both fear and fascination. As an adult, his “insistent questioning” of Whipple leads the older man to share the information that, as the narrator says, “finally embarked us both on our hideous investigation.”²² To use scholar R. Boerem’s words, “the narrator of ‘The Shunned House’ develops an obsession with that tragic place,”²³ and he invites the reader to join him and his uncle in their pursuit of the truth behind it. The first destination in this tier of the story’s dark tourism is—indirectly, via allusion—Schenectady, New York.

Even before he had access to his uncle’s research, the narrator knew that people had died in the shunned house with unusual frequency, and that this fact had led to the building’s abandonment, as no one would rent the unlucky place. As youngsters, he and his fellows were struck in particular by “the dank, humid cellar,” from which exuded the stink and occasional sickly glow of mold and fungus. He recounts the following:

We never—even in our wildest Hallowe’en moods—visited this cellar by night, but in some of our daytime visits could detect the phosphorescence, especially when the day was dark and wet. There was also a subtler thing we often thought we detected—a very strange thing which was, however, merely suggestive at most. I refer to a sort of cloudy whitish pattern on the dirt floor—a vague, shifting deposit of mould or nitre which we sometimes thought we could trace amidst the sparse fungous growths near the huge fireplace of the basement kitchen. Once in a while it struck us that this patch bore an uncanny resemblance to a doubled-up human figure...²⁴

Here the author adopts and reimagines legend from nearby New York in the service of his own fiction, a practice scholar Philip A. Shreffler describes as Lovecraft's "familiar formula of collecting and combining bits and pieces of New England arcana" to create his stories.²⁵ The idea of an anthropomorphic patch of mold in the basement of a house that had been constructed on the site of an earlier cemetery echoes the tale "The Green Picture" recounted in Charles M. Skinner's 1896 folklore collection *Myths and Legends of Our Own Land*. Skinner shares this legend of "the silhouette of a human form, painted on the floor in mould,"²⁶ locating the house with the abomination in the cellar on Green Street in Schenectady.

Skinner's account also suggests a causal connection between the strange manifestation on the basement floor and the existence of a vampire on the site. Lovecraft runs with this premise, transforming fantasy into science fiction in "The Shunned House." By building on Skinner's account—which in turn distilled earlier sources—Lovecraft adds another layer of believability to his tale for local readers and creates a sense of place saturated by regional tradition for dark tourists.

The story's next virtual stop involves the "Exeter superstition."²⁷ In his essay "A Last Defense against the Dark: Folklore, Horror, and the Uses of Tradition in the Works of H. P. Lovecraft," scholar Timothy H. Evans considers how Lovecraft uses and transforms folklore in "The Shunned House," providing his tale with an extra layer of authenticity. One example he provides is that of Skinner's Schenectady house. Another highlights a different aspect of this tier of Lovecraft's dark tourism: his examination of historical superstition. Evans points out that "local Rhode Island vampire legends, probably collected from a combination of oral and written sources," play a key role in the story.²⁸ One of those sources undoubtedly was Skinner, who references "the ceremony of heart-burning" that "was performed at Exeter, Rhode Island" in the aforementioned "The Green Picture."²⁹

As our narrator in "The Shunned House" digests his uncle's accumulated research, then, he learns that the home was constructed in 1763 by William Harris for himself, his wife Rhoby, and their four children. Difficulties began immediately after they took residence there. The couple's next child

was stillborn, and then the older children began to die, as did those servants who didn't flee. After William Harris perished, his wife apparently lost her mind. When her older sister, Mercy Dexter, moved in to help, she found it difficult to find a servant who would agree to work in a home where seven had died and another gone insane in a mere five years. One servant she did employ was Ann White, “a morose woman” from Exeter.³⁰

It was Ann White who first gave definite shape to the sinister idle talk. Mercy should have known better than to hire anyone from the Nooseneck Hill country, for that remote bit of backwoods was then, as now, a seat of the most uncomfortable superstitions. As lately as 1892 an Exeter community exhumed a dead body and ceremoniously burnt its heart in order to prevent certain alleged visitations injurious to the public health and peace, and one may imagine the point of view of the same section in 1768.³¹

The narrator learns that the “annals of the Harrises” reads like a tragedy for as long as the family maintained a connection to their home. No child was born alive there, and after “a series of deaths culminating in 1861,” it stood abandoned. In the story's present day, the last surviving male heir is aware of the shunned house “only as a deserted and somewhat picturesque centre of legend....”³²

Even before he begins his own research, the narrator finds himself making connections between Ann White's allegations “that there must lie buried beneath the house one of those vampires—the dead who retain their bodily form and live on the blood or breath of the living...”³³ and the sufferings of the Harrises and their servants, both before and after White's employment. He considers himself, unlike the long-dead White, “free from unwarranted superstition,”³⁴ yet he perceives the same pattern she did: fear of the cellar from those living in the house; the wasting away of those same inhabitants; the strange transfigurations and insanities of the dying; the lack of blood in the corpses and the deaths attributed to anemia; and repeated reports that the afflicted believed something or someone in the house was choking them or stealing their breath. His mind returns to legends of the Exeter community.

Scholar Faye Ringel Hazel explains how accurate Lovecraft was in his assessment of the historical “Exeter superstition” in her essay “Some Strange New England Mortuary Practices: Lovecraft Was Right.” The native New England vampire belief had faded from Rhode Island by Lovecraft’s lifetime, she notes, leaving the author to learn about it during his habitual antiquarian reading from “old newspaper accounts and secondary sources,” such as the 1896 essay “The Animistic Vampire in New England,” published in *American Anthropologist*. The author of that essay, George Stetson, was inspired by accounts published in the *Providence Journal*—also possible sources for Lovecraft—of how community members exhumed the remains of Brown family members, believing them to be vampires, in Exeter, Rhode Island in 1892. The locals reportedly removed and burned the heart of one corpse, made a potion of the ashes, and then fed it to a live but ailing family member.³⁵ Stetson reached the conclusion that the vampire superstition represented a response to the bewildering wasting deaths brought about by consumption. Burning the hearts or bodies of recently deceased victims did not protect others from the disease, of course, but it provided survivors a way of understanding and reacting to the otherwise inconceivable.

Hazel goes on to demonstrate how the “accidental discovery in 1990 of an abandoned family burial ground in Eastern Connecticut and the resulting archeological dig ... has provided undisputable physical evidence of the native vampire belief referred to in ‘The Shunned House.’”³⁶ This unexpected and illuminating find in Griswold (less than thirty miles from Exeter) revealed a family cemetery that had been used from the eighteenth century through the 1840s. In it, the body of a man who died of consumption had been buried, later exhumed and mutilated, and then reburied. The mutilations—which indicated, among other things, the removal of the heart—reflected action taken by those who subscribed to the native vampire superstition. Furthermore, the proximity of the cemetery to the remains of a contemporary farmhouse suggested to Connecticut’s State Archeologist how “socially acceptable” the belief once was.³⁷ What had been asserted and hinted at in nineteenth-century accounts had been verified by late-twentieth-century science.

Incorporating this genuine superstition and the very real behavior it inspired into “The Shunned House” allows Lovecraft to gain verisimilitude for his premise and plot. He also imports a particularly morbid chapter of regional history into his version of Providence, neatly providing yet more to attract the dark tourist. And still there remains more for the narrator of the story to uncover and explore via research, before he and his uncle take action.

“For my part, I was disposed to take the whole subject with profound seriousness,” the narrator tells us, “and began at once not only to review the evidence, but to accumulate as much more as I could.”³⁸ One of the details that most confounds him in this tale of hearty individuals fading, wasting away, going mad, and dying in the house is “what connexion with France or its language the house could have.”³⁹ Rhoby Harris, for example, had known only the basics of French before the home took her family members and her sanity. In her final disturbed state, however, others heard her shouting “for hours in a coarse and idiomatic form of that language.”⁴⁰ Why?

The narrator builds on his uncle’s work, and eventually by chance uncovers a 1697 lease of land to Etienne Roulet and his wife. Following this paper trail, he learns that these French Huguenots from Caude first settled in East Greenwich, but they proved so unpopular that the locals essentially had forced them to leave. The leaders of Providence took pity on them, at least for a time; approximately forty years after they arrived, however, a mysterious riot had “erased the Roulets from the town.”⁴¹ The mysterious saga of the Roulets provides the missing puzzle piece for the narrator: “I found what I had half expected, that where the shunned house now stood the Roulets had laid out their graveyard behind a one-story and attic cottage, and that no record of any transfer of graves existed.”⁴²

Lovecraft grounds the Roulets’ story—and, indeed, the entirety of his narrative—in reality by incorporating many names of real persons and places and events, from the Edict of Nantes to the Colonial Governor of New England, Sir Edmund Andros, to many of the founding names of Providence itself. Most important to the plot, and to this layer of the tale’s dark tourism, is how Lovecraft links his fictional Roulet family to the historical Jacques Roulet. In the words of the narrator,

I wondered how many of those who had known the legends realised that additional link with the terrible which my wide reading had given me; that ominous item in the annals of morbid horror which tells of the creature *Jacques Roulet, of Caude*, who in 1598 was condemned to death as a daemoniac but afterward saved from the stake by the Paris parliament and shut in a madhouse.⁴³

Joshi points out that Lovecraft pulls his description of Jacques Roulet almost verbatim from John Fiske's *Myths and Myth-Makers* (1872). Fiske, in turn leaning heavily on S. Baring-Gould's *A Book of Were-Wolves* (1865) for part of the report, describes the gruesome 1598 murder of a fifteen-year-old boy near Caude, France, and the nearby discovery of the half-naked and blood-coated Jacques Roulet, fresh from his kill—and in the middle of his meal. As Fiske explains, “He was employed in tearing to pieces the corpse of the boy when these countrymen came up ... it is certain that Roulet supposed himself to be a wolf, and killed and ate several persons under the influence of the delusion.”⁴⁴

In his choice to bury and leave Roulet descendants under the house on 135 Benefit Street, Lovecraft quite literally brings the historical horror of Caude forward in time and home to Providence. Thus the research sequence of “The Shunned House” greatly expands Lovecraft’s lure to readers. But there is a final summons embedded in the story: an invitation to visit the place where Dr. Whipple and his narrator nephew fight back against the evil in the shunned house.

Invitation 3: The Action, “Aggressive Vigil in That Musty and Fungus-Cursed Cellar”⁴⁵

Lovecraft takes obvious pleasure in lingering over the passages that set the stage and relay the research in “The Shunned House,” but it’s worth remembering that these first two portions of the tale serve as prelude to the true action of the story. After the narrator has absorbed his uncle’s research and added to it with his own discoveries, he visits the shunned house “with increased frequency,” finding its menace all the more potent

because of what he now knows of its history. At last, with the permission of owner Carrington Harris, he inspects the basement after dark—on a “stormy midnight,” of course—and witnesses firsthand both an “anthropomorphic patch of mould” that seems to study its watcher and a “subtle, sickish, almost luminous vapour”⁴⁶ that seems to hang above it, develop its own suggestion of form, and then dissipate.

When the narrator reports this to his uncle, Whipple makes a fateful decision. No longer will the pair simply gather information about the building and formulate theories about the evil that has preyed on generations there. They would become actors in the story of 135 Benefit Street and, if possible, they would bring an end to its most tragic chapters: “... he insisted that we both test—and if possible destroy—the horror of the house by a joint night or nights of aggressive vigil in that musty and fungus-cursed cellar.”⁴⁷ The third invitation to the reader, then, is to witness the unfolding of this desperate and dangerous plan.

Again Lovecraft aims for the rational rather than the sensational in order to seduce the reader into belief and better convey his sense of cosmic terror:

In short, it seemed to my uncle and me that an incontrovertible array of facts pointed to some lingering influence in the shunned house; traceable to one or another of the ill-favoured French settlers of two centuries before, and still operative through rare and unknown laws of atomic and electronic motion.... Had not, then, the riots of those bygone seventeen-thirties set moving certain kinetic patterns in the morbid brain of one or more of [the Roulets]—notably the sinister Paul Roulet—which obscurely survived the bodies murdered and buried by the mob, and continued to function in some multiple-dimensioned space along the original lines of force determined by a frantic hatred of the encroaching community?

Such a thing was surely not a physical or biochemical impossibility in the light of a newer science which includes the theories of relativity and intra-atomic action. One might easily imagine an alien nucleus of substance or energy, formless or otherwise, kept alive by imperceptible or immaterial subtractions from the life-force or bodily tissues and fluids of other and more palpably living things into which it penetrates and with whose fabric it sometimes completely merges itself.⁴⁸

The lingering influence in the shunned house, then, is a kind of tangible, material manifestation of the hatred, suffering, and death experienced there, and the struggle that follows is one of the present against that dark and undealt with (and therefore dangerous) past.

It seems clear to Whipple and his nephew that, whether purposefully hostile or simply instinctively self-defensive, the thing in the shunned house must be stopped. They undertake their self-appointed task calmly and methodically. Whipple, acting as leader, equips them with instruments and supplies from both Brown University and the Cranston Street Armoury in order to study and combat the phenomenon. If it—whatever it was—manifested in a form that was intangible, they had devised “a large and specially fitted Crookes tube operated by powerful storage batteries and provided with peculiar screens and reflectors.”⁴⁹ If it possessed material form, they had military-grade flame-throwers; Exeter-like, they would burn the heart out of the thing. After notifying the owner, the two begin their vigil at ten p.m. on the night of Wednesday, June 25, 1919.

It does injustice to Lovecraft’s prose to collapse the events of that late night and the early morning of the next day into mere synopsis. As the two men take turns resting while the other watches, each encounters terrible dreams, seemingly experiencing the past from the perspectives of members of the Roulet and Harris families. At one point, Whipple cries out in French and feels that he is choking. Finally, the narrator wakes to find “a vaporous corpse-light” engulfing his uncle, who “with blackening and decaying features” leers and gibbers at him.⁵⁰

The narrator aims the Crookes tube; his uncle’s countenance transforms into “a dozen—a score—a hundred—aspects,” even manifesting the appearance of different Harris family members. At the end of this horrifying spectacle, the narrator believes the features “strove to form contours like those of my uncle’s kindly face. I like to think that he existed at that moment, and that he tried to bid me farewell.”⁵¹ The narrator chokes out his own goodbye and flees the place where the venerable Whipple has, Christ-like, made the ultimate sacrifice, taking the sins—or at least the sufferings—of so many others upon himself.

The narrator wanders for a time in shock and then returns to the scene, but he finds no signs of the human-like, doubled-up form in mold on the floor or its noxious emanations. His uncle is gone. After eating, bathing,

and resupplying himself—with “a pickaxe, a spade, a military gas-mask, and six carboys of sulphuric acid”⁵²—the narrator returns to 135 Benefit Street the next day. He digs up the cellar floor where the patch of mold had appeared. When the hole is neck-deep, his spade strikes something, “a kind of semi-putrid congealed jelly.”⁵³

There was a rift where a part of the substance was folded over. The exposed area was huge and roughly cylindrical; like a mammoth soft blue-white stovepipe doubled in two, its largest part some two feet in diameter. Still more I scraped, and then abruptly I leaped out of the hole and away from the filthy thing; frantically unstopping and tilting the heavy carboys, and precipitating their corrosive contents one after another down that charnel gulf and upon the unthinkable abnormality whose titan *elbow* I had seen.⁵⁴

As Joshi points out, it is noteworthy that the narrator disposes of the Roulet vampire, who is disgustingly bloated on centuries of devoured lives, “not by driving a stake through its heart but by sulphuric acid.”⁵⁵ The gestures Lovecraft makes throughout the tale to scientific rationale and plausibility mark it clearly as science fiction. The very reasonableness of the story, combined with its seamless blending of true history, authentic regional legend, and fiction, demands that the reader accept and believe. From there, it is only a small step to the desire to visit the scene of it all—especially now that the scene is free from peril.

The notion that the scene is now safe implies a certain understanding of history and its lasting impact on physical space. The site is safe for us now, the reader may infer, because earlier dark tourists—Whipple and his nephew—acknowledged (when they conduct their research), relived (when Whipple takes on the faces of the past inhabitants), and exorcized (when the narrator destroys the vampire with the acid) the terrible past of the place. It is only because these two recognized and (metaphorically and literally) wrestled with what once had happened there that they were able put to rest the hatred, suffering, and death that together had taken on physical and threatening form.

In short, the story suggests the troubling history we refuse to learn, acknowledge, and grapple with is dangerous. Or, to put it another way, dark tourists need not be the victims or enablers of the lingering influence

of a site with a terrible past; if they choose to be informed and sensitive and brave enough to face that past and do something (potentially painful) about it, they have the power to transform the place for the better. Whipple and his nephew make it possible for the shunned house to thrive in the eyes of those who don't know its history and appear merely atmospheric, instead of genuinely threatening, for those of us who do.

The destruction of the vampire offers a case study in what Joshi finds “remarkable” about “The Shunned House,” “the exquisite linkage of real and imagined history.”⁵⁶ As the narrator pours the acid into the hole in the basement to destroy the vampire, he reports that a “blinding maelstrom of greenish-yellow vapour” emerges. He relates that all “along the hill people tell of the yellow day, when virulent and horrible fumes arose from the factory waste dumped in the Providence River, but I know how mistaken they are as to the source.”⁵⁷ For this description, Lovecraft drew inspiration from the famous “Yellow Day” of September 6, 1881, when locals noted—and the *Providence Daily Journal* reported—a mysterious yellow light across the sky, coloring the landscape.⁵⁸

So many details are either true or at least familiar, they demand no suspension of disbelief. This makes the fantastic elements of the story far easier to swallow, and it underscores the impression that we can visit the site of, if not experience, the epic—and ultimately successful, if costly—struggle in the shunned house.

Conclusion: “Unaffected Tribute to My Uncle’s Memory”⁵⁹

The conclusion of “The Shunned House” brings the tale and its three invitations to dark tourism full circle. Few of Lovecraft’s stories contain anything recognizable as an upbeat finale, but here Carrington Harris finds his family’s home free of its centuries-old affliction. Critic Kenneth Hite enthuses that we “end up with the happiest ending in all of Lovecraft ... Providence is cleansed; Eden prevails. What a great story.”⁶⁰ As the narrator notes with well-earned satisfaction, “The barren old trees in the yard have begun to bear small, sweet apples, and last year the birds nested in

their gnarled boughs.”⁶¹ Lest we dark tourists feel put off by the sheer wholesomeness of this description, however, he assures us that, for those of us who know the full story, the site is “still spectral.”⁶² Fair enough.

The tale also ends with the loss of one of Lovecraft’s great heroes, the scholarly and determined Dr. Elihu Whipple. At the conclusion, as the narrator admits to the tears he sheds over the loss of his uncle, readers recall how, earlier in his narrative, he explained, “I have reared a marble urn to his memory in St. John’s churchyard—the place that Poe loved—the hidden grove of giant willows on the hill, where tombs and headstones huddle quietly....”⁶³

On my own pilgrimage through Lovecraft’s Providence, after gazing at the shunned house for a while, I moved on to that burial ground “between the hoary bulk of the church and the houses and bank walls of Benefit Street.”⁶⁴ In the strange but welcome silence of St. John’s churchyard, I imagined Poe taking a stroll. I envisioned Lovecraft himself walking—after dark, of course—while working through various promising ingredients of the stories he had gleaned from regional history and legends.

I didn’t look for the fictional marble urn commemorating the fictional Dr. Whipple. I didn’t need to do so.

I’m certain it’s there.

Notes

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3

“Imagined Ghosts on Unfrequented Roads”: Gothic Tourism in Nineteenth-Century Cornwall

Joan Passey

On July 25, 2016, a monstrosity began its journey. Britain’s largest mechanical puppet, forged into the shape of a miner, began its trek through West Devon and Cornwall, aided by a tractor and a dozen puppeteers at its thick ropes. Dubbed the “Man Engine” after the devices used to ferry workers between the levels of ore mines, the robot/puppet/miner stands at 4.5 meters when crawling and ten meters standing. With its accompanying vehicle it weighs forty tons. It will cover ten Cornish Mining World Heritage Site areas across 130 miles.¹ The very name “Man Engine” conjures the symbiotic relationship between the Cornish body and the mining industry, and the uncanniness of the mechanized self. The puppet itself is a ghastly, magnificent, lumbering thing, clanking through the streets, a mechanical monstrosity bringing to mind the abandoned machinery littering the Cornish landscape. It celebrates ten years of the Cornish Mining World Heritage Site gaining UNESCO heritage status, and is a direct—and monstrous—appeal to the tourist gaze. Its journey through Cornwall mimics the slow, arduous journeys taken

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through Cornwall in the nineteenth century (and even today), and echoes the perceived monstrosity of the transport technology that aided and abetted these journeys. These journeys, however, happened toward the end of the mining industry's reign over the county, when the Cornish workers the puppet has been designed to embody were both losing their livelihoods and witnessing an emerging tourist culture.

The Man Engine's impotence in being dragged around by its supporting vehicle, and its recurrent rise and descent as it shifts alternately from crawling to standing, embody mining's state of flux in the nineteenth century and the desperation of a people wholly reliant on the industry's success. While famed for its mining exports and advanced technologies and techniques, the mining industry in Cornwall began its swift collapse toward the end of the eighteenth century. Left in its wake was a semantic vacuum—a chasm where a distinct and fiercely defended identity was once situated—and so arrived Isambard Kingdom Brunel's Royal Albert Bridge in 1859, to fill that gap with tourists. This bridge connected Cornwall to the mainland of England across the Tamar, and mass audiences gathered for its unveiling.

In 1903 Great Western Railway (GWR) ran a train, unofficially dubbed *The Cornishman*, from London Paddington to Penzance, Cornwall. The line had been active for nearly half a century, but this was due to be a landmark trip. The journey covered 245.25 miles—a world record. In celebration of the journey's success GWR decided such an esteemed vehicle could not continue journeying anonymously and launched a competition to name the record-breaking train. After a successful display of public interactivity, the "Cornish Riviera Express" was born.² The name conjured exoticism and the supposed Cornish Mediterranean climes the GWR were eager to promote—furthering an agenda of Otherness and distance—while simultaneously revolutions in transport technology were making Cornwall (and other distant locales) easier to access than ever before. Distance was a desirable trait for tourists seeking the unfamiliar, yet proved to be a logistical problem for transport companies. Cornwall as a space was rendered suddenly accessible, yet simultaneously foreign, barbaric, and primitive. It combined the unfamiliarity of a distinct culture, landscape, and even remnants of a foreign language with the familiarity of an English county and South West moors. In this way Cornwall quickly developed in the popular imagination as an uncanny site.

The railway boom coincided (arguably, as no coincidence) with the Cornish Celtic revival. Henry Jenner, the father of the revival, created the Gorsedh Kernow in 1901, leading a charge for Cornwall to reclaim its Celtic language, history, and identity. Still in existence, Gorsedh Kernow is an organization dedicated to preserving the Celtic spirit of Cornwall and was instrumental at the beginning of the twentieth century in enforcing a sense of the Cornish as Celtic, including efforts to revive the Cornish language, and the awarding of bardships to individuals who work to protect and preserve Cornish culture and history. The Cornish reached back toward a Celtic past, representative of a time of pre-industrialization, to forge a "new-ancient" identity to replace the industrial identity of old. Early agents of tourism played upon these images of a revived Celtic past, promoting Cornwall as a land of magic, legend, and mystery, overflowing with piskies, sprites, and knockers. Philip Payton and Paul Thornton describe the ways in which Cornwall's tourism and the Celtic revival can be seen as symbiotic agents at the turn of the twentieth century.³ Yet, arguably, traces of these revolutions in both industry and identity are distinguishable earlier in the nineteenth century. The Cornish Riviera was by no means the first train into Cornwall. While Cornwall had a small, irregular train network of its own, the county was not connected to the national rail service until 1859, largely due to its economic and industrial trials and tribulations. But the first trickle of tourists that came with—and before—these early trains still left a significant mark upon the county and were part of the embryonic force that shaped what was to come.

These seeds of the tourist boom and its early relationship with the Celtic Revival can be found in the nineteenth century, in the liminal space in which the mines were collapsing and Cornwall's small transport network was set to be finally latched onto "the mainland." The mid-century marks the space in which Cornish identity was in crisis and floundering for a foothold by which to reach redefinition. Successful revival strategies across Wales and Scotland proved to be the cranny needed, but how did Cornwall look before this revival period, as the first tourists made their first tentative movements into the duchy, the guinea pigs before the mass boom over half a century later? Specifically, how was Cornwall constructed as a dark or threatening space in this period, and how was this space virtually accessed by those not brave enough to physically traverse its dangerous terrain?

Paul Thornton has written extensively on the way that tourism has functioned throughout the history of Cornwall.⁴ Specifically, he employs John Urry's definition of the "tourist gaze" as a means of establishing the objectivity and subjectivity involved in the invasion of Cornwall by the definitively non-Cornish. Urry insists that a successful tourist industry necessitates something "distinctive or unusual to gaze upon," "separated from the mundane of everyday life."⁵ Tourism is dependent upon difference from the home site, and Cornwall's burgeoning Celtic revival sought to emphasize the county's difference by definition. Thornton quotes James Walvin's *Leisure and Society, 1830–1950* (1978) in describing how, in the nineteenth century, "substantial numbers of city dwellers began to turn to nearby towns for an escape, however brief, from the cities."⁶ There is a certain irony in tourists flooding from industrial atmospheres toward a locale where industry had effectively and very recently expired, in that tourists evading industry filled the economic chasm left by mining's absence. Those working in heavily industrialized towns sought to escape the pollution of their landscapes and move toward more "natural," healthier places, indicative of Cornwall's success in marketing itself as a health tourism destination. Cornwall presented itself as a place of clean air, ideally situated for convalescence. Yet this welcoming atmosphere of rejuvenation was at odds with the death of industry, as well as with the mysticism, mystery, and darkness surrounding Celtic visions of Cornwall.

This Cornwall in turmoil, in a state of flux and loaded with idiosyncrasies, became the primary site for numerous Gothic tales throughout the nineteenth century. Wilkie Collins, Thomas Hardy, Bram Stoker, Sabine Baring-Gould, and Arthur Conan Doyle all set gory, spectral tales in Cornwall running up to and just surpassing the turn of the century. They were marked by their preoccupation with corpses, coasts, and transportation; all lent themselves to the shaping of a dark and dangerous Cornwall in the popular imagination. These texts, so concerned with oral storytelling, folklore, and Cornwall's barbarism and primitivism, fed into the early construction of Cornwall as a space representative of a Gothic past. Their popularity illustrates the reading public's desire to access Urry's sense of "difference" virtually as well as physically, taking journeys through dark, Gothic spaces without ever leaving the comfort of their homestead. These celebrated Gothic authors encourage readers to imaginatively journey

through the English-not-English Cornish landscape by recurrently using as their protagonists travelers unfamiliar with Cornwall.

Since Malcolm Foley and J. John Lennon gave a name to "dark tourism" in 1996, its definition has been contested.⁷ Dark tourism more generally refers to tourist sites associated with death and suffering, though an offshoot, "thanatourism," deals specifically with death sites. Emma McEvoy's *Gothic Tourism* introduces another layer of complexity by stating that Gothic tourism

is both more and less than dark tourism. Less, in that, though some of [Philip] Stone's examples are Gothic, others are not (his list, for example, includes tourism to disaster sites, and concentration camps). More, in that there is more to Gothic tourism than "Dark Fun Factories" of the Dungeons range type, and its concerns and content cannot be contained within a spectrum concerned with death and disaster.⁸

Catherine Spooner's work on the town of Whitby (a seaside town in Yorkshire, England, and one of the settings of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*) as a site of Gothic tourism states that "'Dark tourism,' however, does not adequately describe the experience of Whitby, because 'dark' does not adequately summarize the multivalences of the term 'Gothic,' and because it does not engage with the literary models which script tourist encounters with this space."⁹ Both Spooner and McEvoy argue that "dark tourism" fails to capture the complexities of Gothic tourism and its specific literariness. The Gothic is concerned with re-emergent histories and history as *haunting* in a specific way that the "dark" fails to encapsulate. This applies also to the way that Cornwall and the South West have been and continue to be framed, represented, and received through a Gothic lens, and the construction of Cornwall as a Gothic space in Victorian fiction. Gothic literary tourism implies a particular concern with spaces that shaped, and were shaped by, Gothic texts. Gothic's general concern with the distance and blurring between the real and the unreal, the believable and the unbelievable, the known and the unknown, lends itself to a discussion of virtual Gothic tourism in particular.

Alison Byerly's *Are We There Yet?: Virtual Travel and Victorian Realism* (2012) recognizes "continuities between the realistic worlds that the

Victorians sought in their literature and visual culture, and the ‘virtual’ worlds we create today through a variety of digital media. These representations aim not just to create alternative worlds but to give us the illusion of entering them, a journey that is itself part of the process of creation.”¹⁰ Byerly’s work centers on the Victorian preoccupation with travel, and how travel was visually documented and represented in literature. Byerly states that “even as actual travel became easier, staying at home and fantasizing about travel became a favorite pastime. A booming market developed for realistic representations of popular locations, and new ways of representing place—360-degree panoramas, foldout river maps, exhaustive railway guides—seemed to offer themselves as substitutes for actual travel.”¹¹

Robert Mighall describes the impact of the Victorians’ preoccupation with travel on Gothic fiction in his work *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction: Mapping History’s Nightmares*.¹² He describes the ways in which travel is recurrently represented as not just the movement into a different place, but a movement into another time. In Cornish virtual dark tourism, the novel, short story, or travel narrative transports readers into a Cornish past and allows them to experience a primitive, barbarous history as a thrilling counter—or “difference”—to their everyday, modern world.

An example of this sense of preserved history is found in Wilkie Collins’s 1851 travel narrative (of a journey taken in 1850). *Rambles Beyond Railways; or Notes on Cornwall Taken Afoot* documents the author’s travels through the county with his friend, the artist Henry Brandling.¹³ Collins insists, as the title indicates, upon taking his journey by foot, expressing distaste for the way other means of transport disconnect the traveler from his environment, and instead promoting a physical, immersive experience without technological, modern barriers; this attitude suggests the permeability of the body to its surroundings. In the 1861 edition Collins notes with humor the way in which the sudden transport revolution very swiftly rendered his narrative dated, and refers to the building of the Royal Albert Bridge as the “ill-timed intrusion of the railway into my literary affairs,” cementing the relationship between the imaginative or literary and the touristic.¹⁴

Throughout his travels, Collins—exhibiting an early penchant for the gloomy that would feed into his future Gothic novels—displays a dark imaginative approach to Cornwall and its people, describing Cornwall as

“one of the remotest and most interesting corners of our old English soil,” and the Cornish as a “pleasant primitive population.”¹⁵ He writes of Cornwall with a sense of wonder and strangeness, as if visiting a foreign land. When describing his visit to Looe Island, Collins relates the tale of a wreck that had crashed against its shores and the rats that had poured forth from its broken bow. These rats proceeded to overpopulate the island, and the locals of Looe were terrified of setting foot upon its beaches lest they be eaten by the monstrous, multiplying rats. Islanders tried launching a tactical attack on the rodents, but as soon as one could be killed another arose, and it seemed these rats bore certain immortal qualities. The ingenious solution of the people? To gobble up the rats, smothered in onions, before they had a shot at resurrection. This grotesque folklore is retold in luxuriant, decadent detail:

They had resisted before, and could have resisted still, the ordinary force of dogs, ferrets, traps, sticks, stones, and guns, arrayed against them; but when to these engines of assault were added, as auxiliaries, smothering onions, scalding stew-pans, hungry mouths, sharp teeth, good digestions, and the gastric juice, what could they do but give in?¹⁶

This tale has multifarious implications for the visiting tourist. For one, the invasive species narrative warns against visitors on its shores—especially in great numbers. The Cornish are presented as a barbaric, gnashing, but innovative species, unafraid of sinking to the level of dining on rodents to ensure their survival. Robert Browning’s rewriting of the “Pied Piper of Hamelin,” published in 1842, just eight years before Collins’s journey, had also used the rat “invasive species” narrative to express anxieties surrounding immigration, emigration, nationhood, and the general movement of bodies.

This concern over coastal invasions, fallible transportation, and mortality continues with Collins’s retelling of the tale of Pistol Meadow. Supposedly, a ship had wrecked against its shores and over two hundred corpses washed up against the coast some years before Collins’s journey.¹⁷ While fighting against nature’s decay and the incoming tides to dig a big enough mass pit for the bodies, the villagers noted that local dogs had taken a liking to the washed-up meat. The local people were so disgusted

by what they saw that legend has it no one has ever since owned a pet dog in those parts. Within the context of a travel narrative, this tale again warns of the dangers of traveling to Cornwall and its unwelcoming coasts, and portrays unwary incomers as something to be consumed and digested, compromising their subjectivity by rendering them meat. Accompanying Collins on his journey, sharing in his delights and horrors, allows the reader to virtually explore Cornwall without the risk of being gobbled up. Gothic travel writing provides the thrill without the danger, the attraction of the foreign without its risks.

Collins penned two other Cornish Gothic texts, though these took the form of novels rather than personal travel narratives. Both feature people dislocated from the county traveling into it and experiencing its terrain anew, providing a virtual entry-point for the reader to accompany them on this imaginative journey. The reader virtually accompanies the eponymous protagonist of *Basil* (1852) to the Land's End and experiences with him the beauty of Cornwall's coast and the fatal attraction of its deadly seas.¹⁸ Later, in *The Dead Secret* (1857), the reader travels with multiple characters to Rosamund's family home to solve a terrifying family mystery, where the old housekeepers directly reference processes of documenting and promoting Cornwall as a tourist space—as well as the virtual capacity of tourist writings—by referring to the family home's significance in guidebooks to the area.¹⁹

Along with travel writing, guidebooks provided a means for the reader to virtually “travel” with the writer. The rhetoric of many guidebooks “walks” the reader, or traveler, through the landscape, describing, and in many ways imaginatively simulating, the act of travel. Throughout the Victorian period many guidebooks expressed the anxieties and dangers of traveling through a distinctly Gothic rhetoric, rendering guidebooks themselves artifacts of Victorian virtual dark tourism. Oliver Berry quotes the 1876 edition of Black's bestselling *Guide to the Duchy of Cornwall*, where the writer reviewing St. Ives is stunned by the “accumulation of nastiness.... The streets are narrow and crooked; the houses old and shattered, the shops mean and squalid; and everywhere pervades an intolerable fishy smell.”²⁰ Black's Guides, published by Adam and Charles Black in Edinburgh, were first released in 1839. They provide a general overview of the locales featured, with a particular emphasis on the best pubs

and inns, local lore, and items of geological and antiquarian interest. Written as a series of paragraphs of varying lengths giving snippets of Cornwall’s various townships, Black’s 1892 *Guide to Cornwall* frequently deviates into morbidity.²¹ “Dozmare Pool has a dreary, almost solemn aspect,” it states as a segue into the legend of Tregagle, the murderer/monster condemned to spend his life on the futile task of infinitely emptying a pool with a limpet shell, who “labors to this day without intermission, unless when the foul fiend chases him so far as the chapel at Roche rocks.”²² This tale encompasses the intensity, monotony, and hopelessness of the labor of the working people of Cornwall, while also insinuating the presence of an eternal monster among the rocks. Black’s then recounts the various wrecks that have met their fates against Cornwall’s rugged coastline, describing “the sound of the bells buried in the sea” from the lost ships and how they occasionally break “upon the pensive ear,” again orienting Cornwall’s mythology toward both the fatal and the timeless.²³ The tourist narrative covers the subterranean and under-the-sea spaces as much as it covers those above ground, and the wrecking tales, in particular, predominantly feature travelers and adventurers as their victims—a tantalizing warning to the tourist brave enough to read the horrors and still walk upon Cornwall’s haunted shores.

Black’s Guides reveal the complex relationship between the literary and tourism industries. The text is interspersed with poems, ballads, and myths, from Tregagle to St. Neot’s fishes and Southey’s ballad of St. Keyne. The guide emphasizes the art inspired by Cornish locations, using literature as a means of generating tourist interest while reinforcing Cornwall’s significance as an imaginative location. Despite its preoccupation with mythology, Black’s is intriguingly dismissive of the location imbued with the most mythological potential—Tintagel, rumored to be the seat of King Arthur:

Though formerly of considerable extent, and evidently of immense strength, it is now become a confused heap of ruins. The situation and aspect are most awful. On the ledge of lofty precipice, overhanging the ocean, are some of the walls, whilst others are placed on a rocky cliff, separated from the former by a deep chasm.²⁴

While not exactly celebratory, the passage conjures a darker sense of sublimity. That such a formerly grand establishment lies in ruins is representative of the passing of time (again reinforcing Cornwall's ancientness) and devolution. Furthermore, this history is fragile, a place of "immense strength" that is now essentially dangling precariously over the ocean. This conjures the temporality of the preservation of history, landscape, and mythology.

Many of these literary extracts are from "unknown writers," such as this poetic description of Land's End:

the western promontory is composed of rugged rocks hewn by the storms of ages into many fantastic forms ... in the tranquil weather its effects on the imagination are truly sublime; but when the tempest rages, it is awful, appalling, and terrifically grand; it seems as if the elements of earth, water, and air, were engaged in a desperate war of extermination, and that nature was involved in the issue.²⁵

Black's chooses to promote Cornwall's horrors to a Victorian audience, exploiting a taste of the macabre and appalling, and bankrolling on the intimate relationship between revulsion and attraction, horror and pleasure. Cornwall is described in the same terms as eighteenth-century sublime art and literature: a living canvas and an exotic threat, where nature can whisk you into the abyss at a moment's notice.

In addition to its crumbling ruins and tumultuous seas, Black's has a particular concern with burial grounds, final resting places, and tomb ornamentation. The guidebook says barely anything about the village of Probus, except that "there are several monuments and brasses in the interior [of the church]. The tomb of Thomas Hawskins, Esq., is ornamented with a figure of a female leaning over a vase, with a cherubim above. The figures are of white statutory marble, and stand out strikingly from a background of black," representative of the Victorian preoccupation with macabre memorials.²⁶ This sense of the brilliantly awful is best epitomized by Black's brief but effective descriptions of Bryher Island—"it is the most rugged of all the islands. Numerous rocks lie to the west of the island, especially in what is, not inappropriately, termed Hell Bay."²⁷

An illustration of the continuing lure of Gothic tourism, John Betjeman's poem "Cornwall in Childhood" from his blank verse autobiography *Summoned by Bells* (1960) recalls of his joy of traveling into and through Cornwall as a child; of the county's "haunted woods"; of "Paralysis when climbing up the cliff—/Too steep to reach the top, too far to fall,/Tumbling to death in seething surf below," and of "Imagined ghosts on unfrequented roads." Betjeman's poem describes the "difference" of Cornwall and the attraction of its dangers and thrills. Betjeman's retrospective is necessarily located in a Cornwall of the past—a Cornwall that is haunted, and that continues to haunt Betjeman. The multisensory poem, conjuring sights, sounds, and smells provides a virtual experience of Betjeman's childhood for both the reader and author, allowing each to travel in time as well as space.²⁸

While Betjeman's poem illustrates the haunting quality of Cornwall as a Gothic landscape, the most popular tourist sites in Cornwall are simultaneously sites of death and suffering. The celebrated Jamaica Inn, popularized by Daphne du Maurier's 1936 novel of the same name, is the site whereby the smuggler Black Joan supposedly gained her name by shooting a Jamaican smuggler in the forehead in a bar brawl in nineteenth-century lore.²⁹ Many spaces in Cornwall today continue to capitalize on the sense of a Gothic Cornwall, and Jamaica Inn specifically taps into a Gothic literary tradition. The Jamaica Inn website is emblazoned with a pirate's head framed by crossed swords. The sepia-toned photographs and graphic design centering on parchment fragments, old maps, compasses, and wax seals appeals to a vision of Cornwall's dangerous Gothic past as a place terrorized by pirates and smugglers. Jamaica Inn thus virtually recreates the experience of the novel by allowing the tourist to visit a simulated literary site, where the owners have even gone so far as to purchase and install Daphne du Maurier's writing desk. There is no evidence to suggest du Maurier ever wrote at Jamaica Inn, but the owners simulate the virtual writing environment to allow tourists to immerse themselves in the site of Gothic inspiration. A copy of *Jamaica Inn* lies on the desk, along with a period-appropriate typewriter, a lamp, and stubbed out cigarettes in a gold ash tray, lending the impression that du Maurier has merely stepped out, to return at any moment. Incidentally, the cigarettes are of the du Maurier make, suggesting an awareness of the importance of brand and name.

The website welcomes the reader to Jamaica Inn, a “historic coaching house” which “has welcomed weary travelers crossing Bodmin Moor for nearly 300 years. Full of legend, mystery, romance, and even, according to folklore, the odd friendly spirit.” The owners self-consciously tap into the notion of Cornwall as a haunted space—haunted by ghosts as well as its own literary and criminal past. A tab on the website directs the reader toward the regular ghost hunts hosted in Jamaica Inn and boasts that “[p]opular TV programme ‘Most Haunted’ featured Jamaica Inn in what they said was one of the spookiest episodes that have ever recorded!” In addition, “The British Paranormal Association have made in-depth investigations and compiled a report based on their findings and awarded the Inn an official stamp of approval for being a genuine haunted establishment!” The page then specifically directs the tourist toward “areas of substantial interest,” including “the Smugglers’ Bar, former Sable Bar (now the museum), old generator room (now the Hotel Reception), the original bedrooms, Pedlar’s restaurant and the stable’s attic,” allowing travelers to simulate the experience of the ghost hunt for themselves to recreate the already virtual experience of the television program and book. A site of the macabre can thus be manipulated into and promoted as an interactive tourist site to encourage virtual immersion into the simulated environment of a Gothic, literary past.³⁰

Philip Stone states that “for as long as people have been able to travel they have been drawn, purposefully or otherwise, towards sites, attractions or events that are linked one way or another with disaster, suffering, violence or death.”³¹ Stone reiterates Daniel Boorstin’s 1964 claim that the “first guided tour in England was a rail trip to witness the hanging of two murderers. The tour was arranged in Cornwall in 1838 to take people of Wadebridge by special train to the nearby town of Bodmin.” Boorstin states that “since the Bodmin gallows were in clear sight of the uncovered station, excursionists had their fun without even leaving the open railway carriages.”³² Thus Cornwall is intimately interwoven with the history of the thanatourist, embroidering transport technology, accessibility, criminality, and the dark voyeur into a narrative of attraction toward sites of mortality and memory. In a later interview with *The Atlantic*, Stone states that this was not a lone example, and that it was Thomas Cook who “took people to see hangings in Cornwall.”³³ These hangings were the

"difference" Urry insists is necessary for tourism. Cornwall's dramatic promotion of its horrors and fatalities, defanged and blunted by the continual air of mysticism and fantasy surrounding these retellings, offers the tourist a ghoulish imaginative escape from the everyday.

To this day Bodmin jail serves as a Gothic tourist site, enriched by virtual simulations. They, too, offer ghost walks, and focus on immersion in history and access to Cornwall's criminal past. One of their largest, nastiest invitations is to "[c]ome and see the only working execution pit in the UK."³⁴ Travelers have the opportunity to "[l]ook and learn how many of the Jail's condemned were dispatched to eternity with the 'Long Drop,'" with a large noose emblazoned across the website, and a photograph of an "executioner" tying a noose about the neck of a hooded man. There is even a morbid, haunting video recreation of the jail's last hanging, "the hanging of William Hampton at Bodmin Jail," a short, sepia-stained clip featuring scratched film effects of the heavy breathing of a hooded man held in a noose, almost drowned out by the screams of a baying crowd. The video ends with the trap door dropping, "William's" final gurgling croaks, and church bells ringing. The video is an entertainment piece rather than an educational one, and uses morbidity and horror to attract tourists to the Cornish site while providing a virtual insight into the barbarism of hanging. The video recreates and simulates a morbid past in entertaining terms in the same way as Cornish Gothic fiction did in the Victorian period. There was seemingly something "healthy" about expunging these desires and indulging these curiosities a safe distance from home, rendering Cornwall's "health tourism" both physiological and psychological.

Emblematic of the fashion of health tourism as escape from the smog of industrialized centers is Arthur Conan Doyle's 1901 short story, "The Adventure of the Devil's Foot."³⁵ This story follows Sherlock's and Watson's attempts to escape the bustle of city life for the sake of Sherlock's ailing health, and resort to the peace and tranquility of Cornwall to recuperate the detective's faculties. Yet, it would not be a Sherlock Holmes story if Holmes simply indulged in long coastal walks and drank in the dramatic scenery of the moors—instead, a crime is afoot. A young woman's body is found in a small Cornish town, and her brothers sit around her, gibbering like maniacs, apparently driven mad by the terror

that shocked their sister to death. “The Adventure of the Devil’s Foot” illustrates the popularity of Cornwall as a recuperative resort in the mid to late nineteenth century, featured as it is in such a popular saga, while also acting as a criticism of the motivation of those health tourists. Holmes quickly concludes that pollution in the air caused these cases of death and insanity, a perversion of the atmosphere of health Cornwall’s tourism industry attempted to perpetuate.

In “The Adventures of the Devil’s Foot” Cornwall is frequently rendered unique and distant by its presentation as a historical place. Watson’s story is itself a historical recollection—the tale is published in 1901, and Watson retells the story from the early spring of 1897, demonstrative of the continual memorializing of Cornwall as a means of accessing the past. Their holiday destination is immediately depicted in morbid and magical terms. Their property looks upon “the whole sinister semicircle of Mounts Bay, that old death trap of sailing vessels, with its fringe of black cliffs and surge-swept reefs on which innumerable seamen have met their end.” Watson here references Cornwall’s place in the popular imagination as a wrecking site. Movement is fatal here. The landscape is unforgiving and actively unwelcoming, granted a sentient malevolence and immediately demarcated as a place of death: “on the land side our surroundings were as sombre as on the sea.” Those who are dead, that which has passed, and that which will inevitably end appear to be the attraction of the holiday destination in the first place. Sherlock is riveted by the Celtic language and artifacts hidden away within the county: “in every direction upon these moors there were traces of some vanished race which had passed utterly away, and left as its sole record strange monuments of stone, irregular mounds which contained the buried ashes of the dead, and curious earthworks which hinted at prehistoric strife.” Cornwall is a memorial and a ruin, carrying with it all the forewarnings of mortality of the ruin of Gothic novels.³⁶

In this tale, Sherlock is a tourist seeking an experience of the virtual past through traveling. Watson emphasizes that “the glamour and mystery of the place, with its sinister atmosphere of forgotten nations, appealed to the imagination of my friend, and he spent much of his time in long walks and solitary meditations upon the moor.”³⁷ Sherlock, then, is the archetypal nineteenth-century English tourist in Cornwall—a

middle-class health tourist looking for relaxation, fine air, and access to magic, mystery, and history. Most significantly, Cornwall is described as an imaginative place, indicating both its ability to creatively inspire, and its construction as a fantasy. As Sherlock hunts diligently for Celtic artifacts, "we found ourselves, even in that land of dreams, plunged into a problem at our very doors which was more intense, more engrossing, and infinitely more mysterious than any of those which had driven us from London."³⁸ A terrible crime falls at their feet, and their sanctuary, a fantastical "land of dreams" is infiltrated with horror of the likes even London could not generate. The idea of Cornwall as a coastal escape from the city is fragmented, as Cornwall's darkness and mystery are at odds with its function as a site of tranquility and leisure.

Watson bemoans the fact that "our simple life and peaceful, healthy routine were violently interrupted, and we were precipitated into the midst of a series of events which caused the utmost excitement not only in Cornwall but throughout the whole west of England." Watson severs Cornwall from the rest of the West Country and again relates Cornish tourism to health and simplicity, implying that this peace is dependent upon distance from London and Cornwall's dislocation from the rest of the country. Cornwall's distinctiveness is preserved, despite mass transportation, tourism, and communication, through print, as "many readers may retain some recollection of what was called at the time 'The Cornish Horror,' though a most imperfect account of the matter reached the London press." The accuracy is fractured with the distance between Cornish oral accounts and London printing presses.³⁹

An example of the many ways in which a Victorian reading public experienced Cornwall virtually, this represents larger antiquarian anxieties in the period of the documentation of oral storytelling traditions. John Lowerson describes how much of the popularity of Cornwall as a leisure site was inspired by the antiquarian publications of such figures as Hawker of Morwenstow, and that when these publications "passed into print" they "often found a national market."⁴⁰ According to Lowerson, these written, printed, and circulated antiquarian lore and songs of Cornwall established legend as a "key feature" of both the Celtic Revival and Cornish tourism, "although it is a truism that writing down the oral story preserves in aspic and kills continued local refinement ... it is a

necessary process if the tale is to attract the wider market that its literary production requires.” Watson’s “authoritative” account, versus the blurry accounts transmitted orally from Cornwall, addresses this tension over whether the antiquarian craze accurately presented an authentic version of Cornwall and Celticity or a warped, manufactured version fit for London audiences. That this is a Cornish tale, written by visitors from London for a London audience, cements Malcolm Chapman’s and Lowerson’s, assertions that a mystical Celtic identity is frequently imposed upon the fringes by the English elite crafting a virtual Celtic Cornwall. Lowerson states that “the exploitation of Wales, Scotland, Ireland and Cornwall grew out of an English, middle-class hunger for healthy holidays away from vulgar mass-resorts, which was coupled with a very diffused post-Romantic landscape aesthetic, both made realisable by burgeoning transport networks.”⁴¹

The threat of transportation is reiterated in Conan Doyle’s story as an incident occurs which leaves “the most sinister impression” upon Watson’s mind:

The approach to the spot at which the tragedy occurred is down a narrow, winding, country lane. While we made our way along it we heard the rattle of a carriage coming towards us and stood aside to let it pass. As it drove by us I caught a glimpse through the closed window of a horribly contorted, grinning face glaring out at us. Those staring eyes and gnashing teeth flashed past us like a dreadful vision.⁴²

Conan Doyle emphasizes the danger of the journey, the claustrophobia and difficulty in navigating the winding, narrow roads, and the terrible visions present in carriages, as well as the madness and animalism potentially present within the Cornish locals. There are constant references to animalism and inhumanity as a means of othering the Cornish population. One of their companions, Tregennis, states that he sees a vision through the window, but “couldn’t even say whether it was man or animal.”⁴³ The two brothers are driven mad and are found “gibbering like two great apes.”⁴⁴ Their “staring eyes and gnashing teeth” convey a vicious animalism and reinforce the threat of Cornwall as a regressive locale. The popular idea of the Cornish landscape as a place for convalescence is juxtaposed with death, as the scene of the crime “already, in that Cornish air” is “well filled

with flowers."⁴⁵ Life, vitality, and fresh air counteract death, morbidity, and the toxic fumes of the stuffy air found in the lounge. Sherlock reiterates the importance of this contrast, as "to let the brain work without sufficient material is like racing an engine. It racks itself to pieces. The sea air, sunshine, and patience, Watson—all else will come."⁴⁶ Sherlock's statement combines the health properties of the air with the metaphor of the industrial, mechanized engine. Lowerson describes Celticism as being directly opposed to industrialization and modernity, generating a paradox as Celticity is antagonistic toward the materiality upon which it depends for its proliferation and consumption. Conan Doyle refers to this tug of war between industrial mining identity and Celtic identity: "the ancient Cornish language had also arrested [Sherlock's] attention, and he had, I remember, conceived of the idea that it was akin to Chaldean, and had been largely derived from the Phoenician traders in tin."⁴⁷ The idea that the Isles of Scilly are the Cassiterides, the isles where the Phoenicians of ancient history struck upon rich sources of tin, is an idea perpetuated by the Cornish in the midst of their revival, as an attempt to establish an ancient, unique, pre-Christian, and technologically and geologically superior history to the rest of England. The conclusion of the short story reveals that the killing was spurred by the economic difficulties incurred by the selling of the mining business, as Tregennis was driven to jealousy by the sudden income, and ultimately killed his own sister and drove his brothers mad. The implication is the significance of the mining industry for unifying communities, and how the absence of the mining industry leads to disharmony because a vital component of Cornish superiority has been lost.

Ultimately, in the clean air Sherlock comes to the conclusion that it is "the burning, the stuffy atmosphere, and finally, the madness or death of those unfortunate people" that provide the most fervent clues through which to solve the mystery.⁴⁸ The irony of tourists moving from the toxic cities to the cleaner countryside when even that countryside can be corrupted and polluted by the figure of the traveler (embodied in the roaming, international Leon Sterndale and the greedy Tregennis) is the ultimate punch line of the tale. Cornwall's fine air is poisoned. The primary motivating force behind nineteenth-century coastal tourism is nullified, and Cornwall really is no different, no more pure, and no healthier than the cities. Conan Doyle's tale presents Cornwall as potentially more tainted, more toxic, and more barbaric than London.

The relationship between darkness and tourism continues to impact the South West today and shape the experiences of its visitors. Banksy's gigantic art-installation-meets-theme-park brought droves of visitors to Western Super Mare and gained critical and media attention for its public display of distaste for Disneyland, Disneyfication, and the dark artificiality of tourism. The theme-park-sized critique of art-as-tourist-site arguably reflects awareness of the status of Banksy's own works as tourist landmarks. Banksy's graffiti across the country is now protected by plexi-glass or sold.⁴⁹ Bristol runs a Banksy tour through the city, and Banksy's works plaster t-shirts, mugs, and baseball caps across the country. Dismaland addresses the commercialization of art as a tourist draw, yet little has been said of Banksy's chosen location. The artist is a Bristol native, and it can be no coincidence that the South West is the chosen canvas upon which to project his dystopic image of perverse tourism. Weston Super Mare, like Cornwall, has an economy largely dependent upon tourist trade. Growing up as a native, Banksy would be fully aware of the impact of a tourist-driven economy upon the identity, culture, and livelihoods of a region. Many of Banksy's exhibits feature a consciousness of the darkness of coastal life; a mermaid, reminiscent of Disney's Ariel, lies atop a rock, but her body is jagged and distorted in a nod toward the tension and difference between media propaganda surrounding holiday destinations and their reality. A police truck lies on its side in toxic green waters, indicating the difficulty in governing the peripheries and the meager resources distributed from the center, as well as the ecological issues surrounding tourism and natural spaces. A statue of a woman sits on a bench, her body bombarded with birds until you can only see the tips of her fingers extending above their violent bodies, undoubtedly a reference to Hitchcock's *The Birds*. The short story upon which the film was based, penned by Daphne du Maurier, was originally set in Cornwall. Banksy's reference here, then, is to the erasure of coastal and regional peripheries from the popular imagination, and how reworkings and rewritings can strip regions of their identity and culture.⁵⁰

This is something of which du Maurier was keenly aware. Her final novel, *Rule Britannia*, published in 1972, posits a dystopian future in which plans are going ahead for the entire county of Cornwall to be remodeled into a theme park. In this world Cornwall's function is tourism—it exists to satisfy the tourist gaze and nothing more. The implication is that mass tourism

guts a locale of history, heritage, and authenticity, until the entire landmass exists as a kitsch performance of itself. Situated within a tale of dystopian horror, there is a darkness and a hollowness to the commercial proposal—a sense brought to life in Banksy's short-lived Dismaland, and one very present in the climate of Cornwall's struggling tourist economy today.

The Man Engine that crawled across Cornwall would "transform," standing to his full height of two-and-a-half double-decker buses, only when enough people sang. His route was lined with community choirs and spectators, though he would only respond to songs sung in Cornish. The lottery fundraising page following The Man Engine's journey states that "The Man Engine unearthed a deep-rooted vein of pride and resilience running through Cornwall. He gave the Cornish people permission to tell their own story, to celebrate who they were, who they are, and who they want to be."⁵¹ The Man Engine thus embodies the strength of Cornish particularism, the efforts of the Cornish revival, the monstrosity of the county's mining machinery, the labors of its miners, the individuality of its people, and the importance of tourism in the county. The giant puppet is a virtual embodiment of Cornwall's history of dark tourism, its clanking, smoking, steaming industrial past, and efforts throughout the county's history to both attract and repulse, and to attract through repulsion. The Man Engine is an uncanny horror, while also representing the importance of community and communal storytelling. Even the fundraising page acknowledges the importance of the ways in which Cornwall's own historical narrative has been consistently, morbidly, and brilliantly dark.

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4

Through the Looking Glass Darkly: The Convergence of Past and Present in Connie Willis's Time-Travel Novels

Kathryn N. McDaniel

In the short story “Fire Watch” (1983), Oxford University history student John Bartholomew, when presented with his comprehensive examination on the Battle of Britain, balks at the questions asking about the numbers of incendiaries, methods to extinguish incendiaries, the numbers of landmines, the numbers of casualties and fatalities. “There aren’t any questions about the people,” he protests to his professor, James Dunworthy. Dunworthy responds, “They’re important from a statistical point of view ... but as individuals they’re hardly relevant to the course of history.” Enraged, Bartholomew punches Dunworthy in the face and says, “They’re back there in the past with nobody to save them. They can’t see their hands in front of their faces and there are bombs falling down on them and you tell me they’re not important? You call that being an historian?”¹

Bartholomew’s anger stems from the fact that he has actually just been there, in the middle of the Blitz, trying to save St. Paul’s Cathedral from incendiaries, despite the fact that he lives in the mid-twenty-first century. The author of his story, American science-fiction writer Connie Willis, has won numerous Nebula and Hugo awards for her series about time-traveling

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Oxford historians, of which “Fire Watch” is a part.² She imagines that by 2050 time-travel will have been perfected to the point that historians will use it for ethnographic research, that it will be particularly important in training history students like John Bartholomew, and that Oxford University will be the center from which these leaps into times past occur. Written over the course of more than twenty-five years, Willis’s series starts with this short story (“Fire Watch,” 1983) in which our time-traveler protagonist Bartholomew spends several days saving St. Paul’s Cathedral during the London Blitz (1940–1941); continues in a full-length novel in which another time-traveler, Kivrin Engel, goes to the era of the Black Death (1348) in a village outside of Oxford (*Doomsday Book*, 1992); continues to a farcical romantic comedy where time-travelers start out in the Blitz but spend most of their time in late Victorian Oxford (*To Say Nothing of the Dog*, 1997); and then concludes with a return to London and Southeast England during World War II, including the Dunkirk evacuation, the Blitz, and Operation Fortitude South (where fake tanks were put out to fool German air surveillance) (*Blackout/All Clear*, 2010).³

These works represent not just fantasy explorations of the future, but also a creative approach to the past that, especially given the popularity of these works, situates Willis in the field of public history. Using detailed descriptions of material life (including a high level of detail about, among other things, incendiaries and how to extinguish them), counter-factual thinking, and the genres of fairy stories and farce, Willis immerses her readers in catastrophic moments in the British past. Through these stories, she allows readers to visit the past and meet its people (even if only in a fictionalized context), often in their darkest hour. That she is an American, and her audience an international one, places her fictional works even more squarely in the category of “dark tourism.” Willis’s novels offer readers an imaginary dark tour of violent death and communal calamity in a temporally foreign context.

A variety of definitions exist for the term “dark tourism,” most of which emphasize that this practice provides a consumer-oriented approach to violent death in the past, which may be encountered for mere entertainment or may provide more meaningful, even spiritually rich opportunities to contemplate history, memory, and mortality. Malcolm Foley and John Lennon describe dark tourism as “the presentation and consumption (by visitors) of real and commodified death and disaster sites.” A. V. Seaton

defines it as “travel to a location wholly, or partially, motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death, particularly, but not exclusively, violent death.”⁴ As Philip R. Stone has argued, dark tourism offers “potential spiritual journeys for the tourist who wishes to gaze upon real and recreated death.”⁵ This gaze may become the exploitative gaze of the powerful on the powerless (the living regarding the dead) or, in a more positive light, may allow for the living to serve as witnesses to past atrocities. Willis’s novels recreate a mythologized past in the present, which may contribute to an exploitation of British tragedies for the entertainment of her audience. But Willis intends the dark tourism experiences she virtually creates to allow for a more profound connection between past and present. She aims for these novels to fulfill two purposes: first, to “save” the people of the past from condescension and obsolescence by remembering them and appreciating their unique, even heroic struggles; and second, to remind us that someday we will also be dead and gone, and that we are subject to the same inscrutable forces as those who have come before us.

Even while exposing the stark difference between the past and the present, Willis borrows from Barbara Tuchman’s famous notion that history provides a “distant mirror”⁶ for those in the present and future, but one which cannot be seen through easily or purely intellectually. The solution to the isolation we feel in our present moment in time is the same as the solution for all those people stuck in traumatic and uncertain history who “can’t see their hands in front of their faces” and have “no one to save them.” For human beings trapped in time, Willis sees the commemoration of history and deep, emotional empathy as salvation—both for those whose time has passed and those whose time has yet to come. Across time, she thinks, we can rescue each other.

Time-Travel and Dark Tourism: Lady Schrapnell and the Imperial War Museum

The best historical fiction certainly has the ability to transport readers to a different place and time in their imaginations, but this does not make all such literature an exercise in dark tourism. What makes Willis’s series distinct is its use of time-travel within the story as she takes her readers

between the two times of future and past to visit sites of death and destruction. Willis's readers follow along with future-travelers on a journey to our shared past where we remain outsiders to historical events. Nor does all time-travel fiction classify as dark tourism. Stories that see the traveler as other (not self) do not lead readers on a dark tour of the past.

For example, C. L. Moore's classic science-fiction novella *Vintage Season*, undoubtedly an influence for Willis's series, involves time-traveling tourists to scenes of disaster, but this novella is told from the point of view of those in the past who do not yet realize disaster is to befall them.⁷ The protagonist in the past encounters visitors to his rental property who dress and speak strangely and who make cryptic statements about the future. The visitors have come, it turns out, to have front-row seats at a devastating natural disaster: they know that the people they encounter will soon be dead and they wish to see and experience this devastation, after which they will return to their own, much safer time. These tourists from the future remain mysterious and uncommunicative. Their cold-blooded curiosity objectifies and dehumanizes past people. They represent a purely exploitative approach to dark tourism. While Moore's story portrays dark-tourists, it does not create a dark tourism experience for the reader because the reader does not make a journey. The reader identifies with the protagonist in the disastrous past-present. Instead of being the tourists, we readers feel the sting of being the exhibit. Moore's story leads us to understand dark tourism only as a horror of disconnection between the uncertainty of our own time and the pitiless knowing of future generations.

In contrast, Willis tells her tales from the point of view of the time-travelers. Readers journey with bumbling history students of the future (and occasionally other professional Oxford time-traveling historians like Mr. Dunworthy) to dark sites in the British past: the Black Death and World War II eras, specifically. These historians and historians-in-training approach the past with curiosity, a compulsion to know, and humility about what they do not yet fully understand about the past. Their travels serve as part of their education and careers, not mere entertainment. In Willis's novels, we readers identify with the historians of the future whose time more closely resembles our own, and we encounter the "contemps" (contemporaries) as intriguing foreigners in the past, who in many ways

know more about their time than we do. Thus, Willis urges us to acknowledge our own uncertainty about not only our own future but our past as well. This realization leads us, as well as the time-travelers, to reach across time empathetically, forging unity instead of otherness.

That is not to say that everyone in Willis's fictional future takes such a view of the past. Willis engages directly with questions of how people commemorate the past through a character in *To Say Nothing of the Dog* who becomes determined to rebuild Coventry Cathedral in the twenty-first century exactly as it was just before it was destroyed in a Nazi air-raid. Lady Schrapnell, a wealthy American who has married into a British title, has become an enthusiastic Anglophile. Having read in an ancestor's diary that seeing Coventry Cathedral changed her life, Lady Schrapnell becomes determined to use her wealth to rebuild the cathedral: "God is in the details" is her constant refrain. This site will attract at once the reverent and those drawn to the specter of violent destruction surrounding this symbol of the obliterated Coventry Cathedral of the 1940s. As a donor to Oxford's time-travel department, she feels empowered to use the university historians to ensure that each of these details is recreated in its exactitude, including finding a strange piece of Victoriana called "the Bishop's Bird Stump."⁸ Her attempt to rebuild the cathedral is at once a spiritual and commercial act: an engagement with death and destruction on the public stage *and* a denial of death's ability to permanently obliterate the past, especially when funds are readily available. It is also a folly that creates farcical situations as time-travelers stagger "time-lagged" through history for a project that twenty-first-century protesters find to be a waste of resources.

Given the level of sometimes excruciating detail in Willis's novels, and her own status as an American Anglophile recreating the British past for public consumption, she seems almost to be satirizing herself in this characterization of Lady Schrapnell. Willis provides vivid descriptions of food, clothing, weaponry, and articles of daily life, but mostly she tells us about travel itself: horse-drawn carts, trains, ambulances, subways, taxis, and the roads travelers take to their destinations. Raphael Samuel's analysis of the appeal of "living history" sites can be applied to Willis's detailed immersion in the everyday life of the historical moment. He notes, "If there is a unifying thread to these exercises in historical reconstruction it is the quest for immediacy, the search for a past which is palpably and

visibly present: ‘stepping back in time’, for those who sample the sounds of the Great Fire at the Museum of London; ‘taking a walk with history’, for those who follow the old packhorse trail along the Pennine Way.”⁹

Willis’s novels may also be read as pageant-like dramatic recreations, and she consciously builds dramatic self-reference into her depictions of the past. In the last installment of the series, *Blackout/All Clear*, she emphasizes that not only the time-traveling historians but also the contemporaries are all playing roles. The men involved in Operation Fortitude South and other covert operations go by code names from Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest*, itself a play about the flexibility of identities. One time-traveler notes that the women in the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY), “like historians,” have put aside their everyday identities to take on new ones during the war.¹⁰ Amid a particularly bad barrage during the Battle of Britain, those taking shelter in a local church basement¹¹ turn to Shakespeare for diversion but also consolation when the actor among them, Sir Godfrey Kingsman, launches into Prospero’s speech from *The Tempest*: “With strange and several noises of roaring, shrieking, howling ... and more diversity of sounds, all horrible ...” Time-traveler Polly observes that everyone’s panic becomes transformed in the moment by the drama: “They were all watching him, their fear gone, and even though the terrifying racket hadn’t diminished, and his words, rather than attempting to distract them from the noise, were drawing attention to it, describing it, the din was no longer frightening. It had become mere stage effects, clashing cymbals and sheets of rattled tin, providing a backdrop to his voice.”¹² Later in the story, once their refuge has been destroyed, this same group produces a play for those sheltering in the London Underground, J. M. Barrie’s *The Admirable Crichton*, a tale of how a shipwreck temporarily inverts class relationships. Drama as a key feature of dark tourism, and a force for historical recreation, helps connect people across time, allowing both imagined empathy with past people and solace for contemporary trauma.

That Willis is herself an enthusiastic and compassionate consumer of dark tourism is evident in the way her books replicate museum sites and even incorporate them into her plots, descriptions, and historical interpretations. At the beginning of both volumes of Willis’s most recent and much lauded “double-novel,” *Blackout/All Clear*, Willis acknowledges the

importance of an Imperial War Museum exhibit while she was researching the London Blitz. Lucy Noakes has analyzed this “Blitz Experience” exhibit at the Imperial War Museum in the early 1990s as an exercise in both recreating history and engaging museum-goers in active participation with the event as “living memory.” Like Richard Cobb’s famous characterization of the historian as mortician—making “the dead live” with the help of “a touch of rouge here, a pencil stroke there, a little cotton wool in the cheeks to make the operation more convincing”¹³—this exhibit aimed to breathe life into the Blitz, and to place tourists as bystanders at the scene. Led through the urban rubble by the voice of working-class East-Enders “George,” Noakes explains, visitors walk through a scene of devastation, turmoil, crying children, and abandoned prams, with London on fire in the background and the sound of bombs echoing in the distance. George leaves the visitors with two statements: “we was all in it together” and “don’t forget us.”¹⁴ These are clear themes of both “Fire Watch” and *Blackout/All Clear*, where class differences during the Blitz are elided (or simply ignored) and Londoners unflinchingly look after each other in the midst of danger and confusion. For example, in “Fire Watch,” written in the Cold War era of the early 1980s, a Communist working on the Fire Watch helps the time-traveler, despite suspecting Bartholomew of being a Nazi spy.¹⁵ In *Blackout/All Clear* a wealthy woman in the countryside takes in evacuated children sent from London—and, we later learn, becomes a Major in charge of the FANYs, another diverse group in terms of class and privilege. Historians Polly and Merope/Eileen receive unexpected kindness from those both above and below them in the social hierarchy.

Willis almost certainly also visited the Winston Churchill Museum’s Blitz exhibit in the 1990s, since one of the images used by that museum is exactly repeated in *Blackout/All Clear*. When Padgett’s department store is destroyed, Polly and Merope/Eileen return to the scene to find the “pavement was strewn with bodies.” On closer examination, Polly determines, “They’re mannequins. They must have been blown out of the display windows.”¹⁶ Noakes describes the scene of the Blitz recreated in the Winston Churchill Museum display as “disorientating,” as the visitor has no voice to serve as a guide: “instead he or she is left to pick his or her own way through a devastated department store and street.” She notes,

“What are perhaps first thought to be bodies turn out on closer inspection to be mannequins from the bombed shop.”¹⁷ Willis attempts through her story to recreate this disorientation and confusion among readers. Like the museum exhibitors, the time-traveling historians’ aim in both works is to remember, and to remember especially individuals and their small acts of heroism that produced a kind of collective fortitude.

While Willis found inspiration in the “Blitz Experience” exhibit, she explicitly thanks in her acknowledgements the “marvelous group of ladies at the Imperial War Museum the day I was there doing research—women who, it turned out, had all been rescue workers and ambulance drivers and air-raid wardens during the Blitz, and who told me story after story that proved invaluable to this book and to my understanding of the bravery, determination, and humor of the British people as they faced down Hitler.”¹⁸ In a later essay she explained that she told these ladies, “You make it sound like the Blitz was actually fun! ‘Well, it *was*,’ they told me. ‘We were young, and we were on our own in London for the first time. And there were all these *men*!’”¹⁹ Women such as these populate *Blackout/All Clear*, as two of the time-traveling historians find themselves serving alongside contemporary women with just these roles—and just this sense of “fun,” flirtation, and everyday heroism. Mary Kent (whom we later learn to be Polly, again in disguise) serves with the FANYs, whose collective preoccupation is “The Yellow Peril,” which turns out to be a ghastly yellow dress they trade back and forth for dances.²⁰ Her references to public history sites reveal that Willis herself is a “dark tourist” who somewhat uncritically ingests museum interpretations of the Blitz and nostalgic memories of those who lived through the historic events.

Both the museum exhibits and the elderly women’s recollections appeal to a particular interpretation of the Blitz that many historians have characterized as mythic, and so it is no surprise that Willis’s interpretation falls into this much-criticized social memory of the event as well. This view, which Angus Calder calls “the Myth of 1940,” emphasizes the stiff upperlip of British stoicism, a common spirit that united people across class lines, indomitable humor and courage in the face of tremendous uncertainty, and powerful resolve against the forces of evil represented by the Nazis.²¹ This view was embraced in the crisis moment as well and used to create propaganda to bolster the morale of women in particular, as contemporary novels

(like *Blitz Kids* and *London Pride*, both published in 1941) and films (like *Mrs. Miniver* and *In Which We Serve*, both released in 1942) illustrate.²² Thus, Willis's view of the Blitz, which she recreates for virtual-dark-tourist readers, perpetuates war-time, propagandistic attitudes toward the civilian war experience that are not entirely true to history.

Divine Time and Human Salvation: Messages in a Bottle

One of the most prominent symbols of the “Myth of 1940” is St. Paul's Cathedral, which managed to survive the months-long attacks on London through the work of the Fire Watch, a volunteer brigade who nightly put out fires and defused incendiaries to protect the cathedral. Importantly, for the historians in the future—Bartholomew as well as Dunworthy, Michael Davies, Merope Ward/Eileen O'Reilly, and Polly Churchill—St. Paul's has been destroyed by a terrorist pinpoint bomb in the early 2000s and no longer exists. The historians are witnessing an earlier attempt to save an icon that will not withstand the dangers of their own era. Their reverence when they encounter it, and the objects within it that were also destroyed, evokes consciousness in the reader that even these seemingly eternal monuments to survival and endurance are vulnerable to annihilation over time. Willis deliberately exploits symbols like St. Paul's for their emotional and spiritual resonance across generations.

Dark tourism often allows for the spiritual contemplation of the divine and human relation to it. Certainly, Willis's stories also offer this opportunity, and there is much religious symbolism and reference throughout her time-travel series. For example, in the plague years, because of her immunity to the disease, time-traveler Kivrin is mistaken for Saint Katherine by the village priest. He sees in her his salvation and the promise of God's mercy.²³ She in return offers him an assurance of life “after.” Kivrin's own experience of being abandoned in Oxford during the plague only to be found by Professor Dunworthy, who acts as her savior in the moment of apocalyptic destruction in which all the villagers have died, reinforces that people in all times require salvation in the form of other people, particularly *future* people.

Time-travel is, for Willis, not only the mechanism but also the metaphor for historical research, which offers redemption via the future. When, in *Blackout/All Clear*, the time-traveling history students become stranded in the time of the Blitz, Michael—who had been posing as a newspaper reporter—comes up with the idea of planting personal ads as a way of letting the Oxford retrieval team know where they are. These coded written messages from the past to the future—sent in the hopes of being remembered, located, and thereby rescued—are referred to as “a trail of breadcrumbs” and as “messages in a bottle.”²⁴ The time-travelers expect that historians in the future will use their research skills to comb through Blitz-era documents to find and save those stranded in the past. This is, in metaphorical terms, what Willis believes to be historians’ mission, not just in this fantastical case but also in general.

The time-travel mechanism is not well-developed in Willis’s series, and we are not encouraged to ask too many questions about it. Time-travelers go to the lab at Oxford for their “drop” to a particular time and place, which is entered into a computer. A curtain or veil descends around them, then opens, and they are transported a different time and place. The organism through which time-travel occurs is called “the continuum,” which is managed by “the net,” which seems to be a computer system. The net appears to have been programmed not to allow certain dangerous practices, like bringing objects from the past to the future and vice versa. But the continuum seems quasi-sentient, such that it does not allow the net to do things that might change the flow of history. The net seems to uphold identifiable laws of time-travel. There are also times that people cannot get to because the events that unfold seem too fragile to admit any other factors, including ethnographer-historians from the future. These are known as “divergence points,” suggesting that one small change could potentially cause history to diverge along alternate paths. The continuum simply will not allow people to arrive at Dunkirk, for example, site of the famous naval retreat by British and French forces in the spring of 1940. Someone who wanted to do so would experience “slippage,” transported to a different time or place than planned. Slippage is seen as a self-protective device through which the net ensures that history is not changed by those who journey through it.

This concept of time lends it a kind of consciousness that some reviewers have suggested makes it, by the final book in the series, into an all-knowing divine and an extension of God's grace.²⁵ Although time emerges godlike in *All Clear*, it remains largely mysterious. The theme Willis develops more fully is the absence of God, and the consequent human isolation from knowledge and spiritual certainty. Willis prominently features William Holman Hunt's painting *The Light of the World*, where he depicts Christ knocking on a firmly shut, ivy-covered door. Throughout *Blackout/All Clear*, the historians and the contemps contemplate the variety of meanings of this painting, and expressions on Christ's face, in light of their own uncertain futures—using it to mirror their own emotions. Christ's expression is described as "patient" and "impatient," "unconvinced anyone was going to answer his knock," and signaling "sorrow and hope," but also perhaps "resignation."²⁶ Time-traveler Polly, at the beginning of her trip to the Blitz, thinks while contemplating the painting: "Christ's face, in the dimming light, no longer looked bored, but afraid, and the woods surrounding him not only dark but threatening."²⁷ In God's absence, Willis suggests, humanity must save itself, and the mechanism through which we can do that is historical memory. This may, in fact, be a way that human beings ready ourselves for a spiritual salvation that is slow in coming.

The intersection of this concept of time and public history sites appears in the plot of *All Clear*, where the Imperial War Museum's "Blitz Experience" exhibit becomes an important setting for the story's (and time's) resolution. Willis has one of the time-traveling historians, Colin Templer, who has been searching for the time-travelers trapped in the 1940s, travel to the Imperial War Museum in 1995 to see this exact exhibit.²⁸ Colin has been looking for survivors of the Blitz who might have encountered these historians and know what became of them. One of those messages in a bottle from Michael's efforts, an engagement announcement with Polly's name in it, made it through to the future and helped steer the retrieval team to those lost in the past.²⁹ Following Michael's clues, Colin, like Willis, meets an elderly woman at the museum who tells him of her experiences; she has been searching for him, too. We readers realize that she has been an important character in the story who now can explain what became of at least two of the time-travelers to

World War II. This encounter enables him to rescue the historians—in fact, this meeting gives him the confidence that he has already done so—and thus he saves both the past and the present-future.

Counter-Factuals and Contingency: An Uncertain Past

Any time-travel fiction must deal with the problem of paradoxes and the question of to what degree time-travelers have the power to alter the historical moments they visit. Two kinds of butterfly-effect theories speculate that even small changes can have large impacts. Ray Bradbury's famous story "A Sound of Thunder" (1952) suggests that a time-traveler stepping on a butterfly can produce a joyless future. In physics, the butterfly effect theory posits that a relatively small event, like a butterfly flapping its wings, can produce a major event elsewhere (a tornado in Texas).³⁰

Willis clearly does not believe that history is so fragile. Despite the fact that the history students are cautioned to keep a "sacred silence"³¹ around the contemps, Willis makes it clear in her first two stories, "Fire Watch" and *Doomsday Book*, that the laws of time-travel maintain the integrity of time and history and cannot be broken. Yet everything else about her stories tends to support chaos theory, emphasizing the vast inexplicable complexity of the universe, the prevalence of random accidents that end up having significance, and (like quantum theory) the possibility that one may change something just by looking at it. For example, John Bartholomew's trip to the Blitz is an accident. A computer error has changed his research trip from going back to the time of the biblical Saint Paul (for which he has prepared for months) to going to St. Paul's Cathedral in 1940 (for which he has only a few days' preparation). In *Doomsday Book*, the vacation of the department head, Professor Basingame, leaves another professor in charge who is responsible for sending history student Kivrin Engel to the fourteenth century, which is supposed to be a verboten time because of its excessive dangers. She ends up in the midst of the plague only because the technician in charge of her journey has contracted the flu and, in his delirium, mistakenly changes her arrival date. Later in Willis's

series, the time-travelers in *To Say Nothing of the Dog* and *Blackout/All Clear* encounter such contingency in their farcical and bumbling experiences in Victorian Oxford and World War II London that they all become concerned that they are indeed changing history. Michael Davies finds himself at Dunkirk on a vessel evacuating soldiers, even though Dunkirk is a known divergence point. As a result, he becomes convinced that his actions have altered history. “It’s a chaotic system,” he angrily explains. “Every action’s connected to every other action.”³² Willis emphasizes this point by beginning the chapter on Michael’s accidental trip to Dunkirk with the proverb, “For want of a nail, the shoe was lost. For want of a shoe, the horse was lost. For want of a horse, the rider was lost. For want of a rider, the kingdom was lost.”³³

Creating anxiety about whether the historians are altering history by “accidentally” rescuing someone at Dunkirk, or knocking Alan Turing off his bike at Bletchley Park, or deciding not to send a pair of East-Enders orphans to safety in Canada makes for good storytelling. It also helps to provide the reader, from the safety of a time in which we know what did occur, an experience of some of the fear of the unknown that beset Londoners in 1940. Using the technique of counter-factual questioning—Could a small event here create a massive change there? Is history made by a series of accidents?—Willis gives her readers a more thrilling experience, and also one that connects human beings across time.³⁴ Some of the time-travelers to the Blitz in *Blackout/All Clear* have learned when and where the various bombs hit, but once they are immersed in the past, and once they begin to interact with it (forsaking that important “silence”), they begin to feel what the contemps felt, and this bridges the gap between the time of unknowing and that of knowing, between the past and the future.

In *Doomsday Book*, Willis forges this connection by creating an intentional parallel between Kivrin’s experience of the Black Death and a flu epidemic in 2050 Oxford that has a similar effect. The twenty-first-century flu pandemic delays Dunworthy from rescuing Kivrin during the Black Death, but also causes the deaths of friends and colleagues in Dunworthy’s and Kivrin’s own time. Willis crafts this book deliberately as a mirror to show us the consistency of human experience and the limits of our modern ways of defeating death and natural disaster. In both the

fourteenth century and the twenty-first—no matter the advances in modern medicine—sudden, unconquerable, massively contagious death may strike, with disastrous results at both the social and individual levels. But there is hope. Against her training in noninvolvement, Kivrin attempts to save the fourteenth-century people she has come to know from the ravaging effects of the plague. However, she is unable to do so despite her scientific knowledge about medicine and disease and her historical knowledge about the plague's progress through England. Her failure thus confirms history's stability and also the inescapability of death.

Instead, Kivrin bears witness to these people's dignity in life and their suffering in death; in doing so, she helps to reassure the contemps that they have not been forgotten or abandoned in their darkest hour. The result is a more respectful and compassionate passing into death. As Dunworthy searches for his lost student in 1348, he encounters a village in which the plague has caused utter chaos and inhumanity, which is visible in the human remains he sees.³⁵ In contrast, Kivrin's village is orderly; in the guise of Saint Katherine, she facilitated the proper burial of the dead. Having found her because she rang out the bell for the dead, young Colin Templar, who accompanied Dunworthy, assures Kivrin that she did "help them in their hour of need": "You should have seen the mess in the other place we were. Bodies everywhere, and I don't think anybody helped them."³⁶ Kivrin is mistaken for a saint, but does perform "saving" work in the past, particularly burying the dead and ringing out the death knell. By making this allusion Willis suggests that historians are the ones who are really in a position to "save" people of the past—not from death, which is inevitable, but from the chaos and oblivion of being forgotten.

On the other hand, in both *To Say Nothing of the Dog* and *Blackout/All Clear*, Willis spends much less time in the future and instead relies on counter-factual expectation to build suspense and empathy with those who precede us in history. Counter-factual, or "what if" thinking, has become a popular (though controversial) mode among historians. It allows historians to contemplate a wide variety of variables—some small, some large—to determine which were most important in bringing about history's turning points, and what might have occurred if one small detail were changed. Most famously exemplified by A. J. P. Taylor's *War By Timetable* (1969), which argued that the outbreak of World War I had

more to do with railway schedules than foreign policy, the emphasis on contingency in history posits that not all important events are intentionally sought or created. Accidents, surprising or unanticipated events, and minute individual choices matter, too.

Willis's view of a chaotic historical system, perhaps unbound from any greater law of history, develops in her later books so that readers are encouraged to wonder which small acts of the "foreign" historians might unintentionally yet dramatically alter the future. *Blackout/All Clear* makes the most effective use of this technique to build drama, fear, and anxiety—designed to replicate the uncertainty of people in the midst of World War II. Although *All Clear* concludes with the timeline resolving in a way that confirms history's integrity and immutability, this last volume also suggests that the time-travelers have indeed transformed events. Time has intentionally stranded the time-travelers in the past so that their small, sometimes unintentional, heroic acts will ensure that the Allies will win the war. The mechanism of time has used the three time-traveler protagonists in this book to correct its course. They have become part of the history they thought to observe from a distance, and their individual acts of compassion and heroism have helped to save the day—both on the small scale of saving individual lives and also on the larger scale of saving the British from defeat in World War II.

When Willis merges the historians with the era they are studying—and to which they have traveled—she emphasizes again that the past is a mirror of our own present struggles and uncertainty. Echoing this theme, in *Blackout*, we attend part of a church service during which, after the congregation sings "Oh God Our Help in Ages Past," Vicar Goode thoughtfully sermonizes, "We find ourselves stranded in an alien land of bombs and battles and blackouts, of Anderson shelters and gas masks and rationing. And that other world we once knew—of peace and lights and church bells chiming out over the land, of loved ones reunited and no tears, no partings—seems not only impossibly distant, but unreal, and we cannot quite imagine ourselves ever getting back there." Stranded historian Polly thinks this cuts "a little too close to the bone," but when the vicar concludes that in order to see that past/future time of peace and light they must "do our bit," that "We must act—" Polly immediately moves to take charge of her own future in this past age.³⁷

Even more significantly, at the end of *All Clear* one of the time-travelers remains in the past, and becomes inseparably a part of that past, in a way that had already been predetermined before the book's opening pages. Merope/Eileen stays behind to marry the Vicar Goode and eventually to become the several times great-grandmother of Colin, who rescues Polly just as her time is running out. Thus, these time-travelers build a bridge that links the past to the future, one that emphasizes our intimate connections with those who came before us and those who will follow us. Historians are in the position to "save" the past, Willis tells us, by participating in its reconstruction and by empathizing deeply with those who experienced it directly. Paradoxically, she imagines future people becoming the ancestors—or creators—of those in the past.

Anglo-Centric Fantasies and Fairy Tales: Using Other People's History as an Amusement Park

Not everyone has been thrilled with Willis's guided journeys through the catastrophes of Britain's past. Critics complain about the surfeit of seemingly trivial details, the constant rushing about, the missed opportunities and failed connections, and the maddening silence of the time-travelers when open communication would help them determine what is going on more quickly. More seriously for its historical (rather than literary) value, despite meticulous research, Willis gets a fair number of details wrong that reveal the limitations of both her era and her nationality. This, too, is consistent with dark tourism; scholars have noted that "dark tourism privileges the 'visual' and the 'experiential' over historical rigour."³⁸ One reader called Willis an Anglophile "in severe need of a Britpicker"—someone to correct her erroneous portrayals of British English, geography, and social relations.³⁹ For example, she portrays the medieval Oxford-Bath road as plowed during a snowstorm, mixes up London Underground locations, and has her British protagonists utter phrases no British person would say.⁴⁰ Others have chafed at her interpretations of history, especially the "Myth of 1940," as being unconsciously supportive of a particular (conservative) political agenda. This myth links to Margaret

Thatcher's politically motivated interpretation of Britain's so-called glory days and is tied to a view that tends to creatively forget the reality of worker struggles, class inequality, and anti-colonialism in early twentieth-century Britain in favor of the spirit of common sacrifice and a cohesive British identity. For some, the understanding of the London Blitz that Willis offers may seem more akin to "heritage" than "history," a tension common in dark tourism sites. For scholars like Samuel, however, "heritage" is a more complex layering of memory and meaning than those who deride heritage production and consumption typically realize.⁴¹ Some of Willis's reviewers have actually expressed an appreciation for the relatively direct view of human misery that she portrays, without as much varnish as one might expect.⁴²

Another reader's criticism stands out as being particularly important. In a blog titled "Other people's toes: a rant," Kari Sperring, an "Oxbridge historian" herself, declares that what bothers her most about *Blackout/All Clear* is that the American Willis seems to be rather callously playing around in the British past. Responding to an interview in which Willis had described the exciting dangers of Blitz and asked "What's not to like?" Sperring replies, "How about all the dead civilians? That's not to like at all." Sperring continues,

History is not a theme park. It's not a story, either. It's people's real lives. If you're going to write about it, about any part of it, you need to do your homework properly, you need to be respectful, because ... otherwise you're going to find someone's sore place, someone's vulnerability, someone's sacred or difficult or secret thing, and you're going to do damage. Other countries aren't theme parks either, nor museums, nor big bags of useful resources. They're homes to millions, they're people's lives, too.

Sperring ties Willis's approach to Eurocentric fantasies that say less about the realities of the European past and more about a Hollywood spectacle of beauty, glamor, wealth, and kitsch.⁴³

Indeed, many aspects of Willis's virtual replication of dark tourism seem to deserve this accusation of being akin to Disneyland's portrayal of European architecture and fairy tales.⁴⁴ Willis consciously references European fairy stories in her works, partly out of recognition that these

tales evoke a mystic, primordial past, occurring as they do “once upon a time.” The child abandoned in the woods, the maiden with the poisoned apple, Cinderella’s clock ticking toward midnight, Sleeping Beauty, the dropping of breadcrumbs to leave a trail: each of these archetypal images Willis invokes reflects danger, isolation, and an uncertain destiny, as well as valiant attempts to overcome tragedy with hope, virtue, and good fortune. These stories become not just a way to think about the past, but a way that people understand their own difficult circumstances. As J. R. R. Tolkien suggests in his famous essay “On Fairy Stories,” these tales allow people to confront death and also to experience the eucatastrophe of a “joyous turn” that provides consolation for our own mortality.⁴⁵ Similarly, the appeal of dark tourism is that it allows paradoxically a confrontation with the inevitability of death and consolation that one has not experienced it yet or in quite this way—and that even in catastrophic death, one might be remembered afterward. When Michael struggles to get his personal ads to the papers on time, another character chastises him with, “You can write your fairy tales later.”⁴⁶ These fairy tales represent Michael’s expectation for salvation. Without denying grief or silencing mourning—indeed, encouraging them instead—the dark tourism experience, like fairy tales, and like Connie Willis’s time-travel stories, repairs tragedy with comedy.

Using comedic characters and dialog to humorous effect, Willis aims to bring light into the dark times she describes. Willis is sensitive to the value of literature as an instrument of redemption, which is evident in her many intertextual references throughout her series. Her incorporation of dramas like the works of Shakespeare, Wilde, and Barrie allows her to layer onto her vision of the past earlier literary interpretations of the human experience. But she is particularly interested in the comedic. She intentionally calls on the genre of farce to connect comedy with the counterfactual timeline and chaos theory. Her characters rush around—sometimes barely missing each other, other times coincidentally running into each other. Clues are sometimes picked up, other times missed. Above all, she emphasizes the importance of chance in the making of even great events. Farce for Willis is not just a literary genre but an expression of chaos theory in historical recreation. If one wants to recreate history, Willis has decided, one must imagine it as a farce based on the absurdity of a chaotic system, but one that ultimately produces a just result.

Willis is a great believer in the redeeming effects of comedy. She says, “Comedy’s a powerful weapon against the rich and the smug, the complacent and the cruel and the willfully stupid, and against the universe as a whole.”⁴⁷ At the end of *All Clear* Sir Godfrey Kingsman asks Polly (whom he suspects is in fact from the future),

“Is it a comedy or a tragedy?”

He doesn’t mean the war, she thought. He’s talking about all of it—our lives and History and Shakespeare. And the continuum.

She smiled down at him. “A comedy, my lord.”⁴⁸

This seems a strange conclusion when considering what will occur in the remaining years of World War II: the many horrors yet to come, the Holocaust among them.⁴⁹ But this is the essential message of dark tourism, and it is also consistent with Willis’s core theme. What Polly has is not foreknowledge—she really has no idea how the human story will come out. What she has is hope and expectation that through the recognition of our common humanity, through the small heroic acts of individuals, and through collecting messages in bottles sent to us from previous generations, we each give meaning to the past and to the future.

Acknowledging that “the world is a terrible place,” and that bad things often happen, Connie Willis nevertheless notes, “But not always. And that’s what comedy tries to tell us: that communication is possible, that reconciliation is possible, that friendship and good faith and true love are possible. It tells us that adversity can be overcome; that seemingly impossible obstacles can be overcome.”⁵⁰ Although Willis’s enthusiastic consumption and construction of dark tourism sites in her novels may make it seem as if she is building an amusement park out of other people’s tragedies, she does indeed approach the past with respect and admiration. Kivrin creates audio recordings of her journey in 1348 by clasping her palms together in what looks like prayer: her record of the lives of these previously anonymous individuals then can be seen as a spiritual act, a kind of reciting of the rosary. In reverently recording the experiences of the plague’s victims, tragic though they are, she offers life-beyond-death. At the end of *All Clear*, Polly returns to the future via the enclave that houses *The Light of the World* in St. Paul’s Cathedral, and gives the painting one last interpretation:

She had been wrong in thinking Christ had been called up against his will to fight in a war. He didn't look—in spite of the crown of thorns—like someone making a sacrifice. ... He looked ... contented. As if he was where he wanted to be, doing what he wanted to do. Like Eileen had looked, telling Polly she'd decided to stay. Like Mike must have looked in Kent, composing engagement announcements and letters to the editor. *Like I must have looked there in the rubble with Sir Godfrey, my hand pressed against his heart.* Exalted. Happy.⁵¹

By emphasizing history as comedy rather than tragedy, as a force for reconciliation and humility rather than distance and condescension, Willis invites readers to see that salvation is found in each other and in recognizing ourselves in the distant mirror of history.

Notes

1. Connie Willis, "Fire Watch," *Fire Watch* (New York: Blue Jay International, 1985), 39–41.
2. Willis has won eleven Hugo Awards and seven Nebula Awards. Each of the books in the time-traveling historians series has won a Hugo, and among them all but *To Say Nothing of the Dog* received the Nebula.
3. Willis, "Fire Watch," 2–45. Willis, *Doomsday Book* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992). Willis, *To Say Nothing of the Dog* (New York: Bantam Spectra, 1998). Willis, *Blackout/All Clear* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2010).
4. Both are quoted in Richard Sharpley, "Shedding Light on Dark Tourism: An Introduction," *The Darker Side of Travel: The Theory and Practice of Dark Tourism*, ed. Richard Sharpley and Philip R. Stone (Buffalo, NY: Channel View Publications, 2009), 14–15.
5. Philip R. Stone, "A dark tourism spectrum: Towards a typology of death and macabre related tourist sites, attractions and exhibitions," *Tourism* 52, no. 2 (June 1, 2006): 145.
6. Barbara W. Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978).
7. C. L. Moore, *Vintage Season* (Street & Smith Publications, Inc., 1946). Also published under the pseudonym Lawrence O'Donnell.
8. Willis, *To Say Nothing of the Dog*, 7–8.

9. Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory Volume 1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London: Verso, 1994), 175–176.
10. Willis, *Blackout*, 220.
11. St. George is the patron saint of England. Choosing this name reinforces the strong English connection Willis makes: those sheltering in the church represent a microcosm of the whole country, embattled but noble—and perhaps doomed.
12. Willis, *Blackout*, 191–192. This improvised performance cycles through several Shakespeare plays to end with *Henry V*: “‘This story shall the good man teach his son, from this day to the ending of the world,’ he said, his voice ringing through the cellar, ‘but we in it shall be remembered—we few, we happy few, we band of brothers.’ His voice died away on the last words, like a bell echoing into silence.” Note that protagonist-historian Polly Churchill changes her last name to Polly Sebastian for this journey, a reference to Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*; Kingsman refers to her commonly as “Viola,” as a direct reference to the role-playing twin of the play, stranded and in disguise.
13. Richard Cobb, “Experiences of an Anglo-French Historian,” *Second Identity: Essays on France and French History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 43–47, as excerpted in *Historians on History*, second edition, ed. John Tosh (Harlow: Pearson, 2009), 42–43.
14. Lucy Noakes, “Making Histories: Experiencing the Blitz in London’s Museums in the 1990s,” *War and Memory in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Martin Evans and Ken Lunn (Oxford: Berg, 1997), 94–96.
15. The time-traveler Bartholomew also regards the Communist with suspicion; in the world of this story, St. Paul’s Cathedral was destroyed in the early 2000s by a pinpoint bomb carried by a Communist terrorist. This is not a political association mentioned in the parts of this series written post-Cold War. Bartholomew must overcome his own (future) prejudices to keep St. Paul’s secure in 1940.
16. Willis, *Blackout*, 471–473.
17. Noakes, “Making Histories,” 97.
18. Willis, *Blackout*, acknowledgements. (Also appears in *All Clear*, acknowledgements).
19. Connie Willis, “Dorothy Parker, Primeval, Little Nell, Robert Heinlein, Emma Thompson, Reports of My Death, Shakespeare, and Other Thoughts on Comedy,” *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 22, no. 3 (2011): 316.
20. Willis, *Blackout*, 188–121.

21. Angus Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1991), 20–64.
22. Susan Grayzel, *At Home and Under Fire: Air Raids and Culture in Britain from the Great War to the Blitz* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 297.
23. Note that Kivrin’s last name “Engel,” is also quite similar to “Angel”; the village priest refers to her as an “Angel of the Lord.”
24. Willis, *Blackout*, 362. Willis, *All Clear*, 59. Michael continues this quest throughout the rest of the war, even years later when separated from Polly and Eileen. Interestingly, Michael plays the “Ernest” role among the covert operatives of Operation Fortitude South (among “Gwendolen,” “Moncrieff, and “Lady Bracknell”) and Willis has one of the contemps, who is looking for props for a production of *The Admirable Crichton*, collect a bottle for “Ernest’s message in a bottle” (*All Clear*, 19). This connects the Ernest of Wilde’s play with that of Barrie’s and with our stranded time-travelers and their quest for rescue through coded written clues.
25. Jo Walton, “The dove descending: Time as God in Connie Willis’s Time Travel universe,” *Tor.com*, <http://www.tor.com/blogs/2011/07/the-dove-descending-time-as-god-in-connie-williss-time-travel-universe> (accessed February 25, 2015).
26. Willis, *Blackout*, 151–156.
27. Willis, *Blackout*, 156.
28. In *All Clear*, Willis refers to this as the “Living Through the Blitz” exhibit (429).
29. Willis, *All Clear*, 631–632.
30. Willis’s husband was a long-time physics professor, and so it’s reasonable to think that scientific theories have influenced her thinking. Willis explicitly references the butterfly effect in *Blackout* (475).
31. Dunworthy instructs Bartholomew that “Silence and humility are the sacred burdens of the historian.” Willis, “Fire Watch,” 6.
32. Willis, *Blackout*, 475.
33. Willis, *Blackout*, 104. Willis’s depiction of Dunkirk also fits into a mythologized view. See Nicholas Harman, *Dunkirk: The Necessary Myth* (London: Coronet Books, 1990).
34. For an extended discussion of the development of counter-factual thinking among historians, with a full exploration of the ways physics and chaos theory have influenced historical ideas about contingency as well as its usefulness for historical analysis, see Niall Fergusson’s introduction to *Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 1–90.

35. Willis, *Doomsday Book*, 551–570.
36. *Ibid.*, 575–576.
37. Willis, *Blackout*, 391–392.
38. Sharpley, “Shedding Light on Dark Tourism,” 13.
39. “Jenni” (June 6, 2012), comment on Adam Roberts, “Review: Doomsday Book, Connie Willis,” SF Mistressworks, <https://sfmistrissworks.wordpress.com/2012/06/05/doomsday-book-connie-willis/> (accessed February 25, 2015).
40. See Roberts, “Review: Doomsday Book.” See also Jonathan McCalmont, “Review—Blackout/All Clear (2010) By Connie Willis,” Jonathan McCalmont’s Criticism, *Ruthless Culture*, <http://ruthlessculture.com/2011/02/06/review-blackout-all-clear-2010-by-connie-willis> (accessed February 25, 2015).
41. See Raphael Samuel, “Heritage-baiting,” *Theatres of Memory*, 259–273.
42. Adam Whitehead, “Blackout by Connie Willis,” *The Wertzone: SF & F in Print & on Screen*, <http://thewertzone.blogspot.com/2011/07/blackout-by-connie-willis.html> (accessed February 25, 2015). See also Thomas M. Wagner, “Blackout/Connie Willis,” *Sf Reviews*, http://www.sfreviews.net/willis_blackout.html (accessed February 25, 2015).
43. Kari Sperring, “Other people’s toes: a rant,” http://users.livejournal.com/la_marquise_de_/304632.html (accessed February 25, 2015).
44. The idea that historical sites provide a “time-travel” experience that has a theme-park quality is not new and has been explored in Colin Sorensen, “Theme Parks and Time Machines,” *The New Museology*, ed. Peter Vergo (London: Reacktion Books, 1989), 60–73. I’m suggesting that time-travel stories can provide a virtual historic site/theme park experience as well.
45. J. R. R. Tolkien, “On Fairy Stories,” *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London: Allen and Unwin, 1983), 109–161.
46. Willis, *Blackout*, 133.
47. Willis, “Dorothy Parker ... And Other Thoughts on Comedy,” 317.
48. Willis, *All Clear*, 594.
49. See Walton’s analysis of *Blackout/All Clear* in “The dove descending” for a rebuke of Willis for having the forces of time go to such lengths to fix the Blitz and yet leave the Holocaust to happen as it did.
50. Willis, “Dorothy Parker ... And Other Thoughts on Comedy,” 319–320.
51. Willis, *All Clear*, 639–640.

Part II

Film Trips



5

Cinematic Thanatourism and the Purloined Past: The “*Game of Thrones Effect*” and the Effect of *Game of Thrones* on History

Jana Mathews

If Westeros were a real country, it would be ranked among the most dangerous in the world. With an average of 141 people killed there every week, the odds of enjoying a long and happy life in this cinematic black spot are not in your favor.¹ Despite the high body count (or some would say because of it), fans of HBO’s award-winning medievaesque fantasy series *Game of Thrones* (*GoT*) are flocking in unprecedented numbers to the locales where previous seasons of the show were filmed. Over the course of one of these film location tours, one can stand in the place where hundreds of fake villagers were massacred, touch the rock on which a traitor was decapitated and visit the site where half of the residents of the nation’s capital got blown to smithereens.

While the notion of traveling to places where imaginary people meet horrible fake demises may strike us as strange at first, perhaps it shouldn’t, given the longstanding touristic appeal of real dark places. The sites where early Christian saints were martyred and buried were among the few

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sanctioned vacation destinations in medieval society. As author Sarah Vowell humorously points out, the number of people who still visit sites of political violence and bloodshed for fun indicates that we haven't exactly outgrown our penchant for so-called "assassination vacations."² As film and television have worked to blur the boundary between the real and the imaginary and promote, in the words of Chris Rojek, "the evaporation of physical distance," the range of so-called "deathstinations" has expanded in kind to include both virtual and physical sites of fictional death and suffering.³

Illustrative of this new multimodal form of virtual dark tourism is *GoT* and the tourism industry spawned by it. With an average weekly viewership of twenty-three million people from 170 different countries, *GoT* is the most-watched television show on the planet.⁴ In the years since its initial airing, the places associated with the show's production have become beneficiaries of the economic boon affectionately known as the "*Game of Thrones* effect."⁵ In 2015, the number of fans who traveled to *GoT*'s primary filming locations in Northern Ireland, Spain, Croatia, and Iceland skyrocketed, increasing in one case by 100 percent.⁶ The sheer number of *GoT*-inspired tourists streaming into these locales means that, for better or worse, a significant number of people who are visiting these countries are viewing them through the lens of the show.

The subfield of dark tourism studies that examines cinematic thanatourism has focused largely on how violent films and television shows work to shape popular conceptions of specific eras or locales. The new multimodal model of thanatourism represented by *GoT*—Westeros is both an imaginary place and also a physical destination—invites us to consider the important but overlooked role that virtual dark tourism plays in the construction and renegotiation of popular memory and national identity. In as far as nations are, in Benedict Anderson's words, "imagined communities," they also are, as Geoffrey Cubitt notes, "elusive and intermediate, perpetually open to context, to elaboration and to imaginative reconstruction."⁷ The process of reimagining how we think and talk about the notion of national identity—as well as its application to specific entities—is informed not only by high culture (national literatures, classical schools of art and music, et cetera) but also, as Tim Edensor notes, "supplemented and increasingly replaced in

their affective power, by meanings, images and activities drawn from popular culture.”⁸ Television is uniquely suited to serve as a vehicle of national self-fashioning because of its ability to communicate messages that either reinforce or challenge the norms of society in an accessible way.⁹ If, as Lila Abu-Lughod argues, watching television is part of the national character of many cultures, then the reverse also is true: namely, that national identity is formed in part by the shows that the world watches.¹⁰

In the same way that television shows influence the way that viewers see themselves, another truism in contemporary society is that the practices of viewing and visiting are inexorably intertwined. Watching a film or television show has long been talked about as a mode of escape from one’s society and a vehicle by which one can be transported virtually to another.

At the same time as these viewing experiences foster a sense of intimacy between the screen and the audience, the fear that the rise of television culture (which brings the world to one’s living room) would render travel unnecessary has proven to be unfounded.¹¹ On the contrary, research shows that television plays a formative role in inspiring leisure travel by serving as what anthropologist Erika M. Robb calls “a sort of cinematic reconnaissance for future trips.”¹² According to *CNN*, up to 5 percent of all travel—or about forty-five million people—is inspired by movies, making Hollywood one of the world’s biggest travel agents.¹³ Chief among these destinations are film-set-themed amusement parks like the Universal Studios and Disney’s Hollywood Studios. That the most popular attractions at such theme parks are film sets that simulate near death experiences—via man-eating monsters (*Jaws*, *King Kong*, *Jurassic Park*) or natural disasters (*Twister*, the flash flood scene from *The Ten Commandments*)—further illuminates the privileged position of place-based thanatouristic sites in contemporary culture.¹⁴

While *GoT* filming locations are not amusement parks per se, they are equally curated sites marketed as entertainment where, as Bob Pagliari puts it, “death itself is reduced to the ridiculous.”¹⁵ Like other virtual dark tourist destinations, *GoT* film locations do not mark all types of death; they are significantly less interested in the ordinary and mundane

versions (those caused by old age or run-of-the-mill illnesses) than the type caused by extreme violence and protracted suffering. The bloody deaths commemorated at the show's filming locales boast an added level of glamor and appeal because they are inspired in part by actual historical events. But rather than adhering to the traditional conventions of historical fiction—which require the author to root the storyline in the ground of a particular place and time—*GoT* practices what journalist Dan Jones calls a “greedy relationship with history” by creating an imaginative world where the most dramatic and transformative events in the history of western civilization are put into direct dialog with one another.¹⁶

Speaking of cinematic techniques and tools more broadly, Rojek argues that the deployment of these forms of play “stretch conventional shared meanings and disrupt our consciousness of order.”¹⁷ *GoT*'s slicing and dicing of historical figures and facts, then, creates an alternative version of the discourse itself. Unmooring people and places from their original temporal and spatial contexts allows their narratives to be isolated, re-proportioned and assigned new meanings. By transporting the most violent and bloody parts of the past to Westeros, *GoT* makes this imaginary and exceptionally dangerous locale the physical and ideological cradle of western civilization. As a space created through consumption, absorption, and appropriation, however, “Westeros” also is subject to these forces. Specifically, the show's anachronistic compression and creative re-imagining of western civilization's most violent moments stages a subtle but powerful intervention into the ongoing debate about the role of the historical imaginary in the shaping and reshaping of contemporary national self-consciousness. The wildly popular culture of *GoT* virtual dark tourism in contemporary Iceland and Northern Ireland suggests that film location dark tours mobilize the show's violent pseudohistory to reshape the contours of national narratives. In the process of appropriating the identity and history of fake places, the virtual dark tourism industry invents a new model of national identity that destabilizes the definition of “history” through the act of overwriting it.

***Game of Thrones* Virtual Dark Tourism and the Making of Viking Iceland**

Lying inconspicuously between Scandinavia and Greenland above the North Sea, the tiny volcanic island nation called Iceland has about as many total inhabitants (around three hundred thousand) as a mid-size American city. Despite being small both in size and population, or perhaps because of it, Icelanders are a fiercely patriotic bunch. Arguably the most dominant expression of national pride in Iceland takes the form of the country's celebration of its Viking heritage. Iceland's capital, Reykjavík, boasts dozens of Viking-themed museums, exhibits, and other related attractions. Step into any gift shop that lines the main tourist drag, and one will encounter a dizzying array of Viking-themed trinkets and souvenirs including horned hats and drinking horns, replica Viking shields and swords, and t-shirts adorned with brawny warriors or the word "Iceland" written into the shape of a double-bladed axe.

The ethos of Viking culture as represented by the virile, fearless warrior extends to the people themselves. The ideal aesthetic of the Icelandic male (as prominently displayed in Icelandic advertising culture) is one who embodies the Viking stereotype: tall, bearded, and excessively muscular.¹⁸ This paradigm is reinforced by the nation's long history of dominating the World's Strongest Man competition, an annual international event in which competitors demonstrate their superhuman strength through completing a gauntlet of challenges. Since the competition's inception in 1977, Iceland has produced more strongmen than any other country save Germany.¹⁹ Given the nation's close ties with Viking culture, it should come as no surprise that Iceland's current strongman—a six-foot-nine-inch, 418-pound brute named Hafþór Björnsson—goes by the nickname "Thor."²⁰

The problem with the Viking culture in Iceland is that it is almost all manufactured. Viking raiders did come to the island in the ninth century, but probably not on purpose. While the details are a bit murky, scholars believe that the Vikings' first encounter with Iceland was likely the result of a longboat or two drifting off course while in route to a different and more desirable location. Far from being a Viking stronghold, in the

centuries that followed, the island served as a temporary pit stop for raiders and traders, and more permanent settlement for banished criminals and political exiles of Scandinavian kingdoms.²¹

The less-than-romantic narrative of Iceland's initial colonization followed the community up until it became a nation. Iceland's journey to political sovereignty was not marked by protracted sectarian in-fighting or revolutionary war against a colonial overlord but, rather, followed a path of political compromise, bloodless appropriation, and de facto absorptions. At the end of the thirteenth century, Icelanders (most of whom were of Norwegian ancestry) agreed to be governed by their ancestral king, and power over the island shifted hands via marriage to Denmark in the fourteenth century. When Iceland formally earned its independence in 1944, it did so with little fanfare and without violence. As Jesse Byock notes, the relatively seamless transfer of power has been chalked up to many causes including international peer pressure and imperial benevolence.²² However, behind all the wartime rhetoric lies the simple fact that for Denmark, the barren, remote, and economically depressed island was not worth fighting for at the time. For a nation who actively and aggressively lays claim to a lineage known equally for violence and its obsession with lineage and legacy, the real story of Iceland's founding falls a tad bit flat.

Iceland is not alone in its struggle to reconstruct its cultural past and decolonize its history by forming a *bildungsroman* characterized by Viking-like acts of violent self-assertion and resistance. Raymond Powell and Katia Isankova note that bloody national histories are in high demand all over. As society becomes less violent overall, they argue, a simultaneous desire emerges to “conserve and protect the horror and murder as a relic of the past stages of our civilization's development.”²³ What Iceland lacks in its official register of the past in the form of dark history, it borrows from *GoT*. Parts of seasons two and four of the show were filmed in Iceland in 2011 and 2013 respectively, and the show returned to the island in January 2017 to film scenes for season seven.²⁴ The first official *GoT*-themed tour in Iceland was launched during the airing of season two (2012) by a tour guide for Gray Line tours, who also happened to have served as an extra in several scenes shot in the northern part of the country. The popularity of this tour spawned a later spin-off version,

which takes tourists to filming locations of cinematic black spots on the southern part of the island. The latter tour runs three days per week year-round and usually at full capacity (around forty people). I participated in one such tour in July 2016.

There are plenty of scenes in *GoT* whose plots are pulled from Viking sagas or pay homage to Viking culture in explicit ways, but none of them are filmed in Iceland. As a surrogate, the tour offers up Iceland's landscape and topography, which the guide describes as having the same disposition as a Viking serial killer. The travel time between filming locations stretched up to an hour in some cases, and much of it is filled with the tour guide pointing out and gruesomely recounting various tragedies and natural disasters that occurred at places along the way. The eight-hundred-mile ring road that circles the island is the Angel of Death for tourist drivers in the winter; two people fell off a glacier in 2015; a backpacker went hiking one foggy morning and was never heard from again. Although we don't get anywhere near either of the island's two active volcanoes, hearing the stories of its two most recent eruptions offers up additional evidence of the land's mercurial mood swings and solidifies the landscape's status as a kind of predator lying in patient wait for the virtual tourist.

Taken to its next logical extension, hostile landscapes breed people who are half wild themselves. Such is the claim made at least by the filmset-tour stop at Thingvillir National Park. After leading the group into a narrow rocky gorge, the guide explains that this was the place in the show where a group of cannibal warriors roasted their victims' bodies over a spit in season four. She ends her discussion of the scene by laying this episode of violence next to one from Iceland's history. Specifically, she tells us that the place where *GoT* characters ate the bodies of their enemies was the same site as where public executions were performed in front of cheering audiences in the Middle Ages. By mapping *GoT*'s imaginative scene onto Iceland's real one, the tour validates Iceland as a Westeros-like place where violence and death (and violent death) are part of everyday life.

According to Philip Stone, one of the functions of virtual dark tourist sites more broadly is to provide a "safe socially sanctioned space to consume an otherwise taboo topic."²⁵ What Thingvillir does (literally) for

cannibalism, the next stop on the tour does for genocide. The centerpiece of the tour stop at Stöng in the Þjórsárdalur valley is a large turf-roofed structure identified by Gray Line's online and printed description of the tour as a "settlement era Viking lodge."²⁶ Built in the 1970s, the structure really is a government-run living history museum whose floor-plan is modeled after ruins excavated a few miles away. By calling the structure a "Viking lodge," however, the tour assigns to it the most generous reading of its identity. Archeological evidence dates the structure to the years between 930 and 1262, only the earliest of which overlap with the Viking invasions.²⁷ Instead of serving as a kind of Valhalla-on-earth, most of the evidence suggests that the structure was probably a manorial homestead.²⁸ While a chieftain with Viking ancestry may indeed have lived there, his primary preoccupation would have been farming his own land, not raiding foreign ones.

The tour overwrites the real history of the structure with a dark cinematic narrative. Before exiting the bus, the guide shows us a short video clip of the scene from season four that was filmed there.²⁹ The clip opens with the bucolic scene of a rural village whose inhabitants are going about their mundane daily business, only to be interrupted almost immediately by a surprise attack by armed invaders. The bulk of the clip chronicles the bloodbath that ensues: parents are decapitated in front of their children, women are hacked to death by massive hatchets and unarmed men are mowed down by the dozen.

The gratuitously gory scene falls into the genre of theatrical violence that John Tercier calls the "pornography of death."³⁰ Like a freeway pileup or other gruesome accident, the voyeuristic spectacle is simultaneously revolting and alluring. According to Michelle Baran, the need to witness the aftermath of disaster and devastation "seems like a fundamental human urge."³¹ The sight may make us sick to our stomachs, in other words, but we can't turn away. All the fictional casualties at the Viking lodge, of course, have been dragged off and the fake blood splatter has long since washed away. But the presence of the lodge—which stands in for the whole fake village—plays a key role in facilitating the reimagining of the scene and inspiring its reenactment. Paul Duncum has pointed out how role-playing activities enable participants to foster cognitive and emotional connections with sites.³² The tour guide encourages us to

participate in a practice that Erika Robb calls “recreational grieving” by volunteering to take photos of us staggering around the site clutching fake wounds and playing dead, or faux mourning the injuries and deaths of others.³³ In addition to putting the tourist in the subject position, the behavior works to historicize the scene by redefining authenticity as an elastic concept. Specifically, by stepping into the shoes of the villagers and their attackers, tourists demonstrate how an event that did not really happen feasibly could have. This democratization of historical reality allows the tour to write the massacre scene into Iceland’s national narrative.

Additional stops on the tour work in similar ways to create virtual dark narratives that, when assembled, construct an alternative biography of Iceland that contains all the necessary features of a Viking history, save the requisite mythological hero. The tour finds this figure in the actor who plays a freakish tall and strong bodyguard in *GoT*. In the show, Hafþór Björnsson or “the Mountain” as he is called, is personally responsible for a disproportionate number of deaths of other characters, usually by gruesome and excessively violent means. In real life, the Mountain is the former high school classmate of the tour guide and Iceland’s reigning strongman. Given Hafþór/Thor/the Mountain’s celebrity, it comes as no surprise that the last stop on the tour is not a film location, but Björnsson’s hometown. Driving by the places where the Mountain went to school, shopped for groceries, and played with his friends when he was a child has the effect of reinforcing Icelanders’ reputation for physical exceptionalism. Specifically, it works to portray the nation as what a *Vice* reporter calls a “nest of giants” where regular kids grow up to bench press cars and pull tractors with their bare hands.³⁴

Björnsson’s role on *GoT* showcases the other things that Icelanders can do with their strength if they want—like snap off heads, gouge out eyeballs, and skewer whole bodies on lances and swords. While Björnsson’s on-screen activities make a compelling case that Icelanders are Vikings’ corporeal heirs, his off-screen achievements worked to literally write himself and his nation into official Viking legend and lore. In 2015, Björnsson entered the Viking Strongman competition. Held in Norway, this annual contest is comprised of physical challenges described in Viking sagas. According to one ancient legend, a man walked three steps while carrying a log on his shoulders that weighed 650 kilograms (450 pounds) and was

ten meters (thirty-three feet) long. After this third step, the man's back broke under the enormous pressure. For over a thousand years, no one has been able to replicate the feat, until Björnsson did the Viking equivalent of pulling the sword from the stone when he carried a similarly sized and weighted log for an astounding five steps.³⁵

Through this demonstration of superhuman strength, Björnsson literally carves a spot for himself within Viking history. As the designated representative of Iceland, he simultaneously claims his countrymen as legitimate heirs to Viking cultural capital and the privileges that accompany its status in contemporary society. At the same time as Björnsson's log-carrying feat works to redeem Iceland from cultural exile and establish itself as the paradigmatic embodiment of Vikingness, the act also works to redefine Iceland's relationship with *GoT*. Specifically, by accomplishing what no human in modern history has done before, Björnsson emerges as the superlative to the television character that he plays. By highlighting how the Viking Strongman's exceptionalism exceeds the cinematic imagination (Björnsson is physically stronger than the Mountain and thus could likely kill him), the *GoT* dark tour ends by flipping the script on the show itself. Specifically, it invites the virtual thanatourist to see the show's characters and storylines as ripped from the headlines of Iceland's past, rather than the other way around. The way in which history and memory are simultaneously mobilized and manipulated by virtual dark tourism culture in the service of the revision of national identity is picked up and carried forward by another *GoT*'s filming locale to slightly different ends. Whereas Iceland capitalizes on the authoritative potential that comes through figuring itself as Westeros incarnate as a way of inventing the past, Northern Ireland uses virtual dark tourism to construct a narrative of its future.

"The Troubles" in Westeros

One of the reasons why Northern Ireland likely is so invested in forward thinking has something to do with the opportunity for mobility offered by its current relationship to cinematic thanatourism. Taken together, the six northernmost counties in Ireland are referred to alternately as a

territory, region, province, country, and “part” of the United Kingdom. While there is no clear consensus on what Northern Ireland is, there is one descriptor of the place on which top government officials all the way down to local bloggers unanimously agree: Northern Ireland is “*Game of Thrones* territory.”

What started out as a catchy marketing campaign slogan has since become synonymous with Northern Ireland, for good reason. Northern Ireland is the main headquarters for production of *GoT* and has been since the show’s 2011 inaugural season. More than just a scenic backdrop to the action, Northern Ireland’s rugged landscape plays such a pivotal role in the show’s storyline (there are over thirty documented filming locales) that, like Icelandic terrain, it functions as a kind of character itself.

GoT’s imprint on Northern Ireland’s popular culture and national identity is reflected in the sheer number of agencies peddling show-themed virtual dark tours that take visitors to sites of cinematic imprisonment, torture, murder, and execution. At the time of this essay’s writing, there were over twenty companies in the mix, and those are just counting official, guide-led excursions.³⁶ In addition to organized tours, scores of websites, travel blogs, apps, and Reddit forums contain suggested self-drive tour itineraries around “the real Westeros.”³⁷ To making finding these filming locations easier, Northern Ireland’s transportation commission sanctioned the addition of show-related directional markers—such as “Winterfell-½ mile” and “The Kingsroad-10 miles”—to their existing body of road signage.³⁸ For visitors who forget their maps of filming locations, there is a large one on display in Belfast’s historic Waterfront District.³⁹ Want your friends to get mail from Westeros? In 2016, Northern Ireland’s postal service unveiled a limited edition run of *GoT* commemorative stamps.⁴⁰ All of this is enough to make one tour guide state matter-of-factly that “HBO Owns Northern Ireland.”⁴¹

This claim is less of an exaggeration than one might initially think. In 2014, Tourism Ireland—the government-sponsored agency responsible for promoting Northern Ireland as a tourist destination to overseas visitors—and HBO forged a much-publicized partnership agreement that authorizes the former to use *GoT* logo, likeness and imagery in its marketing of the country.⁴² Shortly thereafter, the agency began using

the terms “Northern Ireland” and “*Game of Thrones* territory” interchangeably on its website.⁴³ Local tour operators quickly followed. Consider, for example, the online description of a stop on the “Winterfell Boat Tour,” which collapses a filming location with the real historical event that occurred there:

These waters are where Brienne of Tarth brought Jamie Lannister ashore in a canoe on her way to Kings Landing & fittingly also where St. Patrick first came ashore to Ireland in a boat back in the 5th Century (the Vikings gave the lough the Norse name “Strangfyorthe”, meaning place of strong tidal currents or strong fjord).⁴⁴

The website notes that the *GoT* scene was filmed on the exact spot where the founder of Ireland—Saint Patrick—first made physical contact with the island. The striking parallels between the fictional and historical narratives invite (and even compel) the visitor to see the scene in *GoT* as a reenactment of Ireland’s founding. In this representation, a fictional female knight and a royal prince nicknamed the “Kingslayer” not only serve as surrogates for Saint Patrick, but also as replacements of him.

The idea of television characters usurping the role of the nation’s founding father becomes less of a hermeneutic stretch when we consider that it isn’t just the media and local dark tourism agencies that are collapsing the distinctions between Northern Ireland and Westeros; the conflation is both endorsed and enacted by government officials and agencies. In 2013, Peter Robinson, Northern Ireland’s unionist first minister welcomed his guests at a press dinner by declaring “This is Westeros!”⁴⁵ While intended to generate chuckles, it is hard not to take Robinson a little bit seriously, especially after the Ulster Museum replaced an iconic nineteenth-century Northern Irish painting—William Mark Fisher’s *Landscape with Sheep*—with a reproduction that included a flying dragon and giant in the scene.⁴⁶

Perhaps the most compelling example of the depth and breadth of *GoT*’s seepage into North Ireland’s national identity took place during Queen Elizabeth’s 2014 diplomatic visit-turned-virtual-dark-tour of the country. In addition to meeting with government officials, the British queen also visited the *GoT* film studio where she met several cast mem-

bers and came face-to-face with the show's signature prop—a giant throne constructed from the rusty swords of vanquished foes. The queen's refusal to sit on the so-called Iron Throne made international headlines after it was revealed why her majesty declined the invitation.⁴⁷ As show-runners Benioff and Weiss explained on a late-night talk show, "Apparently, the Queen of England is not allowed to sit on any foreign throne. It was an esoteric rule that we didn't know about until that moment."⁴⁸ Regardless of its accuracy, the fact that the statement went viral and was reported by news agencies ranging from tabloids to NBC's the *Today Show* worked to essentially solidify it as a cultural fact.⁴⁹ By refusing to sit on the Iron Throne, Queen Elizabeth effectively acknowledged Westeros as a real kingdom.

Gaining formal recognition by a visiting dignitary isn't the only benefit that comes from conflating one's identity with that of a fictional country. By pretending to be Westeros (or blurring the distinction between show and nation so much that they are indistinguishable), Northern Ireland has transformed itself from a place where no one wants to go to one of the hottest travel destinations of 2016, as determined by *Condé Nast* and the *Guardian*.⁵⁰ A record 2.3 million tourists visited Northern Ireland in 2015, the most in its history.⁵¹ The irony of Northern Ireland's ascendance to the top of the world's must-see sites lies in the fact that the region spent most of second half of the twentieth century on most countries' travel advisory lists. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Belfast was considered among the most dangerous cities in the world, and, as *Satellite Magazine* notes, "named in one breath as Baghdad and Beirut."⁵² The reason for this caution has a lot to do with the bloody civil strife euphemistically called "The Troubles." Festering tensions over what *BBC* calls "two mutually exclusive visions of national identity and national belonging" snowballed into a violent thirty-year paramilitary conflict between British loyalists (mostly Protestant) and Irish nationalists (mostly Roman Catholic).⁵³ In the end, street fighting and terrorist acts by both sides claimed over three thousand and five hundred lives and injured over fifty thousand.⁵⁴ The cinematic qualities of the conflict are not lost on the people who lived through it. As Belfast tour guide David McAnirn told the *New York Times*, "For most of my life I was in a film set. And it was a horror movie."⁵⁵ The Troubles officially ended in 1998 with the Good Friday Peace

Agreement, a political compromise that preserved Northern Ireland's membership within the United Kingdom but allowed the territory to be ruled by locally elected officials. Today Belfast is still booming, as one local website wryly puts it, not with bombs anymore "but with tourists."⁵⁶

Despite the changes that time has wrought upon the city, residues of the Troubles are still so visible in Belfast that they would be hard for tourists to "Westeros" to ignore. Instead of obscuring the violence of the recent past, Northern Ireland's government and thanatourism industries join forces to write the conflict into the show's mythological history. The structure of contemporary Belfast tour itineraries facilitates this reading by positioning political conflict sites alongside *GoT* film locations. Nearly all tours—including the enormously popular hop-on, hop-off city bus version—follow a well-trod circuit around the city that includes stops at Titanic Studios and Paint Hall Studios, home to a quasi-permanent *GoT* exhibition and the show's filming headquarters respectively.⁵⁷ At these attractions, tourists can get up close and personal with a myriad of the show's props and set pieces including a scaled version of the three-hundred-mile-long, skyscraper-high ice wall that stretches along the northern border of Westeros. The experience of visiting this iconic wall is preceded or followed on many of the city tours by encounters with other equally famous walls—namely, those that surround Belfast neighborhoods. Constructed during the Troubles, these multistory, concrete and razor-wire topped fortresses are smaller in size than their cinematic relative but no less imposing.

In her study of the role of theatricality in dark tourism, Emma Willis notes that each dark destination "is haunted by absence, and each in their own manner, traffic in substitutes that attempt to make such absence present, to make it *felt*."⁵⁸ Visiting "the Wall" and the conflict walls in the same afternoon links the two structures by figuring one as the contemporary heir of the other. In doing so, it keeps past tragedy visible, yet safely muted. Through the course of the virtual dark tour, visitors learn that the purpose of both walls is the same: namely, to preserve peace through segregation. While the Wall in Westeros has served for millennia as a barrier between two groups who can't get along, the Belfast walls similarly were constructed to enable unionists and nationalists to live in the same city without having to engage with one another. The tours' casting of the

walls as parallel structures figures the Troubles as much more than a localized squabble between neighbors; through its re-contextualization within *GoT*'s mythological history, the contemporary sectarian conflict is rewritten as the latest episode in an ongoing, epic struggle for self-determination whose origins lie in the distant past.

By mythologizing twentieth-century conflict sites, the Belfast "conflict" tours cast *GoT* as a kind of national narrative. If the show embodies the story of Northern Ireland's past, then it also scripts its future. A recent Tourism Ireland digital marketing campaign plays on the idea that the fates of Westeros and Northern Ireland are not only intertwined, but also follow the same timeline. The advertisements—which circulated widely on Facebook and Twitter, tourist websites and travel blogs—take the form of photographic murals portraying haunting Northern Ireland landscapes with accompanying taglines that say things like "Explore the realm of men before it's too late."⁵⁹ Around Belfast, print versions of this ad campaign appear on billboards and are plastered in train stations, shop windows and other public places. The profile of the Stark mascot (a special breed of wolf) appears on the side of a fleet of city buses, accompanied by the ominously threatening phrase "The North Remembers."

The joke embodied in these virtual murals takes a sinister turn when situated within Northern Ireland's contemporary political milieu. The same city bus that brandishes the phrase "The North Remembers" on its side drops tourists off in front of the famous Troubles-era political murals that adorn the walls dividing the Falls and Skankill roads. Produced by both sides of the conflict, these works of public art belong to the category of memorials that through their very existence function, Lucy Lippard argues, as "battlegrounds in a life-and-death struggle between memory, denial and repression."⁶⁰ Individually, they serve as statements of allegiance and defiance that celebrate IRA bombings and loyalist ambushes; honor political prisoners and commemorate fallen martyrs; mark territories and make overt and veiled physical threats. One of the famous unionist murals depicts two masked gunmen below the slogan "Prepared for Peace, Ready for War."⁶¹

The controversial mural is a reminder of abandoned sentiment of an older era. Independently, the threat articulated is contained to the past. But when read alongside the *GoT* advertisements, their argument—that despite hope for peace, there is no real confidence that the future will lead to any-

thing other than armed conflict—is revived. By insisting that it is an analogue to Westeros, Northern Ireland’s dark tourism industry compels the visitor to follow the metaphor to its logical end. Doing so leads one down a road that ends in a terrifying and bloody place.

Virtual dark tourism, Robb reminds us, “relies heavily on expectation and imagination.”⁶² What looms on the other side of the Wall in Westeros is a race of zombie-like creatures that look eerily like friends and neighbors precisely because they used to be them before they were transformed into soulless monsters. The Seven Kingdoms’ hardline stance on these so-called White Walkers—we must kill them before they kill us—becomes a veritable war cry when mapped onto contemporary Belfast neighborhoods. By conflating *GoT* places and plotlines with Northern Ireland’s political history, Belfast city tours not only figure the people on the other side of the political (and literal fence) as the monstrous other, but also frame the violent conflict between them as inevitable and natural. The violence that *GoT* virtual dark tourism industry anticipates for Northern Ireland’s future then, isn’t one that violates its national character but is a defining and requisite feature of it.

Conclusion

As its star has risen and production budgets increased, *GoT* has expanded its corpus of filming locations to several other countries, including Spain and Croatia. Not surprisingly, both nations have rolled out similarly enthusiastic welcome wagons for HBO as their northern neighbors, and likewise are reaping the financial and ideological rewards that come from taking on the persona of Westeros. *TripAdvisor* recently reported that tourist interest in *GoT* filming locations spiked by 120 percent.⁶³ For Spain, this led to an influx of jobs and industry to some of the most rural parts of the country.⁶⁴ Reports indicate that 2016 was a record-setting year for tourism in Croatia as well, with *Forbes* declaring that the show is “turning Croatia into a ‘Kingdom of Tourism’ and Set-Jetting.”⁶⁵

While new filming locations are replicating the marketing strategies and tourism ploys of the old with unprecedented success, the time and energy expended in pretending to be Westeros is not just about capturing the

golden goose while it is nesting in your backyard. As journalists and financial analysts have noted, the countries that promote *GoT*-themed virtual dark tourism most aggressively are also among Europe's most financially and politically "sickly."⁶⁶ Iceland's banks went bust in the 2008 financial crisis and its economy has been slow to recover. Northern Ireland's grip on peace is fragile at best. Spain's national unemployment still hovers at an astoundingly depressing 24 percent and its Catalonia region is threatening secession. Croatia is still struggling to find its legs after the Yugoslav Wars. For one reason or another, each place where the show is filmed is experiencing some sort of identity crisis. As we have seen, some are using *GoT* thanatourism to make themselves over, while others are employing it in a desperate attempt to keep themselves together.

For the neophyte nation of Croatia, *GoT* virtual dark tourism offers what *Bloomberg* journalists call its best hope for rehabilitation.⁶⁷ While referring specifically to the show's Midas touch, the same also can be said about the power of the repository of "historical" narratives that it offers up to filming locales for the taking. Like the virtual dark tourism industries at work in Iceland and Northern Ireland, Croatia appropriates the identity of the place in Westeros where most of the scenes filmed there are set. During a *GoT* dark walking tour of Dubrovnik, one can visit the site where half of the residents of Westeros's political seat King's Landing—including members of the royal family and all the kingdom's clerical elite—are blown to smithereens in an explosion orchestrated by Cersei Lannister, the king's mother. The massacre, which reduces the fictional city center to rubble, pays cryptic homage to several historical events in recent Croatian history, including one that took place in Dubrovnik itself in 1991. For eight months of that year, the city was besieged by Yugoslav forces. Photographs taken in the aftermath of the conflict show a city center whose bombed out footprint bears striking resemblances to that of its cinematic doppelgänger.⁶⁸

And this is precisely the point. As critics have noted, virtual dark tourism openly traffics in imagination and fantasy, both of which are spurred on in the *GoT* variety by what my Iceland tour guide calls "movie magic."⁶⁹ If one of the primary reasons why visitors to Iceland, Northern Ireland and Croatia go on *GoT*-themed virtual dark film location tours is to have fun and be entertained, they emerge from these experiences also having been

taught how to see things that aren't there, and never were. Aided by film clips and screenshot stills of cinematic scenes, virtual dark tourists are asked to reassemble in their minds notable scenes and structures (villages, gigantic walls, septs) that either were digitally created in film studios or existed as small-scale film props. As we have seen, the process of reconstructing the imaginary creates an alternative history of space and nation that overwrites real landscapes and histories.

While an immensely powerful editorial tool, revisionism doesn't always have to lead to erasure. In fact, the same hermeneutic skills that *GoT*'s virtual dark tourists employ to see Iceland, Ireland, Spain, and Croatia as these countries never were, also enable them to imagine what these nations and their flagship cities might look like in the future. Pushing this process along are the very visible construction and revitalization projects indirectly financed by the *GoT* virtual dark tourism industry. Nothing drove this point home more than the final ten minutes of the show-themed film location tour in Iceland. As the tour bus made its slow descent down an elevated pass leading into Reykjavík, the tour guide gestured to the city's surrounding foothills and valleys. There are plans in the works to build several suburban communities there, she told us. In unison, forty heads craned their necks to look out the windows. The patches of land in front of us were barren, save a herd of sheep or two. But we could already see the houses and shopping malls.

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6

Touring the “Burning Times”: The Rhetoric of Witch-Hunting Films, 1968–1973

Gavin F. Hurley

In Europe between 1450 and 1750 secular and ecclesiastical courts prosecuted approximately 110,000 (predominantly) women for witchcraft; approximately sixty thousand of these persecutions resulted in execution.¹ This era is referred to as the “witch-craze” or more casually, the “burning times.” Although popular understanding of the “burning times” often blames religion, specifically Christianity, as the blanket root cause of the historical atrocities, a range of contributing factors led to the collective condoning of murder, torture, and persecution for the purpose of eradicating witchcraft.

Unlike the relative religious unity in medieval western Europe, early modern Christendom was splintered by both Protestant and Catholic Reformations.² Christian unrest likely established conditions of instability and fear that allowed witch-persecution to unfold more easily.³ Yearning for unity and order in these times of fragmentation, people rallied around a common scapegoat, the witch, which helped coalesce communities as they attempted to root out religious and social rebellion. To combat the increasing crime rate, ecclesiastical and secular powers

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revived formal study of Roman law; consequently, they revived more humanistic judgment regarding legal affairs.⁴ Early modern witch trials strove for legal precision much more than their medieval predecessors. Unlike medieval witch trials that relied on ecclesiastical courts, secular courts served an active role in the burning times. In fact, secular courts sustained witch-hunts when church courts either abandoned or became more lenient regarding witches.⁵ The overall legal process became more scientific as well; it moved away from medieval faith-based modes of accusation and embraced more material forms of evidence. Accordingly, early modern European legal methods were more rationally robust, relying on testimonial evidence, written confessions, witnesses, and the facts of the case.⁶ Despite the move toward more advanced legal argumentation, the evidence in many of these cases was still tenuous. To help order and gather evidential data, including locating the witches themselves, officials hired professional witch-hunters.

Professional witch-hunters in the Reformation era were tasked with locating, testing, and incarcerating presumed witches. Although contemporary scholars certainly discount the actual existence of witches and the science of witchcraft, in the 1500s most European intellectuals believed in the actual existence of witches.⁷ Literature of the time, such as Kramer and Sprenger's influential *Malleus Malleficarum* (1486) and Jean Bollin's later *On the Demon-Mania of Witches* (1580), established conceptual manuals that supported the existence and the persecution of witches. The existence of the Devil and demons was a central premise of these manuals. In fact, doubting the existence of demons and the Devil was akin to doubting the existence of angels: both were associated with atheism and punishable by death.⁸

Texts like *Malleus Malleficarum* and *On the Demon-Mania of Witches* directed the act of witch-hunting in pursuit of physical and metaphysical truth. Therefore, professional witch-hunters were not rogue roaming vigilantes. Rather, they were employees of the church and state carrying out "God's business" in a structured manner. Overly sadistic witch-hunters did sometimes become obsessive, but this was rare and not representational of the majority of witch-hunters.⁹ In fact, witch-hunts were occasionally halted when the state realized that witch-hunters were abusing their power and asserting fraudulent claims. For example, the Scottish hunt of 1661–1662 closed when courts accused witch-hunters John Kinkaid and John Dick of deceitfully spotting "the Devil's Mark" on suspected witches.¹⁰

In sum, early modern witch-hunting was not composed haphazardly. Amid religious turmoil, secular and church courts strove toward rationalism and bureaucratic order. Organization, reason, and evidence were insisted upon, albeit often misused. No one group was at fault for the witch-craze. State and Church, Protestants and Catholics, all participated in these events. Far from one simple historical interpretation, witch-hunting during the burning times offers a curious tapestry of secular and religious ideologies and power dynamics.

The historical attitudes of the burning times seem foreign and distant in today's more secular world. Yet in the 1960s and 1970s, filmmakers and audiences alike became infatuated with the time period. Accessible European cinema offered an opportunity to voyeuristically gaze upon the witch-craze atrocities as a virtual tourist. Characterized as horror films, they attracted a viewership by pulling audiences from the mundane "everyday" and engaging them in adrenaline-fueled shock cinema. However, at a deeper level, the films also served a more profound touristic role. They guided tourist-viewers through an experience, transported them to dark destinations, and enabled them to ask their own questions and formulate their own answers about religion and ideology. Consequently, witch-hunting films act as vehicles of dark tourism, empowering tourists as agents of interpretation rather than passive subscribers to imposed answers. Tourists juxtapose the virtually experienced Reformation history with their own present experiences to see their present world through fresh eyes. In other words, witch-hunting films guide tourists away from the everyday present by offering a contrasting experience (in this case, the early modern era); in turn, the touristic experience allows viewers to reflect back on their "home" or non-tourist situation through a new angle of vision.¹¹

Witch-Hunting Films, 1968–1973

The twentieth-century curiosity to tour the early modern witch-hunting events began with historical-fiction writers from England. These writers sparked a series of narrative representations of the time period that later inspired the witch-hunting films from 1968 to 1973. In 1961, British

dramatist John Whiting composed *The Devils*, a play for the Royal Shakespeare Company. The play reimagined Aldous Huxley's 1952 "non-fiction novel" *The Devils of Loudon*. Both works traced the controversial political and ecclesiastical career of Urbain Grandier, a seventeenth-century French priest who was executed for witchcraft.¹² Ronald Bassett penned *Witchfinder General* in 1966, which narrated the violent story of Matthew Hopkins, a seventeenth-century witch-hunter who was especially cruel when torturing and executing accused witches.¹³

By resurrecting these dark pasts, Huxley's book, Whiting's play, and Bassett's pulp fiction offered sites of religious belief and persecution, virtually situating audiences in ideologically fraught Europe; however, these works were not particularly popular. The audiences were specialized. Huxley's book uses densely written historical prose; Whiting's *The Devils* was performed for upper-class audiences who could afford Royal Shakespeare Company productions; Bassett's *Witchfinder General*, a noteworthy attempt to appeal to general audiences, has been lambasted as ineffective.¹⁴ In short, these three works did not promote wider, more inclusive dissemination. These writers did not circulate their histories via more inclusive communication—such as popular film—and therefore, they did not fully harness the available means to engage wider audiences.

Filmmakers in the late 1960s and early 1970s remedied these shortcomings. Between the years of 1968 and 1973, a sub-genre of horror films appeared in Europe and made its way to America. This cinematic trend began with young British director Michael Reeves. Working with Tigon Films in the late 1960s, Reeves was one of the first filmmakers since Benjamin Christensen (*Haxan*, 1922) to revisit the dark tourism of the European burning times. Tigon Films bought the rights to Bassett's *Witchfinder General* novel¹⁵; Reeves reluctantly secured Vincent Price for the lead role and filmed the historical horror film aptly entitled *Witchfinder General* (American title: *The Conqueror Worm*).¹⁶ Tigon's choice to base a horror movie on Matthew Hopkins was curious. According to British film scholars, Tigon Films may have chosen early modern witch-hunting because they knew that the epic historical British film *Cromwell* was in production.¹⁷ *Cromwell* (1970), starring Alec Guinness and Timothy Dalton, depicted the English Civil Wars of the 1640s and was an anticipated box-office success. Tigon Films may have wanted to create a lower budget historical horror film to tap into that popular audience early.

Based on the success of *Witchfinder General*, Spanish director Jess Franco filmed and released *The Bloody Judge* in 1970. Starring horror icon Christopher Lee in the role of Restoration-era judge Lord George Jefferies—a real figure who severely punished rebels during the “Bloody Assizes” (1685)—the film alters history to portray Jefferies as a malicious prosecutor of witchcraft crimes. *Witchfinder General* and *The Bloody Judge* dealt with the same era; however, Franco’s dialog-heavy, slow-moving film is frequently viewed as a less successful imitation.

In 1970, the German film *Mark of the Devil* (*MOTD*) was also released. This film depicted witch-hunting in early-eighteenth-century Austria. It portrays the no-nonsense, “impotent” witch-finder Lord Cumberland (Herbert Lom), his soul searching apprentice Christian (Udo Kier), and Christian’s love interest Vanessa Benedict (Olivera Vuco), who was a bar-keep from an Austrian village. The film, rated X for violence and gratuitousness, is commonly known for its shock appeal in the early 1970s. The torture scenes, such as the infamous tongue removal scene, were so disturbing that it literally made audiences sick. Embracing the publicity, some theaters distributed “vomit bags” branded with the *Mark of the Devil* title.

The next year escalated the extravagancy of witch-hunting films. Celebrated British director Ken Russell crafted *The Devils* based on Whiting’s play and Huxley’s book. Like the play and book, *The Devils* illustrated the rise and fall of seventeenth-century French Roman Catholic priest Father Urbain Grandier (Oliver Reed). The film follows the persecution of Grandier by Baron Jean de Laubardemont (Dudley Sutton) and professional witch-hunter Father Pierre Barre (Michael Gothard). Additionally, it plots Grandier’s connection with the demonic possession of a local Ursuline convent. The film is beautifully stylized and well-acted; however, it has yet to be officially released by Warner Brothers due to the provocative depictions of nudity and violence.

Other minor entries in the witch-hunting catalog include *Blood on Satan’s Claw* released in 1971. This Tigon film delivered a folkloric depiction of witch-hunting activities set in a demonically possessed eighteenth-century village. Like he had done with *The Bloody Judge*, Franco released his own low budget French-Portuguese imitation of *The Devils*, entitled *Les Demons*. Franco’s film appeared in 1973, concluding the witch-hunting trend in popular films.

Tourism, History, and Interpretation

Witch-hunting films from the 1960s and 1970s link historical narratives with the touristic experience. As Hayden White points out in *Tropics of Discourse*, history is not purely science but relies on interpretation and narrative.¹⁸ Quoting Claude Levi-Strauss, White explains that the “‘overall coherence’ of any given ‘series’ of historical facts is the coherence of story, but this coherence is achieved only by a tailoring of the ‘facts’ to the requirements of the story form”; communicated history never quite leaves arena of ‘myth.’”¹⁹ White explains that historical narratives utilize fictive elements. According to White, the content of historical narrative is “as much *invented* as *found* and the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in the sciences.”²⁰

Readers, or in this case filmgoer-tourists, follow a historian’s story (the director’s cinematic accounts of witch-hunting activity) initially by recognizing a familiar story type (tragedy is the primary witch-finding story type; romance is the secondary story type). Through the recognized story type, the tourist then becomes familiar with unfamiliar historical “data,” which White explains is “always immediately strange” because of its distance away from the reader (or viewer) and its differing way of life.²¹ Historical narratives work with audiences because the stories “refamiliarize” readers or viewers with broadly understood historical information but also integrate historical information into well-known “story types,” invoked to make sense of one’s personal “life-history.”²² This approach cooperates with the touristic experience of reflection: using the unfamiliar (touristic experience of history) to reflect upon on the familiar (the non-touristic present). Historical narratives—like witch-hunting films from the 1960s and 1970s—rhetorically rely both on fiction and fact, art and science, to lead tourists toward deeply reflective experiences.

Why are tourists specifically drawn to virtually revisiting the macabre era of witch-hunting? In their pivotal book *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster*, J. John Lennon and Malcolm Foley argue that dark tourism offers an “intimation of post-modernity,” ultimately establishing that objects of dark tourism incite “anxiety and doubt about the

project of modernity.”²³ The project of modernity generally involves hunting, debating, and defending a monolithic metanarrative—an overarching interpretation—by which to explain the world and instruct people how to live their lives. Witch-hunting films of the 1960s and 1970s illustrate particular ways of modernist thinking: those involving the jockeying of metanarratives, including Christian and religious constructs. Consequently, witch-hunting films as virtual dark tourism articulate post-modern “anxieties and doubts” about modernist understandings of the world.

This 1960s and 1970s interrogation of metanarratives aligned directly with the cultural backdrop when the witch-hunting films were released. In the late 1960s, anxieties and doubts about religion had reached unprecedented levels. After three years of meetings, the Roman Catholic Church’s Second Vatican council ended on December 8, 1965. Vatican II significantly modified aspects of the Catholic Church, including a more participatory Mass, vernacular liturgy, and more emphasis on social justice; in effect, Catholicism became less removed from both humanism and the world at large.²⁴

Vatican II’s changes fostered dialog outside of Roman Catholicism as well. Conversations unfolded about Christianity, spirituality, organized religion, and the need for interfaith dialog. The 1966 “Is God Dead?” issue of the *Time Magazine* acts as an iconic representation of such public conversation. In its feature article, “Theology: Toward a Hidden God,” John T. Elson examines the contemporary 1960s death-of-God culture.²⁵ This *Time Magazine* issue articulated an apprehension—even an existential anguish²⁶—that pervaded the global consciousness during the decade: something that horror author Stephen King calls “the God-is-dead tempest [...] whirling around in the teapot of the 1960s.”²⁷ Faith was questioned. Faith was challenged. Faith was also defended.

Dark tourism theorists Philip Stone and Richard Sharpley explain that with increased liberalism and secularization and without “mediating institutions” like religion or politics—all of which were “whirling around” and being questioned in the 1960s—taboos can be more easily dismantled and analyzed; consequently, presenting death in public spaces can facilitate more robust public discussions about darker forbidden topics.²⁸ Horror films offered an acceptable genre to wrestle with death and dying

because the genre customarily pivots upon such morbid axes. Horror films, an appropriate genre to embed dark histories, gained significant traction in 1960s and 1970s, a time when politics and religion were questioned. Reciprocally, horror films, as an acceptable genre to explore metaphysical topics, offered a space to grapple with the role of religion in the 1960s and 1970s as well. For example, Ira Levin published his best-selling *Rosemary's Baby* in 1967; Polanski's film version followed in 1968. William Peter Blatty published his best-selling *The Exorcist* in 1971; Friedkin's film version followed in 1973. Jeffery Konvitz's best-selling *The Sentinel* was released in 1974; Michael Winner's film version followed in 1977.

Late 1960s and 1970s audiences were drawn to interrogations of religious—particularly, Christian—metanarratives. Moreover, they were intrigued by the back-and-forth or dialectic between two points of view: the stance that “God is dead” and religion has ceased to provide value, and the stance that “God is alive” and religion remains valuable. Like other religious horror films of the time such as *Rosemary's Baby* and *The Exorcist*, witch-hunting films unfold the dialectic on the screen. Characters in these films question their faith and the role of religion. Viewers, as voyeurs in the cinematic experience, are also encouraged to interrogate the taboo, transcend the taboo, and contemplate their own sets of past and present religious/counter-religious convictions.

Rhetorical Information

In *Dark Tourism*, Lennon and Foley mention that cinematic artifacts of dark tourism can influence individual acceptance and rejection of history by overtly integrating persuasive messaging into films. They explain that films such as *All Quiet on the Western Front* and *Johnny Got His Gun* deliberately educate and warn audiences about the violent effects of war, bringing the dark events spatially and temporally closer to the audience via representation.²⁹ Unlike these films about World War I, witch-hunting films do not seem to have cautionary aims as their primary rhetorical purpose. Because the early modern period is so far removed from the twentieth century, such a cautionary agenda would not interest an audience. Witch trials are not a contemporary threat. Rather, witch-hunting

films rhetorically use historical information to persuade viewers to contemplate their own religious convictions or contemplate their resistant attitudes toward religion. Instead of using "unbiased information," creators of witch-hunting films intentionally bias the history via "rhetorical information." This can more effectively awaken subjective contemplation of religious conviction as well as interrogation of religious institutions. Rhetorical information leads viewers toward a particular stance about the history so that they can more actively agree or disagree. In the context of dark tourism, rhetorical information fits into one side of Philip Stone's "dark tourism spectrum." Stone's spectrum ranges from the darkest dark tourism to the lightest dark tourism. Whereas the darkest tourism aims to educate audiences on historical "sites of death and suffering," the lightest "gray" tourism aims to entertain audiences regarding heritage sites "associated with death and suffering."³⁰ Rather than purely referential information of the "blackest" dark tourism, rhetorical information embedded in the palest dark tourism prioritizes capturing an audience. This mode is seen within witch-hunting films.

As Hayden White remarks, the aims of fiction artists (such as screenplay writers or directors) and the aims of historians can overlap: both aim toward a representation of reality.³¹ The artistic mode aims to recreate historical reality through experience³²; it also aims to stir the emotions, persuasively appealing to *pathos* as a means to recreate that reality through experience. Through this lens, witch-finding tourism transports viewers into the emotional space of the witch-finding era—and if the director needs to adjust the factual evidence to achieve such emotional accuracy, then so be it. In short, witch-finding films underscore a rhetorical mode of dark tourism, immersing tourists into an emotional interpretation of the Reformation era.

For example, Michael Armstrong's film *MOTD* begins with scrolling text addressing the historical context of the film: "This motion picture shows three cases taken from authentic documents from the times when witch-hunting had reached its peak and can only give a slight idea of the cruelties of one of the blackest pages in the history of Man." This textual discourse reveals a clear informational purpose: the film represents actual accounts of the witch-hunting era using "authentic documents from the times." However, the film's introductory text also reveals a distinctive rhetorical

purpose that supplements the informational purpose. It illustrates three historical cases when witch-hunting had reached its peak: extreme cases, which may sway audience opinion if viewers hastily generalize that the three cases fully represent the early modern era. Moreover, the film “can only give a slight idea of the cruelties of one of the blackest pages in the history of Man”: a rhetorically charged line. Although Armstrong responsibly hedges his representation of the era (“can only give a slight idea”), he also evaluates and communicates the severity of the burning times using opinionated language (“one of the blackest pages in the history of Man”). After this blurb, the text mentions that eight million people were executed during these times. Historians recognize that this information is hyperbolic: closer to sixty thousand people were actually executed in Europe during this time.³³ Again, the information is exaggerated to heighten emotional responses from virtual tourists and thereby persuade them of a biased understanding of early modern Christianity as a problematic institution. By juxtaposing the film’s bias alongside their own opinion, tourists are charged with contemplating their own religious or counter-religious beliefs.

Another example of compromised historical information appears in *Witchfinder General*. Director Michael Reeves deliberately skews much of the historical information about the witch-hunter Matthew Hopkins. Tourists experience Hopkins as “judge, jury, and executioner,” whereas the actual seventeenth-century judicial process required more involvement than mere locutionary utterances spoken by greedy witch-hunters. The conviction process often included an extraction of a confession that was then examined by magistrates alongside evidence³⁴; such judicial scenes were depicted more authentically in *MOTD* and *The Bloody Judge*. However, in *Witchfinder General*, tourists witness the accusation, torture, confession, and execution processes as quick events, unfolding in rapid succession and orchestrated entirely by Matthew Hopkins, one man’s cursory evaluation. Although the pseudo-scientific conviction process was surely problematic in Reformation witch trials, judges often closely analyzed evidence. Although torture was used for confessions, severe torture was only used when proofs were quite strong.³⁵ Therefore, due diligence was often not completely neglected during this time period, as *Witchfinder General* would have tourists think. Since due diligence is not particularly entertaining, Reeves adjusted the information,

presumably to make the film more interesting, exciting, and influential. Using broad impressions about Hopkins, Reeves shocks tourists—through emotional appeals—into contemplating Hopkins and the witch-craze in general terms.

Reeves extends his influence more overtly in *Witchfinder General's* final scene. The film concludes by fully embracing the horror genre. The "hero" Richard Marshall (Ian Ogilvy) kills Matthew Hopkins in a fit of vengeance-fueled rage, striking Hopkins's body repeatedly with an axe after Marshall rescues Sara (Hilary Dwyer), his lover, from Hopkins's torture. However, the historical facts do not align with this scene. History suggests that Matthew Hopkins actually died of illness, probably consumption, in his bed later in life.³⁶ Because the historical information would not lend itself to a very influential cinematic conclusion, Reeves alters the facts to serve his rhetoric purposes. After Marshall's axe-wielding craze, the soldiers shoot Hopkins to end his suffering and Marshall psychologically snaps, repeatedly screaming, "You took him from me!" To add to the hysteria, Sara begins uncontrollably screaming as well. The film ends with this unsettling cacophony. By illustrating vengeance and the accompanying psychological breakdown of a chivalrous war hero and an innocent country girl, Reeves provides a conclusion that persuades tourists to ponder the human condition: a meditation prompted by religious conflict. No longer is Marshall the good character and Hopkins the bad character: instead, the binary between good and bad blurs into shades of gray.

Witchfinder General's conclusion reveals the tension between historical facts and affect-driven poetic freedoms. In his expert analysis of the film, Ian Cooper describes the "Unusual way *Witchfinder General* melds two divergent traditions, the 'respectable highbrow' heritage film and the 'disreputable lowbrow' horror film."³⁷ Reeves departs from the historical script to weave a more satisfying, thoughtful, and affect-driven ending. In effect, Reeves uses the imagination—exploring a possible world, an alternative history—to engage tourists' emotional and contemplative faculties. His conclusion powerfully articulates the clashes, the anxieties, and the social and political concerns of Reeves's own time, the late 1960s.³⁸ Reeves leaves tourists with an interpretative rhetorical moment, rather than a factual moment, so that tourists can ponder their own anxieties in relation to the anxieties of the Reformation period.

The affective role of aesthetics in *Witchfinder General* is also deliberate and nuanced in respect to the historical information. For example, Reeves frequently integrates nature into his visuals, specifically sun-kissed landscapes and lush trees. Cooper stresses that the natural beauty establishes an irony from the very beginning image in the film.³⁹ The first image is sunlight through tree branches; the sunlight forms a cross. The camera pans down to rolling hills and then the hanging of a convicted witch. Consistently, such contrasting images are juxtaposed throughout the film, perhaps contrasting the God of the natural world with the God of manmade religion.⁴⁰ Cooper also points out that nature is passive and “indifferent” in these shots. Although it is beautiful, the “rural backdrop” appears as blank as the faces of the townspeople.⁴¹ Supplementing this poetic irony, the constant images of nature also establish an overall unity—one that coalesces the film into a beautiful, enjoyable art form. It mitigates the brutality, balancing beauty with ugliness. The lush landscapes, healthy trees, and bright sunshine serve a formal purpose, evoking positive emotions and uniting the narrative into a consistent visual experience. Ultimately, the natural world plays an important poetic role in *Witchfinder General* in invigorating the historical facts with aesthetic appeal, thus rhetorically enriching the information.

Poetics are less subtle in Russell’s *The Devils*. The beginning of the film reveals a noticeable oscillation between discursive modes. Like *MOTD*, *The Devils* begins with text: “This film is based upon historical fact. The principal characters lived and the major events depicted in the film actually took place.” This red text appearing on a black background establishes the referential dimension, the documentation of history, highlighted through repetition. The text repeats its primary claim; the second sentence merely offers a more specific definition of the term “historical fact.” Both the textual repetition and the visual depiction (red text and black background) emphasize the severity of the claims and therefore exhibit rhetorical intensification.

After the text, the opening scene displaces the referential rigidity with a lavish—and lengthy—artistic stage show performed by King Louis XIII for Cardinal Richelieu. After the elaborate performance, the king, still on stage, speaks with the cardinal. Kissing the cardinal’s ring, the king agrees that the state and the church must cooperate so that Protestants can be

"driven from the land." The lights darken; both the king and the cardinal diabolically look into the camera. The title of the film, *The Devils*, appears. The audience gathers that "the devils" offers a double meaning: the literal demons that possess human beings, and the figurative diabolical nature of seventeenth-century European church and state.

The elaborate opening stage sequence highlights the artistically interpretative nature of the film itself, indicating that Russell will poeticize the historical facts, highly stylizing the forthcoming historical narrative in the film. The virtual tourist of *The Devils* voyeuristically gazes upon a lavish play within a lavish film: a theatrical depiction of historical events within a cinematic depiction of historical events. By contrasting the initial historical factuality disclaimer with this hyperbolic play, Russell nods to the artistic distance he has from the historical facts. Russell guides the tourist into an ambivalent series of emotions and representations of the times; in doing so, he offers a historical touristic experience—one which indeed was designed to replicate the ambivalence of the witch-craze era. Accordingly, *The Devils* is a deeply artistic experience that uses hyperbole and style together. As in the case of the introductory play scene, Russell's ostentatious approach emphasizes the virtual element of virtual tourism. Far from subtle, Russell's poetic dimension (along with the elaborate sets and costumes) may offer the most stylized and interpretative version of the witch-craze to date. In such artistic scenes, which are charged with layers of meaning and emotion, Russell softens "historical fact" into rhetoric.

Tourist Identification

Like literature, film acts as a vehicle by which words or symbols transport audiences, influence attitudes, and induce action. Cinematic virtual dark tourism can act in the same manner. The inspired action can include contemplative or intellectual activity. However, tourists must first subscribe to the film's narrative and identify with character profiles before associating the narrative with their own personal beliefs.

Voyeurism is a primary method whereby a tourist can participate in the historical context and events. Tourists become voyeurs of the unfolding narrative: witnesses unrecognized by the characters. Unlike horror

films such as *Peeping Tom* (1960), *Halloween* (1978), or *Psycho* (1960) that implement voyeuristic approaches to rhetorically propel *fictional* narratives, witch-hunting films use voyeurism to foster audience identification with historical contexts and attitudes. As voyeurs of history, tourists identify with the common rabble depicted in witch-hunting films, the masses who passively watch the witch-burnings. Cooper explains that Reeves repeatedly captures the “sensation-hungry crowds, made up not of sadists but the average, the everyday and the curious” in *Witchfinder General*.⁴² These crowds become surrogate vehicles for the tourists who virtually visit witch-hunting events: average, everyday people who are curious about the dark history, not particularly sadistic.

In *MOTD*, Armstrong combines voyeurism with eavesdropping to engage the audience’s active identification with the common rabble. Armstrong embeds selective pieces of conversations from various townspeople into the background noise of scenes. Tourists become eavesdroppers, as if they are actually walking the streets of the town, hearing bits and pieces of side conversations. Consequently, the tourist absorbs additional pieces of rhetorical information. For example, in one scene, as the camera moves through a pub, the tourist overhears a conversation about how a particular townspeople views witch-burnings; to his friend, he states, “Well, I enjoy a good witch burning every now and then. It’s better than a boring sermon.” This casual assessment of witch-burnings helps tourists understand the early modern entertainment value of the witch-burnings—which helps tourists understand the twisted appeal of the brutality. After all, viewers of horror films—such as witch-hunting films—are also entertained by violence in a certain respect. Therefore, by means of eavesdropping, tourists voyeuristically participate in the history while also identifying with the crowds’ desire for shock-based entertainment.

Tourist identification with the townspeople is not always covert and voyeuristic. Toward the beginning of *The Devils*, Father Grandier, a skilled rhetorician and speaker, gives a riveting epideictic speech at the funeral of French governor of Loudon to the Loudon townspeople. Grandier praises the deceased governor for saving the city, which required the governor to respect “all faiths.” The tourist listens to Grandier’s impassioned speech as one of the sea of people. Like the townspeople, tourists visiting *The Devils* can be entranced by Grandier’s persuasive delivery, smitten by the priest’s

charisma, and moved by his progressive platform of religious tolerance. Ultimately, the tourist visiting *The Devils* becomes an active member of the historical narrative rather than a passive voyeur.

Audiences of these films loosely identify with the townspeople, eavesdrop on their conversations, and voyeuristically witness the acts of violence—however, how do such virtual tourists internalize these messages and attitudes? How do tourists associate these dark historical accounts with their own beliefs about religion, Christianity, politics, dogma, ideology, and science?

One method implements what twentieth-century rhetorical theorist Kenneth Burke explains as "dramatic irony"—that is, "two conflicting sets of meanings acting simultaneously, as the *dramatis personae* interpret their situation one way and audience interprets it another."⁴³ The characters can be wrong but the audience—in this case, the virtual tourists—can be right. The characters "think they know" what is right, but the tourists, with more perspective, more fully "know" what is right.⁴⁴ This frame is often used in witch-hunting films. Tourists know that Matthew Hopkins, Father Pierre Barre (witch-hunter from *The Devils*), and Lord Cumberland use faulty arguments to unjustly convict witches, but the characters think they are right, often in the name of Christianity. Dramatic irony resists an enforcement of a metanarrative or a totality; rather, as Burke states, dramatic irony promotes the "overlapping, conflicting, and supplementing of interpretative frames" and leads to a "reinforcement of the *interpretative attitude itself*."⁴⁵ Consequently, the tourist then becomes an active interpretative participant in the historical narrative.

Introspection can naturally follow from such participatory activity—and the introspective possibilities are endless. For instance, a Christian believer may deem the antagonist witch-hunter to be incorrectly Christian, causing the tourist to ponder what it means to be authentically Christian. The non-believing tourist of witch-hunting films may fault the witch-hunting antagonist for taking religion seriously at all, affirming the tourist's personal choice to distance oneself from organized religion. The ironic identification with the witch-hunter helps adhere the tourist to the film and engages tourists' interpretative attitudes. Through the interpretative activity of "knowing they know" what is right or wrong, and prompted by the witch-hunter character, virtual tourists revisit their own

personal conceptions of religious or counter-religious identity. Therefore, glimpses into the witch-hunter's dark actions open up identity-driven, hermeneutic possibilities for virtual tourists.

Each film's witch-hunter antagonist shares similar traits—abuse of power, prioritizing “God's business” over human affairs, and the performance of sadistic acts. In opposition, witch-hunting films' protagonists open up more immediate, less ironic lines of dramatic identification. Christian (Udo Kier) from *MOTD* reveals this kind of identification. Clearly, from his name, Christian evokes identification from the Christian tourist, but he does not merely affirm Christian belief. Rather, Christian's character represents sincere idealistic Christian principles; he often proclaims his Christian attitudes and motives in statements such as, “I live to serve God. To free the world from all evil. That's the highest aim a man can aspire to.” Believing in the religious cause, Christian supports the witch-hunting mission and his mentor Lord Cumberland—until at the end of the film, he finally recognizes the insincerity of the witch-hunting agenda. *MOTD* follows his revelatory trajectory, allowing Christian tourists to identify with the character of Christian, equally striving for spiritual perfection.

Christian's lover, Vanessa Benedict, on the other hand, represents an alternative spiritual program. Vanessa leans toward naturalism, embracing nature and freedom. In a scene where Christian and Vanessa are immersed in nature, she states, “This is my truth. What I can touch and feel. [...] Sometimes I wish I could be a witch!” Although disappointed with Vanessa's “frivolous talk,” the apprentice witch-hunter Christian does not report her to Lord Cumberland as a witch, demonstrating his love for Vanessa but also his tolerance for alternative spiritualities.

In an additional private scene between the two lovers, Vanessa asks Christian, “Suppose they called your mother a witch. Could you really stand by and see her tortured and burned? And still believe you were right?” Disturbed by the hypothetical dilemma, Christian does not answer Vanessa. However, later in the film, he reintroduces the question to his mentor, Lord Cumberland, indicating that he has been pondering Vanessa's line of inquiry: evidence of Vanessa's Socratic prowess and the impact of the two characters' dialectical interaction. Overall, these differing characters' interactions reveal a dialogical tolerance that is rare in

witch-hunting films—a pluralistic tendency to understand and empathize with different ideological perspectives. Tourists witness these discussions and can identify with one or both of these characters as they ponder their own religious, spiritual, or counter-religious beliefs.

MOTD's ultimate extension to the tourist occurs at the end of the film. Historical facts are abandoned in favor of creative storytelling; the townspeople capture, torture, and kill Christian as a witch. Irony pervades this sequence since Christian—after emancipating several people from unjust allegations of witchcraft—aligns with the true spirit of Christianity: justice, love, and peace. As Christian is martyred for his Christian principles, Vanessa kneels by his hanging body and repeatedly screams "Christian!" while the townspeople guiltily slink away, presumably realizing the hypocrisy of their own actions—that is, killing a Christian in the name of Christianity for being too Christian. Similar to the ending of *Witchfinder General*, the ending of *MOTD* is emotional, noisy, and open for interpretation. Tourists are left to think about the religious injustices and hypocrisies found in this dark era of history. Through character identification, they are influenced to ponder their own Christian, non-Christian, or counter-Christian convictions.

These characters propel "frames of acceptance," which necessarily cultivate "frames of rejection" as by-products. In *Attitudes Toward History*, Kenneth Burke explains that frames of acceptance are "more or less organized system of meanings by which a thinking man gauges the historical situation and adopts a role in relation to it,"⁴⁶ "symbolic structures designed produce [...] acceptance in one form or another," specifically by naming "both friendly and unfriendly forces" to "fix attitudes that prepare for combat."⁴⁷ In other words, frames of acceptance "draw the lines of battle" demarking relations between attitudes.⁴⁸ Christian and Vanessa illustrate two historical attitudes: the principled idealistic Christian and the non-Christian folkloric naturalist. Versions of these two historical attitudes are found in the early modern period⁴⁹ as well as in the 1960s and early 1970s.⁵⁰ Upon experiencing the film, tourists can calibrate the frame of acceptance in accordance with their personal values—unless the film's rhetoric persuades them to pivot their stance. For instance, a tourist may accept Christianity and reject naturalism; she may accept naturalism and reject Christianity; or she may embrace a pluralistic frame of acceptance,

whereby principled Christianity should cooperate with more empirical-centered worldviews. In doing so, *MOTD* sets several possible frames of rejection in motion. These rejections are by-products that accompany frames of acceptance.⁵¹

With the other witch-hunting films, frames of rejection are generally fronted as a means to emphasize a frame of acceptance in the background. As Burke explains, “The full strategy for saying ‘don’t do that’ is ‘do do this.’”⁵² Outside of the character of Christian in *MOTD*, genuinely pious Christian characters are seldom seen in witch-hunting films. Even in *The Devils*, a film filled with religious authorities, none of these characters displays exemplary piety. Russell presents religious authorities as caricatures, highlighting their flaws and corruption. Specifically, *The Devils* is infamous for its blasphemous content, such as a two-minute scene where naked nuns sexually attack a statue of Christ, concluding with a scene where Sister Jeanne masturbates with a charred bone of Father Grandier. Despite this seemingly unidirectional message, *The Devil’s* blasphemy reveals a “saying No to say Yes”—“‘don’t do that’ is ‘do do this’” strategy: blasphemy carried out by priests and nuns highlights how piety *should* work—that is, as the opposite of blasphemy. Deliberate negation of what is good implies an initial understanding of what is good; therefore, the strategy positions piety and blasphemy in conversation with each other. This is precisely the framework that Russell uses throughout *The Devils*: constant interaction between piety and blasphemy.

Russell complicates the frames to depict an interpretative mosaic of piety, blasphemy, humanism, and spirituality. For instance, Father Grandier is clearly a corrupt and haughty Christian figure, less humble and genuine than *MOTD*’s character of Christian. However, Grandier does not merely signal a frame of rejection. Russell explains, “Grandier is a mixture of good and bad qualities. He knows what he should do, but he often doesn’t do it, as Saint Paul once said. Then he gets the opportunity to stand up against Richelieu in order to preserve the rights of the city and he does so. In this crisis his good qualities come to the surface and he dies a Christian martyr for the people.”⁵³ Witch-hunting films are much like the character of Father Grandier: a compound of pieties, impieties, sincerity, insincerity, theology, ideology, politics, history, and religion. All of these witch-hunting films—even Franco’s low budget imitation

films—act as multilayered texts. Russell maintains that *The Devils* is primarily a political film, not a religious film⁵⁴; however, the politics of Reformation Europe make such separation difficult. Russell was a knowledgeable Catholic, and Catholic religiosity clearly finds a home in the film.⁵⁵ The web of viewpoints is complex. Tourists of heritage-horror films must navigate through these dimensions, interpreting history and art in relation to their own beliefs. Consequently, tourists are not passively absorbing history but actively participating in cultural complexities that have been inherited by the 1960s, 1970s, and today.

Conclusion

Although historical references and poetic style both play important roles within witch-hunting films of the 1960s and 1970s, the rhetorical arts may play an even more important role. In crafting heritage-horror witch-hunting films, these filmmakers seem to intentionally bristle the tourists—and in that affective reaction, nudge them to think historically about the objective reality of the past, and to be intellectually inspired to ponder their own subjective reality and experience of religion. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, assumptions about religion and God were upended. This context opened up lofty issues—such as atheism, freewill, religious tolerance, separation of church and state—that extend to global, cosmic, and metaphysical lines of inquiry. These questions and anxieties were difficult to answer with statements, morals, or maxims; rather, they became partly managed via “narrative knowledge” found in popular literature and film—that is, displaying “*living out* how some of the problems of life can be represented,” not by merely presenting a heavy-handed “statement of its moral.”⁵⁶ To this day, effective heritage-horror films, like these witch-hunting films, provide such narrative knowledge. They do not present Reformation Europe or the debate about religion with a single judgment; rather, they open up what Hayden White and Kenneth Burke would recognize as “interpretative attitudes.” The films allow tourists to enter a conversation, placing their own values and beliefs alongside the film’s interpretation of the past.

In his 1974 *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent*, rhetorician Wayne Booth, informed by his time, asserts that authors of literature “have been shouting and whispering overt *yeses* and *noes* and *maybes*”⁵⁷ Similarly, creators of witch-hunting films, shout and whisper “*yeses*,” “*noes*,” and “*maybes*” about religious, non-religious, and counter-religious stances. Although critics may discard these films as mere shock cinema, they often do not account for the complexities of poetics, audience identification, and the cultivation of interpretative attitudes. Witch-hunting films are not simple shock films; rather, they utilize complex rhetorical apparatuses of virtual dark tourism. As Booth points out, critics often seek out and proclaim single statements about the meaning of a work. Critics could easily assert that *The Devils* conveys a counter-religious message, without observing the inspiring religious nuances or the spiritual possibilities. Instead, it is important to recognize that witch-hunting films offer “*yeses* and *noes* and *maybes*,” all of which formulate a flexible matrix by which tourists can insert themselves in historical narratives and spark internal conversations about beliefs (affirmations) and counter-beliefs (denials).

Witch-hunting films address twentieth-century misgivings about the Christian religion during the burning times. Representing a dark historical period of death, corruption, and turmoil, these artistic tours nevertheless also offer Christian principles, mystical encounters, and pious intentions, albeit often misdirected. These films craft multiple sides of the historical period into their art. Although these films are justifiably dark—and provide virtual dark tourism experiences—they also provide windows into Christian sincerity, humanistic belief, and pluralistic desires during that time period. Therefore, virtual dark tourism does not only concern the “dark.” Virtual dark tourism can offer back-and-forth exchanges between “*yeses*” and “*noes*” (across a terrain of “*maybes*”) as a way to conform to or challenge the dogmas (both religious and scientific), affirmations, and value systems to which audiences subscribe. Virtual dark tourism blends history, art, and rhetoric not merely to reflect upon the past, but to contemplate selfhood within the present.

Notes

1. Jonathan L. Pearl, introduction to *On the Demon-mania of Witches* by Jean Bodin, trans. Randy A. Scott (Toronto, ON: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 1995), 20; Brian P. Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (London, UK: Longman, 1987), 21.
2. Levack, *Witch-Hunt*, 93–95.
3. *Ibid.*, 108–109.
4. *Ibid.*, 66.
5. *Ibid.*, 84.
6. *Ibid.*, 67.
7. Pearl, introduction to *On the Demon-mania of Witches*, 25.
8. *Ibid.*, 59.
9. Levack, *Witch-Hunt*, 161.
10. *Ibid.*, 164.
11. John Urry and Jonas Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* (London, UK: Sage Publications, 2011), 2–3.
12. Richard Crouse, *Raising Hell: Ken Russell and the Unmaking of The Devils* (Toronto, ON: ECW Press, 2012), 38–43.
13. Ian Cooper, *Devil's Advocates: Witchfinder General* (Leighton Buzzard, UK: Auteur, 2011), 24–25.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*, 25.
16. “*Witchfinder General: Michael Reeves’ Horror Classic*,” special feature documentary in *Witchfinder General*, DVD, directed by Michael Reeves (1968; Los Angeles, CA: 20th Century Fox, 2007).
17. *Ibid.*
18. Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 51–52.
19. *Ibid.*, 91.
20. *Ibid.*, 82.
21. *Ibid.*, 86.
22. *Ibid.*, 87.
23. John Lennon and Malcolm Foley, *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster* (London: Continuum, 2000), 11.
24. John O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 1–14.
25. John T. Elson, “Theology: Toward a Hidden God,” *Time Magazine*, April 8, 1966.

26. Corroborated by Van Cleve Morris, *Existential Education* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 3.
27. Richard Crouse, *Raising Hell: Ken Russell and the Unmaking of The Devils* (Toronto, ON: ECW Press, 2012), 128.
28. Philip R. Stone and Richard Sharpley, "Deviance, Dark Tourism, and Dark Leisure: Towards a (Re)configuration of Morality and the Taboo in Secular Society," *Contemporary Perspectives in Leisure: Meanings, Motives, and Lifelong Learning*, ed. Sam Elkington and Sean Gammon (New York: Routledge, 2014), 56.
29. Lennon and Foley, *Dark Tourism*, 8–9.
30. Philip R. Stone, "A Dark Tourism Spectrum: Towards a Typology of Death and Macabre Related Tourist Sites, Attractions and Exhibitions," *Tourism: An Interdisciplinary International Journal* 54, no. 2 (2006), 151.
31. White, *Tropics*, 121–122.
32. *Ibid.*, 122.
33. Pearl, introduction to *On the Demon-mania of Witches*, 20; Levack, *Witch-Hunt*, 21.
34. Cooper, *Devil's Advocates*, 23.
35. Pearl, introduction to *On the Demon-mania of Witches*, 20.
36. Cooper, *Devil's Advocates*, 24.
37. *Ibid.*, 95.
38. *Ibid.*
39. *Ibid.*, 59–61.
40. *Ibid.*
41. *Ibid.*, 63.
42. *Ibid.*, 78.
43. Kenneth Burke, *Permanence and Change: An Anatomy of Purpose* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 117.
44. *Ibid.*
45. *Ibid.*, 118.
46. Kenneth Burke, *Attitudes Toward History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 5.
47. *Ibid.*, 19–20.
48. *Ibid.*, 20.
49. Pearl, introduction to *On the Demon-mania of Witches*, 14–15. Explains early modern popular folkloric culture, which is represented by Vanessa.
50. Hippies or more liberal young audiences can be loosely associated with Vanessa's carefree character.

51. Wayne Booth, *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 193.
52. Burke, *Attitudes*, 22.
53. Crouse, *Raising Hell*, 53.
54. *Ibid.*, 135.
55. *Ibid.*, 142, 148. In fact, Russell was astonished that the film's religiosity was overlooked, and he blamed its censorship on hypersensitive atheists, stating, "There aren't many Catholics in England, but I'm sure that if a Catholic censor had been shown the scene of the nuns and the crucifix, he would have understood what was being said and he would have passed it. Atheist censors are always the ones to be most appalled."
56. Booth, *Modern Dogma*, 186.
57. *Ibid.*, 183.



7

“Did Those Portly Men Over There Once Rush This Position?”: Virtual Dark Tourism and D-Day Commemorations

Matthew Young

In his coverage of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the D-Day landings in June 1969, *New York Times* London bureau chief Drew Middleton disparaged the event and criticized the entire enterprise of commemoration, asserting that the return to Normandy’s beaches could not conjure the past in any meaningful way. Middleton used the American Army Rangers’ dramatic climb up the cliffs at the Pointe du Hoc to highlight D-Day’s futility, and by extension, that of the entire war:

Here at Pointe du Hoc, an American veteran was doing his best to explain what had happened to a group of young people. The Rangers had come in from the sea and had been pinned down by German fire. “Pinned down? What was that?” a French woman asked her husband. “What was it all for?” a Dutch tourist asked the American. “What was it all for?” the veteran said. “Why they had six 155mm guns here. They swept the sea and the coast. We had to knock them out.” But the tourist

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was no longer listening. ... Today when you look out from Pointe du Hoc to the sea it is not the battleship Texas you see but only a wallowing fishing boat. Did those portly men over there once rush this position? Was this whole thing the climax of a great war effort?¹

In the present age in which D-Day has become an established emblem of bravery, heroism, and worthy sacrifice in American collective memory, Middleton's bleak reporting evokes a moment when these meanings were contested. In fact, his account of the "portly men" returning to Pointe du Hoc is an ironic foreshadowing of President Ronald Reagan's patriotic paean to those same Rangers, whose exploits became a central element of the fortieth anniversary commemoration in 1984.

Virtual dark tourism played a central role in commemorations leading to the June 1969 anniversary. In the quarter-century following World War II, a number of "guides" created virtual tours of D-Day battle sites to familiarize the public with the Normandy landscape and invest it with meaning. While these dark tours cast D-Day's bloody history in generally heroic terms, Middleton's reporting demonstrates that such interpretations were not beyond dispute, particularly given the gloomy shadow of doubt Vietnam and the Cold War cast over popular conceptions of World War II as the "Good War." Fears that the significance they had invested in June 6, 1944, was being diminished—or even worse, forgotten—led to conflicts over which of these guides stood as the dominant arbiter of D-Day.

Middleton's presence at the twenty-fifth anniversary resulted in large part from the efforts of journalist and popular historian Cornelius Ryan, author of the bestselling 1959 book about the Normandy invasion *The Longest Day*. Ryan organized a "Normandy Revisited" committee to bring a group of writers and journalists, including many present at D-Day, back to the landing sites. The occasion was to honor another Normandy tour guide, Dwight D. Eisenhower, who had died that March. "Normandy Revisited" culminated in a ceremony to dedicate a monument at the American Cemetery at Colleville-sur-Mer to Eisenhower.²

Along with Eisenhower and Ryan, filmmaker Darryl Zanuck rounded out the triumvirate of guides who led the public on virtual tours of the Normandy battle sites as part of D-Day commemorations. Ryan had been the first, with the publication of his bestselling book *The Longest*

Day, the first popular history of D-Day. *The Longest Day* played a critical role in educating the public about the events of June 6, 1944, and its success established Ryan’s reputation as a popular historian who had “invented D-Day.”³ Twentieth Century Fox film mogul Darryl Zanuck orchestrated the 1962 film version of *The Longest Day*, whose vaunted realism included scenes shot in Normandy on the locations of the battles they depicted. The film’s tremendous success did nothing to repair the feud between the two men that began during its production, as they wrestled over which one “owned” D-Day, as historian Philip Beidler has observed.⁴ Eisenhower toured the beaches soon after, his first non-ceremonial visit after the war, accompanied by Walter Cronkite for the television production “D-Day Plus Twenty.”⁵ Eisenhower’s death just three months prior to the twenty-fifth anniversary renewed the strife between Ryan and Zanuck. Sensing the opportunities the anniversary presented, Zanuck upstaged Ryan’s commemoration efforts with his own television production, “D-Day Revisited,” intended to boost ratings for the television debut of *The Longest Day* on ABC. Zanuck’s puff-piece, which replicated the structure of the Eisenhower-Cronkite production but replaced their roles with his own, was an attempt to establish himself as the dominant interpreter of D-Day.

Ryan’s rage at Zanuck having “walked over the graves of brave men” was wrapped up with fears regarding his own legacy as well as that of the fallen at D-Day, men whom he characterized as “jewels.” As it turned out, Ryan’s fears of D-Day being forgotten proved to be unfounded. Although it would take another fifteen years for the next major D-Day commemoration, President Ronald Reagan’s return to Normandy in 1984 revived the D-Day tropes established by Eisenhower, Ryan, and Zanuck. Historians who examine D-Day in American collective memory identify President Ronald’s Reagan’s return to the Normandy beaches for the fortieth anniversary as a pivot in American perception. In *The Boys of Pointe du Hoc*, Douglas Brinkley states that the public viewed D-Day as “just another World War II turning point” prior to the Reagan commemoration.⁶ John Bodnar, who has written extensively on the war’s impact on American collective memory, notes that by the fiftieth anniversary, D-Day had become established as the “centerpiece to the American victory celebration.”⁷

Despite the contested nature of commemoration in the 1960s, the revival of attention to D-Day beginning in the Reagan era is a story of continuity rather than change; the enduring impact of the earlier commemorations enabled politicians, filmmakers, and other opinion-shapers in the late twentieth century to invoke an established consensus on D-Day's meaning. The tour-commemorations of early postwar decades defined the Normandy landscape as the site of a bloody but victorious turning point in the war whose success had been determined by the bravery and sacrifice of the men who fought there. Middleton's dour reconsideration of Pointe du Hoc was representative of restive doubt regarding D-Day's meaning in the Vietnam era. This doubt did not prompt a substantive revision, however, as D-Day beliefs defined prior to 1969 were quickly revived in the 1980s.

The first official D-Day commemoration took place on the tenth anniversary. United Nations Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. traveled to Normandy to deliver President Eisenhower's message, which highlighted D-Day as a turning point in world history whose success "depended . . . upon the skill, determination and self-sacrifice" of fighting men in the Allied forces. The speech lamented the postwar breakdown of the Big Three alliance, but held out hope that the same "courage, devotion, and faith" which led to Allied victory would bring about "peace, security and freedom" in the Cold War that followed.⁸ This 1954 message reiterated themes Eisenhower expressed in his famous invasion message as Supreme Commander on the eve of D-Day ten years earlier, as the vast Allied armada embarked upon "great crusade" to "bring about the destruction of the German war machine, the elimination of Nazi tyranny over the oppressed peoples of Europe, and security for ourselves in a free world." Eisenhower's tremendous prestige as a military and, later, political leader was ever-after tied to D-Day's success, which he in turn credited to the individual bravery of those who fought.⁹

Cornelius Ryan emerged as a prominent voice with the publication of *The Longest Day*, which arrived in bookstores in time for the fifteenth anniversary. In telling the story of D-Day as one of heroic individuals willing to endure hardship and sacrifice in the name of freedom, Ryan's book built on Eisenhower's definition of D-Day's significance. *The Longest Day* also represents the first virtual dark tour-commemoration of D-Day.

Its riveting account of the people caught up in the drama of the Normandy landings familiarized the reading public with the D-Day landscape and invested those sites with meaning.

To write the book, Ryan sifted through a vast archive of over a thousand interviews he conducted and wove together a diverse range of perspectives, from military men of all ranks on both sides, along with civilians, to tell the story of the Allied victory on June 6, 1944. Because his account focused on the ordinary men and women caught up in the chaos, Ryan’s work represented a significant departure from earlier military histories, which centered on the decision-making of commanders and policymakers. Its journalistic style captured the breathtaking action only found up to that point in World War II memoirs like Audie Murphy’s *To Hell and Back* (1949) and Robert Leckie’s *A Helmet for My Pillow* (1957).¹⁰

In order to make sense of a battle that encompassed a multitude of individual perspectives, Ryan took care to inform his readers of the essential aspects of the landings, and provided maps so that they might follow the action. *The Longest Day’s* foreword described the invasion in broad strokes, beginning with the arrival of two airborne armies, dropped in the darkness of June 5 deep in the Norman countryside on the extreme flanks of the main invasion force, which was then moving inexorably across the English Channel. Approaching the five invasion beaches—from the westernmost American (Utah and Omaha), the central Canadian (Gold), and easternmost British (Juno and Sword)—was the largest armada ever assembled, made up of over two hundred thousand soldiers and sailors. The survivors of the initial landings successfully fought their way beyond the beaches, linking up with the airborne forces and establishing a foothold on the continent that ultimately contributed to the defeat of Nazi Germany less than a year later. Maps inside the book’s front and back covers provided a step-by-step aerial overview of the invasion, from its staging through the evening of D-Day. Names of key individuals appear on the maps where their actions are central to the story, connecting them to the larger landscape and helping readers see how individual actions contributed to the success of the entire operation.¹¹

Ryan’s book clearly tapped into a latent interest in the reading public, selling some eight million copies in its first year of publication and tens of

millions more worldwide through the 1960s in a number of translations.¹² Ryan, who had interviewed Eisenhower in the course of his research, sent him a signed copy as a gesture of gratitude and expression of his personal admiration for the Supreme Commander's leadership.¹³ The book established Ryan as a popular historian whose reputation was ever-after tied to his account of the events of June 6, 1944. As his friend *San Francisco Chronicle* columnist Herb Caen would often remind him, Ryan was the man who had invented D-Day.¹⁴

Filmmaker Darryl Zanuck was one of the millions of readers dazzled by Ryan's account. He acquired the screen rights and approached Ryan, who had no screenwriting experience, to create the script. After the two clashed over the production, Zanuck sidelined Ryan and brought in veteran screenwriters to develop the script he wanted. While the majority of *The Longest Day's* film sequences followed episodes from Ryan's book, Zanuck controlled the production.¹⁵

The film achieved notoriety as the most expensive war movie ever made well before its release in October 1962, but when it generated almost twice as much in box office earnings as what it cost, it restored the lost fortunes of Darryl Zanuck, repairing his own damaged reputation as a producer and enabling him to retake his former position as president of Twentieth Century Fox. Furthermore, it restored Zanuck's own faith in the appeal of the World War II epic for the postwar generation. Zanuck's son and protégé, Richard, who had been bewildered by his father's willingness to risk so much on the project, begged him to abandon it. "Who cares about World War II?" he had asked his father.¹⁶

Even though the film adhered closely to the book's content, there were significant differences between the two versions. James Jones, a World War II veteran whose novels offered a critical perspective of the war, and who had been one of the writers Zanuck called in to work on the screenplay, offered qualified praise for the final product. In his *Saturday Evening Post* critique "Phony War Films," Jones held up *The Longest Day* as coming the closest of any war film to capturing "what modern war is like" because its vast scale approximated an actual military operation. Yet Jones criticized the film for failing to embrace the way modern warfare obliterated the individual, forcing its participants into a paradox "of willingly living and fighting as an unhuman cog in a machine because of a belief in

unique individualism.” Despite its epic length and great expense, Jones lamented that because the film cut out the wide range of perspectives of ordinary men and women the book captured, the screen version ended up being “basically a documentary, and like history it records the personalities of generals ... and does not record more than a glimpse of the personalities of ... privates.”¹⁷ Zanuck’s film avoided any direct reckoning with the dehumanizing aspects of war. The original closing scene depicted a soldier sitting on one of the beaches, surrounded by the flotsam of battle, staring out at the waves as the dead wash in. Overcome by his experience, he sobs as he tosses one stone after another into the water. Zanuck found the scene “too downbeat,” and it was cut from the film.¹⁸

The Longest Day was the first film depicting the Normandy Landings since the end of the war, and Zanuck was obsessed with visual accuracy, particularly the locations of battle scenes.¹⁹ Despite the fact that color had long since become the norm for major blockbusters, *Longest Day* was shot in black-and-white in order to capture the authenticity of wartime newsreel footage.²⁰ The production team developed a close rapport with the Defense Department and secured permission to film amphibious training exercises on Corsica. Although the Army denied Twentieth Century’s requests to relocate the already scheduled operations to Normandy, it did allow the film crews to alter the landing sites to make them appear like Omaha Beach.²¹ The French government granted permission for some scenes to be shot on the same locations where fighting took place on D-Day, further enhancing the film’s verisimilitude. Actors wearing the uniforms of the various warring nations reenacted the battles over the Ouistreham Casino, Sainte-Mère-Église and the Pegasus Bridge. Teen heartthrobs Paul Anka, Tommy Sands, and Fabian, cast as Army Rangers by Zanuck to attract a younger audience, clambered up the cliff face of Pointe du Hoc. Preparation for those scenes involved blackening the battle-scarred landscape of the Pointe, which had been left untouched since the war. Further down the beach, the film crew discovered a buried tank, which they used for scenery.²²

Taken together, the immensely popular book and film took millions on a virtual tour of the D-Day battle sites. Ryan’s method of incorporating a vast array of participants created a narrative that gave a corporeal form to Eisenhower’s earlier pronouncements defining D-Day’s significance and

crediting its success to the ordinary soldiers who had carried out the operation rather than the higher-ups who had planned it. Although Zanuck's screen adaptation failed to capture that aspect of the book, it complemented Ryan's writing with realistic visual representations of the D-Day landscape that frequently included the actual locations where the fighting took place. Thus, Ryan and Zanuck together constructed virtual dark tours of Normandy, interpreting the bloody battleground for a postwar generation with little if any memory of what had taken place there.

Eisenhower himself had hardly faded into obscurity. "D-Day Plus Twenty Years," a 1964 Columbia Broadcast System documentary commemorating the twentieth anniversary, was the first televised tour-commemoration for American audiences. In it, Eisenhower chauffeurs CBS newsman Walter Cronkite on a jeep tour of the American landing beaches. Throughout the ninety-minute long program, Eisenhower acts as guide, repeating, as he drives, tropes that he himself had first expressed in his D-Day message to the Allied invasion force: "everything that could go wrong did, and the thing that pulled us out was the bravery and courage and the initiative of the GI. That's what did it."²³

"D-Day Plus Twenty" concludes with Cronkite and Eisenhower sitting among neat white rows of grave markers at the American cemetery of St. Laurent. Here the former Supreme Commander recalls that his son John graduated from West Point on D-Day, lamenting how the men buried in the cemetery never had the chance to experience the joys of life that he and his family had. Again, Eisenhower invokes the significance of the sacrifice of the dead and their grieving families: "[they] stormed these beaches, not to gain anything for ourselves, not to fulfill any ambitions that Americans had for conquest, but just to preserve freedom, systems of self-government in the world...."²⁴ As the program's credits roll to the Shaker hymn "Simple Gifts," the two men shrink in the distance in a rising aerial shot that reveals the expansive cemetery. If Eisenhower represented the ideal of wartime virtue better than any other American, as Bodnar claims, "D-Day Plus Twenty" exemplifies how that ideal had also become bound up with the memory of D-Day.²⁵ Although Eisenhower himself had not been present at Normandy on D-Day, his connection to it and its success made him a natural choice as tour guide on the first televised commemoration.

Eisenhower’s death almost five years later, in March 1969, prompted Ryan’s plans for a reunion of World War II correspondents to return to Normandy to dedicate a memorial to the Supreme Commander in conjunction with the twenty-fifth anniversary. Ryan co-chaired a “Normandy Revisited” committee which sponsored the group that included twenty-five journalists present at D-Day.²⁶ The anniversary marked a moment for Ryan to reflect on the last quarter-century. The Irish-born correspondent for the *Daily Telegraph* had celebrated his twenty-fourth birthday the day before he observed the Normandy landings from a bomber; he walked the liberated beaches later that evening. *The Longest Day* marked the first significant milestone in his career as a popular historian of WWII. Ryan’s next bestseller came in 1966 with *The Last Battle*, which chronicled the last months of the war in Europe leading to the Battle of Berlin. To research that book Ryan secured special access to military archives and wartime leaders in the Soviet Union, making him the first historian outside the Iron Curtain to be granted such a privilege. As he prepared for his return to Normandy in 1969, Ryan was hard at work on *A Bridge Too Far*, the third installment in a planned five-part history of the war in Western Europe. A prostate cancer diagnosis forced Ryan to race to finish this book, which was released in 1974 soon after his death at age fifty-four.

In a retrospective interview with *Look* magazine in 1969, Ryan reflected on his motivations for writing *The Longest Day*. He recalled his frustration at his inability to capture the momentous event as a young journalist, which for him was bound up in the valiant actions of the individuals in the landing forces:

I felt a total inadequacy trying to report. I felt angry that there was no way to tell the story without getting inside the men who were living it. In some vague, unformed way, I knew I had to get this down on paper. I had to be able to say, “this is the way it was.” If I’d been a soldier, I might have had a kind of cynicism. I might not have been interested in finding out why. But I was just young enough, just eager enough to be mad at myself for not really knowing. I determined to find out the stupid things, the mad things, the courageous things. I simply had to know—that was all.²⁷

The demands of his career, during and after the war, prevented him from getting to the story. A return trip to Normandy in 1949 provided the impetus:

Nobody, nobody anywhere, knew which men had landed on D-Day in the first wave. What an appalling thing. I understood it; who had the time to record such incidentals? Seriously now, I began to think about writing a book.

He also offered this assessment of the enduring popularity of his book:

I have wondered why the attention continues in such intensity, why the book sold so well everywhere. Perhaps it has something to do with the rash of books—novels—that began to be issued after the end of the war: sadism, sex, psychoanalytic messages. *The Longest Day* told about people caught up in conflict; men I call knights who did their best, and this was called courage. ... I've tried to show that man can and will prevail even under the worst circumstances. That was the story of D-Day: of individuals who did what had to be done to save our world. I tried to report it. Their success was the book's success. That's why I dedicated it to "the men of D-Day."

Does this sound odd in 1969? Behind Omaha Beach there's a cemetery with nine thousand GIs in it. On one of the crosses is a parent's inscription: "Into the great mosaic of victory, this priceless jewel was set." I have tried to write about jewels.²⁸

Ryan's wife Kathryn characterized him as "obsessed" with Normandy, and he frequently told her that he wanted to be buried among the American dead there. "Nobody knew their names until I began research for *The Longest Day*," he told her. "I guess I wrote [it] because I never understood why nobody seemed to care about the names of the ordinary men and the civilians involved. If I ever did anything right in my life, I made their names immortal." In writing about them, he put names and faces on the men Eisenhower credited for destroying the German war machine. Called upon to "save our world," the men who fought were owed recognition for their sacrifice.²⁹

The notoriety Ryan earned from the book generated a stream of hundreds of unannounced visitors to his Connecticut home, veterans and

their family members, seeking a combination of affirmation, solace, and absolution, leading Ryan to quip that he and his wife Kathryn Morgan Ryan had become a parallel Veterans Administration. Among the thousands of letters Ryan received from his readers was one from the mother of an Army Ranger whose son was paralyzed on D-Day. After a horrific ten-year struggle in a military hospital, the veteran died, but his nurses contrasted his peaceful attitude at the moment of his death with “so many of the boys ... who were so embittered that they went out swearing.”³⁰ Ryan perceived that these former warriors, now the middle-aged “portly men” Middleton described, were not receiving the recognition they deserved, and this disturbed him profoundly. Bound up in this was a fear that his own efforts, despite the success it had brought him, would amount to nothing. Taking the public on virtual tours of the Normandy beaches had become Ryan’s mission, made all the more critical by his perception that the postwar generation’s low regard for the war lay on a spectrum ranging from indifference to disdain.

In 1969 Ryan appealed directly to President Nixon for support for his tour plans. In his letter, Ryan embedded the memory of Eisenhower in his “victory mosaic” metaphor:

On one of the crosses above the beaches of Normandy some parent or maybe a sweetheart had inscribed on one of the crosses this epitaph: “Into the great mosaic of victory this priceless jewel was set.” The last piece of that mosaic has now been added to the crown of victory—Dwight David Eisenhower. We return to pay homage to him and those men who have fallen.³¹

It is doubtful Nixon ever read Ryan’s message, yet there is reason to believe he would have been moved by it. While his personal relationship with Eisenhower was as complex as any Nixon had, he confessed that he wept openly in the Oval Office in the presence of his advisers upon learning of his death.³² Eisenhower had planned his state funeral in detail and chose Nixon to deliver the eulogy. Standing before the deceased president’s flag-draped coffin in the Capitol rotunda, Nixon connected Eisenhower’s legacy to D-Day by citing the prepared-but-unsent Normandy “failure message.” In it, the Supreme Commander took full responsibility in the

event the landings failed, which Nixon cited as evidence of Eisenhower's selflessness, integrity, and sense of duty.³³

The funeral marked a brief eddy of calm reflection in the otherwise turbulent first months of Nixon's administration. Protesters hurled bottles and invectives at the President's motorcade on route to his inauguration, and anti-Vietnam demonstrations grew on university campuses that spring. Nixon's campaign promise to end hostilities with "peace and honor" appeared empty following his decision to bomb enemy sanctuaries in neutral Cambodia, expanding the deeply divisive and unpopular war. Nixon was keenly aware of unfavorable comparisons with Eisenhower, in particular Eisenhower's pledge in the 1952 campaign to seek an end to the bloodshed in Korea, which he fulfilled following his victory.

Ryan's hope that Nixon would use the anniversary to remind the country of the enduring value of patriotic sacrifice was ill-timed given the President's moves toward the "Vietnamization" of the war. On June 1, Nixon issued a brief release from his home in Key Biscayne declaring D-Day "a historical landmark in the history of freedom," which ended up near the bottom of page thirty-four of the *New York Times*.³⁴ As Ryan and his cavalcade of aging "Normandy Revisited" journalists crossed the Atlantic, Nixon crossed the Pacific for a meeting with South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu on Midway Island. Following this meeting, and on the heels of the twenty-fifth D-Day commemoration, Nixon announced his decision to begin the immediate phased withdrawal of American troops, and twenty-five thousand returned home later that summer. For a war that had begun with evocations of Normandy, with images of Marines leaping off landing craft onto the beaches at Da Nang in 1965, Nixon's decision to withdraw forces stood as the antithesis of D-Day, shading its timing with undeniable irony. Given the exigencies of the moment, it is clear why Nixon failed to embrace the memory of Eisenhower as Ryan had hoped.

Nixon's brief announcement confirmed Ryan's fears that D-Day's meaning had begun to erode. Even though thousands of veterans and still-living commanders like Omar Bradley and Jack Gavin attended the Normandy commemoration, anniversary events received scant coverage in major American newspapers and magazines. *The New York Times* buried Nixon's statement on D-Day, in contrast with the front-page status

of previous official statements.³⁵ Drew Middleton’s prominent coverage in the *Times* offered a bleak appraisal of D-Day’s significance. After questioning the purpose of the entire endeavor, Middleton aimed a critical eye directly at Ryan’s and Zanuck’s commemoration efforts:

It is possible to pardon the eager young publicity men who tell you that the twenty-fifth anniversary will do this and that for someone’s book or movie or television series. But none of this brings the event any nearer. Only memory speaks. Not the orators at the cemeteries, not the bands in the village squares. Not even the generals reliving the supreme moment that put them in the history books. Can it really ever be recaptured? The biting cold of the water, the dead bobbing in the waves, the unending clamor of guns, planes and exploding mines, the stench of death, the exultation when the thing was done.

The mind’s eye can strew the sea with ships, raise visions of hunched men going up the hills and into the fields, recall the shrill of bagpipes and the shouts of sergeants. But this is memory.

The only ones secure from doubt, Middleton concluded, were the war dead, and he cited lines from A.E. Houseman’s poem “Here Dead We Lie,” to speak for them “and all the dead in all the wars:”

Here dead we lie because we did not choose
 To live and shame the land from which we sprung
 Life, to be sure, is nothing much to lose;
 But young men think it is,
 And we were young.³⁶

Despite this critique, Ryan looked upon his “Normandy Revisited” tour as a success.³⁷ In addition to the dedication of the Eisenhower monument, this dark tour served a secondary purpose of promoting the release of *A Bridge Too Far*. Ryan used his associations with Pan-American Airlines and friendship with Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands to arrange for the group to fly Pan-Am’s inaugural Chicago-to-Amsterdam flight; a brief tour of wartime sites in Holland and interviews with members of the Dutch Resistance served as a prelude to anniversary activities. A group of travel writers rounded out the “Normandy Revisited” entourage, whose presence Ryan intended to generate interest for his forthcoming book.³⁸

If Middleton's harsh criticisms and Nixon's quiet avoidance did not faze Ryan, Zanuck's attempt to exploit D-Day's memory and upstage him with a tour-commemoration of his own caused Ryan to fly into an apoplectic rage. ABC touted the first televised broadcast of *The Longest Day* as "Never So Timely! Never So Great! See It During the 25th Anniversary of Year of D-Day."³⁹ As a prelude to this event, on Sunday, June 1, it aired Zanuck's hour-long documentary "D-Day Revisited," in which he guided viewers on a tour of pivotal moments of the Normandy landings with clips of famous scenes from the film.

The narrative structure of Zanuck's "D-Day Revisited" mimics that of the Cronkite-Eisenhower "D-Day Plus Twenty," save for the fact that Zanuck stands alone, positioning himself as a historian-filmmaker, and highlighting his own "personal conclusions and viewpoints ... [that] far transcend the making of a film."⁴⁰ Ryan is never mentioned, and his book is literally cast aside. The program opens with Zanuck reading *The Longest Day* at his desk. He quickly closes the book and sets it down as he introduces his audience to the significance of D-Day in grandiose terms: "In the entire history of warfare, no undertaking had ever approached, in size or stakes, the D-Day Invasion. The future history of the world hung in the balance, and if its outcome had been otherwise, it is quite possible you and I would not be here today."⁴¹ "Revisited" places Zanuck at the center of the story, as he takes his viewers by helicopter tour over Normandy to Omaha, Utah, Pointe du Hoc, Pegasus Bridge, the Ouistreham Casino and other prominent locations. The master filmmaker casts himself in the roles of tour guide, historian, and director, with the camera showing him instructing the film crew, emerging from his helicopter resplendent in a flowing scarf and wrap-around sunglasses, and demonstrating his fluency with the French language and culture as a *bon vivant*. Zanuck conducts no interviews with historians or D-Day participants; rather, he has lengthy conversations with locals without translation, so audiences without a knowledge of French are left with little idea what is said; when a railroad worker indicates that he served in the Resistance, Zanuck gives him a pat on the back. In another scene, when a pretty young waitress reveals her ignorance about the war in the course of a brief flirtation with Zanuck, the filmmaker takes the opportunity to teach her about the importance of the British Airborne landing

at the Pegasus Bridge in front of her café (no attention is paid to the sign explaining the event affixed to the bridge that the woman must have passed several times a day). “Revisited” next cuts to Richard Burton in the Pegasus Bridge scene from *The Longest Day*. No images or other footage related to June 6, 1944, were utilized in “Revisited,” but the contrast with Zanuck’s scenes, shot in color, gives the black-and-white scenes from the 1962 film an authentic newsreel feel.

Just like the Cronkite-Eisenhower program, Zanuck’s “Revisited” concludes in the American cemetery at St. Laurent. As he walks among the rows of war dead, Zanuck laments that *The Longest Day* did not have the anti-war impact he desired, despite being the most successful black-and-white film to that point in history:

In the seven years that have passed since I finished the *Longest Day*, we have had Korea, the Middle East conflict between Israel and the Arabs, revolts and wars in more than half of Africa. And now, we have Vietnam. Clearly, my ideal did not materialize. There are more than nine thousand American soldiers buried here at Omaha. Untold thousands of British, French, and Germans are buried in similar cemeteries elsewhere. If these men had a voice in the matter, I am sure there would be no more wars.⁴²

Zanuck also replicated the closing aerial shot in “D-Day Plus Twenty,” slowly shrinking to obscurity as he walked along the rows of war dead. It is telling that around this time, Zanuck nixed a similar closing scene in *Patton*, in which a tight shot of the general’s grave in a Luxembourg war cemetery would slowly draw away to encompass the thousands of Third Army dead surrounding it, claiming that it was “too downbeat.”⁴³ “D-Day Revisited” mimics the basic structure of “D-Day Plus Twenty” to such a close degree that it represents a bald attempt by Zanuck to supplant Eisenhower as the interpreter of D-Day. By effectively erasing Ryan’s contributions as well, the program imbued Zanuck with authoritative powers to speak for the war dead and create a film intended to end all wars. In addition to being a work of unabashed egotism, it was intended as a puff-piece to prime ABC’s audience for the commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the event, the inaugural television broadcast of *The Longest Day*.

The reaction of Ryan's wife, Kathryn, a writer and collaborator with her husband on his projects, is telling. From their home in Connecticut, she vented her outrage to *TV Guide* editor Merrill Panitt at Zanuck's program, which she characterized as having "overtones reminiscent of a barker's come-on at a county fair." Her letter, which she requested to be published in the *TV Guide* letters section, captured her husband's sentiments precisely:

In the midst of his celebration of himself, [Zanuck] might do well to read *The Longest Day* dedication published in the book, but written on a single sheet of paper ten years before the book itself was finished—or Zanuck ever heard of it. It reads: 'For all the men of D-Day.' They, not Mr. Zanuck, made "The Longest Day."⁴⁴

"Revisited" aired in France on June 11, the same date Ryan was scheduled to participate in a televised panel discussion on D-Day on French television as part of his tour.⁴⁵ Ryan captured his rage in a flurry of notes written on a pad of hotel stationery:

[Zanuck] has appropriated a saga which belongs not to him but to the men to died ...

a grave robber—

I do not seek publicity by walking over the graves of brave men—

I dedicated my book for all the men of D-Day[,] I did not dedicate it to Darryl F. Zanuck....

I HAVE NO INTENTION OF FIGHTING IN THE GUTTER WITH ZANUCK AFTER ALL IF YOU LIE IN THE GUTTER YOU MUST EXPECT TO EAT WITH PIGS....

Remembering the war dead a promotion piece for box office bid....

The Longest Day was film about of [*sic*] Normandy and the men who were buried there

D-Day Revisited is a film about Zanuck.⁴⁶

While Ryan condemned the filmmaker for using the heroic deeds of those who served at D-Day for his own selfish ends, the financial end of the deal must be understood. A year prior to the commemoration efforts, Ryan had learned that Zanuck had sold the television rights to *The*

Longest Day to ABC, and Ryan sought to receive the percentage customary for credited screenwriters. When it was clear that no money would be forthcoming, Ryan girded himself for a renewal of the earlier legal battles he had fought over the film’s production. Although the matter was never resolved, it is critical in understanding Ryan’s motivations and the struggle between the two men over D-Day’s memory.⁴⁷

By June 1969, undeniable cracks had emerged in the foundation of American beliefs about D-Day that the Eisenhower-Ryan version of the event presented, which had been subverted by the novels (along with their subsequent film adaptations) that Ryan lamented for their “sadism, sex, psychoanalytic messages,” like *Catch-22*, *The Naked and the Dead*, *From Here to Eternity*, and *Slaughterhouse Five*. Zanuck’s confession that *The Longest Day* failed in its larger purpose of ending violent conflicts through its realistic portrayal of the destructiveness of war demonstrated an unflinching arrogance that used the anniversary to promote Twentieth Century’s upcoming Pearl Harbor epic *Tora Tora Tora*, which failed miserably at the box office.

Pericles’s Funeral Oration reminds us that the struggle over who should speak for the war dead is as old as history itself. In this tenuous moment where internal conflicts over Vietnam challenged the collective memory of D-Day, Ryan struggled to counter Drew Middleton’s ennui, Zanuck’s egotism, and Nixon’s quiet avoidance. His return to a theme of writing “about jewels” was part of a larger effort to keep D-Day in the public mind that sought to reaffirm the nobility of the sacrifice of the men who fought. Eisenhower’s death fueled this sense of mission, for it stoked Ryan’s personal fear of the changing of D-Day memory, which he saw coming out of the apathy of the political establishment and the “silent majority” (the yet-to-be-defined “greatest generation”) and the selfish ingratitude of a younger generation of war protestors. The description of Ryan as “the man who invented D-Day” is apt; for it was his work, both the book and the film it inspired, that defined its boundaries in collective memory. Other events pushed D-Day into the background. Attention turned to landings of a very different nature with the celebration of Neil Armstrong’s first steps on lunar soil in July 1969. Revelations of the My Lai Massacre that November reminded the public that its citizen-soldiers were not always heroic and were in fact capable of deplorable barbarism.

Ronald Reagan would become the first sitting president to visit Normandy when he crossed the Atlantic for the fortieth anniversary in 1984. Historian Douglas Brinkley reckons with the power of D-Day in American memory, particularly the dramatic ascent of the Rangers up the cliffs of Pointe du Hoc. His work begins with the history of that dramatic event and then traces out the way it was told, lost, and ultimately conjured again by President Reagan as part of his New Patriotism to promote his Cold War agenda. The revival of D-Day memory—beginning in the Reagan era and reaching its current place as the “centerpiece” of American WWII commemoration—suggests that the meaning of D-Day, first defined by Eisenhower and expanded upon by Ryan, had by this point established itself in American collective memory. The Normandy landscape was inextricably bound up in the belief that D-Day’s success was due to the individual sacrifice, bravery, and valor of hundreds of thousands of Allied troops. Beginning with Ryan’s book, which linked the actions of individuals to the D-Day battle sites, subsequent visual media representations led the postwar generation on virtual tours, familiarizing the public with key locations and investing those places with meaning.

Events of the recent past demonstrate that Ryan’s fear of the possibility that D-Day would be forgotten, so evident in Middleton’s doubts about the exploits of “portly men” in June 1969, was unfounded. The tour guides themselves played a critical role in defining D-Day for the present. Eisenhower’s death, coming just months before the twenty-fifth anniversary, renewed the struggle between Ryan and Zanuck over who would control the memory of D-Day. Ryan saw himself as the natural heir to Eisenhower’s legacy, and though his claims appear stronger than Zanuck’s given his role in reconstructing the past in light of the former Supreme Commander’s perspective, Middleton’s admonition that D-Day’s “owners” had a fiduciary relationship to its memory is important to consider. Memory is always bound up with present interests, and the fact remains that both men’s claims to the memory of June 6, 1944, contained a significant element of self-interest. Even so, the virtual dark tours orchestrated by Ryan, Zanuck, and Eisenhower provided the public with a visual and symbolic knowledge of the Normandy landscape that continues to shape the present understanding of D-Day.

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8

Thanaviewing, the Aokigahara Forest, and Orientalism: Rhetorical Separations Between the Self and the Other in *The Forest*

Emma Frances Bloomfield

Nestled at the base of Mount Fuji, Japan, the Aokigahara Forest is a gorgeous expanse of trees and wildlife. The “sea of trees” emerged after an eruption from Mount Fuji flooded the area with lava and allowed new plant and animal life to thrive. Mount Fuji and Aokigahara have been important parts of Japanese mythology and history,¹ the former now being a World Cultural Heritage site due to its religious temples and the latter having been an inspiration in art and literature.² The area’s natural beauty attracts hikers and mountain climbers exploring the forest, its famous ice caves,³ and its diversity of animals and insects such as butterflies.⁴ But Aokigahara’s splendor covers a sinister association: suicide. Upwards of 100 people commit suicide there each year.⁵ This number is considered an underestimate because of the difficulty in locating and retrieving bodies from within the dense forest.⁶ Although suicide rates have been in decline worldwide with rising economic prosperity,⁷ they still trouble many developed countries, including Japan,⁸ which has one of the highest suicide rates in the world.⁹

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Some scholars attribute the prevalence of suicide in Japan to Eastern perspectives of suicide as altruistic and beneficial for the community.¹⁰ Unlike in the West, suicide is not traditionally stigmatized in Eastern culture and religion. Buddhism and Shinto religions view life as cyclical, so death does not have the finality it does in the Judeo-Christian tradition.¹¹ Suicide can even be viewed as heroic or praiseworthy if done for a particular cause,¹² such as the practice of *seppuku* by samurai warriors.¹³ Famous novels, such as Seichō Matsumoto's *Nami no Tou*, have also been blamed for encouraging suicides within the forest by romanticizing the practice.¹⁴ To combat the persistent trend of suicide in Aokigahara, Yoshitomo Takahasi has noted that the Japanese government and local police have launched prevention strategies such as patrolling the surrounding area and conducting regular searches for bodies.¹⁵

Aokigahara is now immortalized in the American film *The Forest*,¹⁶ a story of an American, Sara, in search of her identical twin sister, Jess, who is teaching English in Japan and becomes lost while hiking in the forest. When visiting Japan, Sara is confronted with many differences between American and Japanese cultures and, ultimately, the supernatural mystery of Aokigahara. To help her find Jess, Sara entrusts an American man living in Tokyo, Aiden, and a Japanese guide, Michi. Despite many warnings from various, mostly unnamed characters, Sara stays in Aokigahara overnight, which results in her and Aiden's deaths at the hands of *yūrei*, ghosts who inhabit the forest. Although many people can and do visit Aokigahara in person, the forest is now much more accessible to global audiences via this entertainment medium. Viewers of *The Forest* can travel with Sara on her journey across the globe and experience Aokigahara without making the trip themselves.

Many scholars have noticed the similarities between Aokigahara and the Golden Gate Bridge (GGB) as Eastern and Western suicide sites.¹⁷ However, only one of these sites is "exotic" enough for a Hollywood horror movie.¹⁸ One might wonder how well received a horror film about the GGB would be, given its proximity to Hollywood and American culture. Conversely, there are no such hesitations for Aokigahara. David Goyer, one of *The Forest's* producers, said that he was shocked that no one had previously made a horror film about Aokigahara, "particularly all these Japanese filmmakers."¹⁹ Perhaps the reluctance Japanese horror filmmakers

show is the same hesitancy of American filmmakers to turn their cameras toward the GGB. Emma Willis has argued that it is immensely difficult “to confront histories of violence and death that are closer to home.”²⁰ But *The Forest* director Jason Zada noted that, on the other side of the world, Aokigahara makes a perfect spot for a horror film.²¹

The Forest serves as a contemporary, mediated iteration of peoples’ obsessions with death and their need to visit and experience sites of death and dying. Many names for this phenomenon have emerged in scholarship: dark tourism,²² black spot tourism,²³ morbid tourism,²⁴ and thanatourism,²⁵ to name a few. This inquiry expands upon our knowledge of this growing trend through the lens of *virtual* dark tourism, or thanaviewing.²⁶ *The Forest* allows for viewers to connect with and experience Aokigahara in a virtual, mediated, entertainment form. It is theoretically useful to expand our operating definition of dark tourism beyond the physical to include the “experience of” cultural sites that happen through media.²⁷ In a globalized world, thanaviewing provides a virtual window through which people can experience and express fascination with the dark areas of life without leaving the comforts of home and the known.

The Forest engages themes of dark tourism that stereotype Japanese people and culture, packaging an important global landmark for the enjoyment of American audiences. It is not my intention to demonize *The Forest’s* creators or place blame solely on this film for negative representations of Asian cultures. It would not be fair to burden a business based in fantasy, simulacra, and fiction with recounting accuracy. *The Forest*, however, does serve as an exemplar of how dark tourism can function in a mediated environment and the implications of such depictions on global knowledge and awareness of foreign sites. In representing a real place, *The Forest* can have prominent effects on how people, specifically Western audiences, view and understand Japanese culture. Given its focus on American tourists, the film could have been in any exotic location. Japan, therefore, is merely a setting, backdrop, and footnote in the larger story about an American journey to self-discovery.

To analyze *The Forest*, I propose a rhetorical shift in perspective toward tourism studies from a forensic (past-oriented) frame to an epideictic

(present-oriented) one. *The Forest* participates in the dark side of tourism: using the pain of others for entertainment and enjoyment.²⁸ Dark tourism is a trend that continues to grow and its virtual variety has been little studied. Viewers of *The Forest* are able to engage on a surface level with Japanese culture and avoid the immersive and potentially positive experiences of a physical journey. Focusing on the importance of place in tourism and horror film as virtual dark tourism demonstrates how the film exoticizes and others Japan through the process of Orientalism.²⁹ *The Forest* is an example of the negative rhetorical and cultural consequences of dark tourism on the silver screen.

Appreciating the Virtual in Dark Tourism Studies

Dark tourism sites provide outlets for catharsis and understanding of past tragedies, especially for those directly related to the site through heritage or ancestry.³⁰ Such locations are certainly important as historical and educational sites, but they are equally important, if not more so, because of what they say about the present and the future. While history lies in the past, memory lives in the present. Visiting and being witnesses to sites gives the event or location relevance to the current day. Britta Tim Knudsen has argued that visits to dark sites may invoke a feeling of responsibility to the memory of those who have passed.³¹ Willis has added to this, arguing that witnesses to dark tourism sites promise “never again” through their visitation.³² This potentially positive aspect of dark tourism, however, may be lost on suicide sites like Aokigahara, where the social contagion effect of suicide might encourage further loss of life.³³ Looking at the past, or engaging with forensic rhetoric, necessitates a focus on who is to blame and why an event unfolded the way that it did.³⁴ However, looking at the present, or engaging in epideictic rhetoric, enables attention to what actions are praiseworthy, which ones are blame-worthy, and what is important to society.³⁵

Tourist sites are always practices of public memory that bring history and the past into present constructions of reality. Stephen Browne has

argued that epideictic or ceremonial rhetoric is a natural complement to public memory.³⁶ The guiding frame of epideictic rhetoric illuminates the effects of dark tourism on contemporary society. As a medium of “modern dark tourism,” films are well-suited to reveal the various ways that dark tourism is enacted, especially in mediated environments, and the consequences of such forms of engagement.³⁷ One can argue that many, if not all, films are voyeuristic and touristic in nature, because they provide a glimpse into a different, unique, and perhaps impossible life story. Media representations enable people to experience dark tourism sites “while not having to commit [themselves] in any deeper sense.”³⁸ In portraying foreign sites in film, filmmakers have creative license to represent, accent, and frame their subjects in specific ways. Thomas Blom has emphasized the importance of accurate media representation, noting that experiencing sites through media may be as meaningful and impactful “as if they had experienced the catastrophe themselves.”³⁹

What are the consequences of negative media representations of tourist sites? Are these consequences amplified by the virtual tourist experiences of horror films? Entertainment is an important source of information that can leave lasting impressions on its consumers. Cultivation theory predicts that increased media consumption constructs people’s expectations of their environment.⁴⁰ In other words, humankind “lives in a world erected by the stories they tell.”⁴¹ Stories portrayed by entertainment media have broad effects on the viewing public and their perceptions of the people, places, and topics discussed. Oftentimes, a mediated portrayal can increase or decrease motivation to visit a tourist site.⁴² Blom has argued that the film *Titanic* spurred visitation to its wreckage.⁴³ Furthermore, cultivation’s effects are amplified when media images become accepted, normal parts of daily life, separated from their media origins.⁴⁴ Through the viewing of a movie protagonist and setting, an audience becomes a traveler on the same journey to a new, exotic land.

These representations can shape one’s perspective by serving as a representative anecdote⁴⁵ that “sum[s] up [the] essence” of a dramatic occurrence.⁴⁶ In *The Forest*, Sara’s traumatic experiences in Japan may serve as synecdoche for Japanese culture, where negative portrayals might deter future tourists or promote Orientalist stereotypes. In contrast to the positive effects outlined by Knudsen, Willis, and Blom, watching *The Forest*

may negatively affect a person's conception of Japan and misconstrue important elements of its culture and heritage. By showing limited, narrowed, and stereotypical images for the purpose of storytelling, films may be inadequate ways to present a holistic look at other cultures.

Place and Virtual Dark Tourism

The Forest represents itself as taking place mostly in Japan, but the forest on the screen is actually a forest in Serbia.⁴⁷ The film, in virtually presenting Aokigahara, does not show the forest itself, but a “similar” forest that has the feel and mystery of Aokigahara.⁴⁸ Willis has argued that dark tourism is “haunted by absence,” so must create “substitutes” for tourists to feel and understand what has passed.⁴⁹ The Serbian forest takes the place of Aokigahara, a substitute for the actual forest in much the same way that mediated images are substitutes for the viewer's physical presence and Sara is the substitute for the audience. Viewers get the impression that the forest represented is Aokigahara, marveling at its beauty while misinformed about its authenticity. Authenticity provides a deeper and more direct connection to the place and thus the people who have passed or suffered there. These “primary” sites are often located on the hallowed ground with material evidence, while “secondary” or “created” sites are located in different spaces.⁵⁰ Virtual dark tourism experiences, such as those provided by films, are perhaps a step further removed, and exist wholly as constructed, mediated sites. Even though they are not physical or authentic tourist experiences, these layers of simulacra are meaningful in that they provide a representation for the viewer of what Aokigahara is like. Those images are stand-ins for a real, physical trip that evoke reactions in audiences that are tied to Japan as a whole.

Many horror movies focus on the mystery and evil of generic locations, such as haunted houses.⁵¹ Few horror films, however, deal with specific, real horror sites, especially ones that are current sites of suffering. True stories are common, but authentic physical locations are not. For example, Russian locations of Chernobyl (*Chernobyl Diaries*) and Dyatlov Pass (*Devil's Pass*) have been a focus of horror films, as well as countries in Eastern Europe (*Hostel* series). *The Forest* is another example

in this rare breed of horror film where a real, physical location is a source of the film's terror. Unlike the Chernobyl disaster and the Dyatlov Pass incident (happening in 1986 and 1959, respectively), the suffering in Aokigahara is a present-day occurrence. Visiting Aokigahara, or marveling at its beauty through film, cannot be separated from its current status as a suicide site, where death and suffering exist as realities for many Japanese people. *The Forest* exploits these suicides for their entertainment value as a proposed source of evil and mystery. Aokigahara is used as a backdrop for a creepy, supernatural storyline that primarily features two American tourists exploring a foreign, Asian culture. Japan and Japanese culture are subsumed by the forest's function as an occult setting for the terrorizing of Americans.

Viewers travel with Sara on a journey to save Jess, experiencing Japan in film snippets. Those who watch *The Forest* see Japan through Sara's eyes, co-tourists in observing and consuming Japanese culture. The act of tourism provides opportunities for witnessing, which Knudsen has called a "performative act" that involves the audience in the tourist site.⁵² By watching *The Forest*, viewers perpetuate the image presented of Aokigahara as real and authentic parts of the media landscape. Willis has argued that simulations or reenactments are tantamount to physical travel because they both involve witnessing pain and suffering.⁵³ Although *The Forest* does not show the real Aokigahara, the film does involve the audience in a virtual, simulated experience of a trip to Japan and through a similar forest. The success and prevalence of mediated images such as *The Forest* can have real, physical ramifications for Aokigahara. Takahasi has argued that suicides in Aokigahara increase when it is featured in mass media and news outlets.⁵⁴ This is perhaps due to previous suicides being recognized, remembered, and honored by media attention.⁵⁵ In addition to the potential encouragement of more suicides and romanticizing Aokigahara, *The Forest* might also encourage negative stereotypes of Japanese people and culture.

Most of *The Forest* is filmed in a Serbian forest, but the scenes of Sara before she enters Aokigahara are filmed in Japanese cities, such as Tokyo.⁵⁶ The beginning scenes of the film provide viewers some insight into the people and culture before the film travels to Serbia. This representation is nevertheless also artificial, as only minute pieces of Japanese culture

are shown, often in degrading ways. The introductory scenes prime Sara's journey into Aokigahara with the bizarre, different, and non-Western attributes of Japanese culture and people.

Othering Japan for the Sake of Horror

Tourism and horror films share a focus on “the other”⁵⁷ and avoid familiarity and what is known at all costs.⁵⁸ Willis has argued that the driving motivation behind all tourist practices is a “quest for The Other.”⁵⁹ By definition, tourism is only possible because those who are traveling are different from those being observed or remembered through the visit. Without borders and identities to separate us, there would be no need for tourism as an escape from everyday life. “Otherness” is also a fundamental horror trope, Valerie Wee has argued, and one that sets up the basic conflict that the protagonists must overcome.⁶⁰ The duality of self and other represented in both tourism and horror films encourages a feeling of separation and distance, pitting the two against each other as a way to define the self.⁶¹ This interplay between identification and division is called “consubstantiality,” where people simultaneously recognize themselves as similar to and different from another person.⁶² Kenneth Burke called consubstantiality a fundamental part of communication and a fundamental way that people engage with one another.⁶³ In *The Forest*, the audience can identify with Sara's plight and determination to reach her sister, while being aware of the physical distance and separation between them.

Viewers are thus positioned on Sara's side against the haunting, mysterious, and foreign beliefs of the Japanese people. Producer Goyer noted that the lack of “traditional Judeo-Christian mythology” was one of the “allures” of the film. He argued that “Japanese folklore ... feels ... like something ‘other.’”⁶⁴ The key conflict that sets up the tense, suspenseful moments is the trapped American, vulnerable in Japan without a sense of comfort or understanding. The audience feels that same culture shock and “fish-out-of-water” mentality along with Sara, prompting fear and skepticism. Sara's arrival in Japan is not filled with the wonder and excitement of tourism, but rather with fear for Jess and the commitment to

rescue her. The scenes of Japan and its people are limited and serve to heighten the tension and terror of an American in a foreign, and thus dangerous, country, instead of exploring its intricacies. In line with Edward Said's theory of Orientalism, *The Forest* others Japanese people and undermines its culture, specifically adapting Japanese folklore and film techniques in order to create an eerie, unexamined environment.

The Forest is not alone in presenting these negative images of Japanese and Asian people. Wee has noted that the Western film industry as a whole often participates in Orientalism, by which it highlights the "inherently exotic" elements of Asian culture.⁶⁵ Said's term, Orientalism, features "the Orient," a racist, outdated name for Asia. Thus, Orientalism is the process by which stereotypes of Asia become standard knowledge.⁶⁶ These stereotypes are derogatory and inaccurate images that serve the purpose of keeping the West, or "Occident," powerful over Asia. Oriental stereotypes become pervasive parts of media texts. Said has argued that these stereotypes become "more formidable than a mere collection of lies," because they create expectations and representations that incorporate social, economic, and political institutions.⁶⁷ Since Said's initial theorizing in the 1970s, stereotyped images of Asia continue to plague American media.⁶⁸ For example, Qin Zhang has argued that people's perceptions of Asians and Asian Americans align with media stereotypes that portray Asians as "never [being] American, speak[ing] poor English, and lack[ing] appropriate social skills."⁶⁹ These stereotypes "affect people's intent to interact with Asians" and their expectations of Asian cultures.⁷⁰ Thus, it is reasonable to expect that tourism to Asian sites can be influenced by Orientalized expectations from media representations.

Othoring and Orientalism occur primarily in mediated forms such as texts, television, and film. The horror genre, in particular, plays up exotic elements and a sense of the unknown, "the strange, the alien, [and], the impossible," to heighten tension.⁷¹ When Sara arrives in Japan, she is shown traveling around Tokyo in a taxi. While Sara looks out the taxi window curiously and skeptically onto the city, the audience can only view her reactions and see a blurred view of lights through the dirty glass, while haunting, instrumental music plays. Walking down the streets, the camera rests either behind Sara's shoulders or facing her, giving the audience only peripheral views of the city while highlighting Sara's importance

to the narrative. Japan itself serves no purpose in the film but to be a backdrop for the horror elements. Sara's brief tourism experiences only serve to amplify feelings of difference between Western and Eastern culture. When she arrives at her hotel room and opens the windows to view the city, she sighs and looks out with contempt, as if the city is something she must conquer to reclaim her sister. This scene shows Tokyo most clearly, and even then, the city is a blur of lights in the darkness of night. Sara gazes on an oncoming army and foreign threat, not an exciting city to explore and understand.

Orientalizing Japanese People

While Sara is in the taxi in Tokyo, she focuses on a group of four women in *Harajuku* style clothing with flouncing pink and black dresses, bonnets, and fluffy umbrellas, reminiscent of Little Bo Peep. Fascinated by their strange style, with a wide-eyed and curious look, Sara is oblivious to the surrounding environment. Suddenly, an elderly homeless man appears and slams his hands on the taxi window. Having elicited a shock from Sara and also the audience, he laughs at her reaction and moves on. This scene provides little more than a jump-scare and exemplifies the negative roles that Japanese people play throughout the film. In this case, they are tricksters, behaving rudely, invasively, and even cruelly to foreigners. In a later scene at her hotel, Sara encounters a moving figure in the darkness. Creeping along slowly, Sara and the audience are treated to another shock when an old woman appears from the shadows making loud moaning noises and grasping toward Sara. The audience soon finds out that woman has dementia when the woman's daughter grabs her and takes her back to bed, apologizing for the incident. This scene portrays Japanese people as creepy, unpredictable, and mentally unstable. Their characters are useful only as fodder for cheap scares. While Sara is on the train to Aokigahara, she notices a man who obviously and shamelessly stares at her and tracks her body with his eyes. Sara adjusts herself to avoid his gaze, visibly disturbed and uncomfortable. The scene showcases a bizarre and un-Western social interaction; there is no verbal exchange or information added to the story. These three

scenes demonstrate how the few Japanese characters in the film reflect negative stereotypes and are made to be seen as vastly different from Sara and, thus, all Americans.

A frequent trope in *The Forest* is that the Japanese characters are obsessed with death and have incredibly detailed knowledge of folklore. These attributions serve to Orientalize Japanese culture by highlighting a preoccupation with the occult. When Sara gets to the edge of Aokigahara, she enters a visitors' center that houses people who have been recovered from the forest until their families are located. In truth, shop owners and police near Aokigahara do conduct tours of the forest to recover bodies and talk people out of their suicide plans.⁷² To Sara, though, this practice is disturbing and unnatural. When she is invited to descend into the crypt to look for her sister's body, the scene is suspenseful and ominous instead of helpful and commonplace. The woman who works there descends before Sara and, using broken English, turns to ask, "You come?" Sara reluctantly follows. Many characters that Sara meets have difficulty speaking English, which displays them as unintelligent or unfamiliar with Western culture. Meanwhile, Sara makes no attempt to speak any Japanese throughout the film, not even managing to say "*Konnichiwa*."

Not finding Jess in the crypt, Sara leaves the center and passes another woman on the porch. This woman issues another warning to Sara not to enter the forest. Most Japanese characters in the film function only as harbingers, and this woman in particular is direct. She describes the *yūrei* to Sara and tells her that they will trick her, so "you to do it [commit suicide] to yourself." As she says this, she smiles at Sara and mocks Sara's arrogance that she could avoid the *yūrei*. Sara responds by dismissing the *yūrei*, saying, "If the *yūrei* are looking for me, I'll be at my hotel." The woman on the porch is not amused and glares angrily at Sara as she walks away.

In a scene after Sara visits Jess's English class, she meets the school principal and Mei, one of Jess's students. Despite having been in Jess's English class, Mei cannot speak English, barely stutters through Japanese, whispers responses, and struggles to drink water because her hands are shaking from fright. The principal translates as Sara asks Mei why she was scared upon seeing her in the previous scene. Panicked and nearly crying, Mei says she thought Sara was a *yūrei*. The film infantilizes Mei, emphasizing her vulnerability, femininity, and weakness, unable even to see

someone who resembles her former, and now missing, teacher. Mei wears an often-fetishized schoolgirl uniform with youthful braids, an outfit that appears again when Sara sees a young girl inside Aokigahara. Mei and the principal apologize for the misunderstanding and warn Sara not to go into the forest in search of her sister.

The one central Japanese character is Michi, who helps Sara and Aiden explore Aokigahara. He is very knowledgeable about the forest and is shown to be kind and generous, going off the trail to aid Sara, to rescue people, and to reclaim abandoned bodies. He briefly leaves Sara and Aiden to talk to a man who is camping in a tent, returning to say the man would be “okay, I think.” In another scene, Michi follows a yellow ribbon that someone left to mark where he or she committed suicide. Michi quickly checks the path, hoping that he is not too late to persuade that person to abandon their attempt. When rounding a tree to which the ribbon is tied, Sara and the audience experience another jump-scare as they see a hanged man with a sack covering his face. What should be a somber discovery is used as an opportunity for fear, with the hanging corpse eliciting shock instead of sympathy. Michi insists on cutting the body down and notes its location to retrieve it later.

While hiking, Michi notes that sometimes the forest can be confusing; if Sara or Aiden sees something that is “bad” or “strange,” it is not real, but is only “in your mind.” As he says this, he points to his head, issuing a well-intentioned warning. Sara and Aiden turn toward each other and mock Michi’s gesture with raised eyebrows. They are convinced that Michi’s warning is nothing to be afraid of; it is simply another fear from a supernatural-obsessed Japanese person. Sara frequently undermines and disregards the warnings and cultural beliefs of the people she meets. Her journey through Japan is not one of learning or understanding, but temporary trespassing before she can return home.

Even though Michi is given a supporting role and becomes important to finding clues to Jess’s whereabouts, Sara and Aiden ultimately disregard his expertise. After much wandering, the group finds Jess’s tent and Sara demands to stay the night. Michi repeatedly mentions that this is a bad idea, particularly because she is not familiar with the forest, could get lost, and is unprepared to survive overnight. Stubborn and convinced her sister will return to the tent, Sara decides to camp and wait, with Aiden

joining her. Michi pleads with Sara and Aiden to follow the path out of the forest before nightfall, saying it is “foolish” to stay. Sara gets angry with Michi and quips, “Don’t tell me *you* believe in *yūrei*, Michi. You sound like the girl from the visitors’ center.” Sara compares Michi to the earlier character, whom Sara similarly dismissed as being outrageous, illogical, and obsessed with the *yūrei*. It is interesting to note that the “girl” at the visitors’ center appeared to be Sara’s age, but is described by Sara as being much younger, and perhaps, more inexperienced and ignorant. Sara attributes these feminized characteristics to Michi and suddenly distrusts his judgment about the safety of the forest. Michi reluctantly leaves Sara and Aiden in the forest, but vows to return the next day to the same spot to rescue them, advising them not to move. Michi is initially portrayed as a helpful guide, but becomes an antagonist when he tries to dissuade Sara from doing everything she can to rescue her sister.

Orientalizing Japanese Culture

In addition to Orientalizing Japanese people, scenes from the film paint Japanese culture, history, and traditions in a negative light. If the characters become stand-ins for the entirety of Japanese people, then the representations of Japanese culture become stand-ins for the entire country, and potentially all of Asia. Common consequences of Orientalism are “distortion and inaccuracy” of Asian culture, leading to misunderstandings and biases.⁷³ Films that negatively represent Japanese culture may influence a viewer’s knowledge and proliferate inaccuracies. *The Forest* primary Orientalizes Japanese perspectives on the supernatural, food, and folklore.

In order to find her sister, Sara visits the school where Jess teaches. Upon seeing their presumed-dead teacher (although Sara is blonde while Jess is brunette), the students in the room shriek in horror, particularly Mei. Their exaggerated reaction to seeing Sara exceeds cultural expectations. Andy Richards has argued that supernatural phenomena are often viewed as natural parts of everyday life in Eastern cultures.⁷⁴ For the students to scream with such horror and fear seems in contradiction to Japanese cultural norms and serves to undermine the perceived rationality of Japanese people. For a Western audience, however, the possibility

of the supernatural creates the suspense that drives Sara's journey and would have elicited such a powerful response.

In the next scene, the principal talks about Aokigahara and mentions its beauty and how "it is important to history," but also that it was used in the past as a place to sacrifice people. Focusing on the last part of the principal's description, Sara responds, "That's awful!" This scene is the only one that describes positive aspects of Aokigahara and its role in Japanese culture. That positivity, however, is dashed immediately by its association with human sacrifice and Sara's quick and culturally insensitive characterization that the whole forest is "awful" due to one part of its history. Instead of asking more about these now-abandoned practices, Sara dismisses them immediately as barbaric and gruesome, ignoring the cultural significance, history, and beauty of the forest.

In addition to Japanese folklore, Sara is struck by differences in Japanese food and its presentation. In a restaurant scene shortly after Sara's arrival, a sushi chef slams a plate in front of her featuring a wriggling and flapping shrimp tail, with the head resting beside it pointed straight up at Sara. With a look of dismay, Sara asks, "You wouldn't happen to have a dead one, would you?" Her disgust at the meal and pointed question draws laughter from other restaurant-goers and the chef, who view the food as normal. The film pans to three women who whisper to each other and scoff at Sara's inability to eat the sushi. Sara glares at them in frustration for laughing at her plight before glancing down at the unappetizing meal. The next scene shows Sara in her hotel room, hungrily eating chips, implying that the sushi went uneaten.

Sara is not shown eating Japanese food, nor is she shown going to any tourist sites before reaching Aokigahara. The audience follows Sara on her version of a tourist experience, which seems to highlight only the negative, exotic, and non-Western aspects of Japanese culture. These scenes are representative of Orientalizing practices, where Japanese people, culture, and beliefs are made strange for the purpose of heightening the tensions between good and evil, normal and foreign, natural and supernatural in the film. Viewers get the impression that Sara is unsafe and uncomfortable in Japan and must surmount its foreignness to rescue Jess.

In *The Forest*, Japanese horror tropes, such as the *yūrei*, are "cannibalised" for the enjoyment of American audiences.⁷⁵ In Japanese mythology,

yūrei are ghosts of specific people who passed away and have returned to right a wrong or deal with “unfinished business.”⁷⁶ Because they right previous wrongs, *yūrei* are often not aggressive to anyone other than those who have offended them.⁷⁷ Purposeless hauntings are more common in Western ghost stories, where the overarching presence of Judeo-Christian themes—good versus evil, God versus Satan—often replace specific justifications.⁷⁸ The *yūrei* of *The Forest*, however, are not the ghosts of specific people; they appear mostly as faceless, decaying skeletons. The *yūrei* haunt and terrorize people who enter Aokigahara with no clear motive or purpose. They are malicious, and they are not given personalities or even treated as (former) humans. Sara is often tormented by disembodied, whispering voices that urge her to go in certain directions, not to trust her group members, or to get lost.

Indeed, *The Forest* portrays Aokigahara itself working to trap visitors, as if the forest were alive and conscious. Many scenes contain flashing images of the forest with haunting music and whispers; the forest itself is evil, not just the spirits that inhabit it. The woman outside the visitors’ center warned Sara that “the forest uses them [*yūrei*] to trick you.” Aokigahara is thus anthropomorphized as an evil place with intentions to murder and claim bodies instead of being a passive environment. Zada echoed this personification in an interview about *The Forest*, noting that “the forest is really the bad guy,” the evil that Sara must defeat to save her sister.⁷⁹ At the end of the film, Sara loses her fight with the forest and is dragged into its floor by dozens of ghostly arms. Sara becomes a part of Aokigahara and can never leave her Japanese prison to return to the safety of her Western home.

Wee has argued that supernatural occurrences, such as ghosts, are oftentimes viewed negatively and posited as “a distinct threat to a safe, healthy, natural environment.”⁸⁰ American culture often highlights the “tension” between good/evil, natural/supernatural, and hero/villain.⁸¹ Japanese culture, however, often avoids creating such a harsh distinction between binaries. Ghostly presences can be positive forces that can “restore balance, order, and stability.”⁸² Because Eastern culture views the supernatural and natural worlds as having “porous boundaries,”⁸³ their culture is often portrayed as irrational and “unquestioning” in American cinema.⁸⁴ These “deep-rooted beliefs” in the supernatural are mocked in the film as illogical, as exhibited in the scene with Michi warning Aiden and Sara about tricks the forest plays or the harbinger outside of the visitors’

center.⁸⁵ While Asian films often “leave certain mysteries unexplained,” Western films reach their climaxes through explanation.⁸⁶ *The Forest*, in part, rationalizes the appeal of Aokigahara as a location for suicide because of the *yūrei* that inhabit the forest. Instead of turning to social issues, mental health, or personal difficulties as a reason for the suicides, the film uses the supernatural culture of the Japanese as a substitute for addressing broader issues.

In rationalizing suicide by way of Japanese folk traditions, *The Forest* ignores the larger social concerns that enable suicide. Japanese suicide prevention centers note that the most frequently reported justifications for suicide are mental illness and family issues.⁸⁷ A few characters tell Sara she should not enter Aokigahara because she has “sadness in her heart,” and twice Sara finds Jess’s pills that appear to be anti-anxiety medication. There are no larger or more explicit discussions of the connection between mental health and suicide in *The Forest*. When Sara’s story ends, so does the film. Aokigahara and the other visitors, such as the man Michi talks to on their hike, are distant memories, a temporary place filled with temporary people for frights and a superficial consideration of the implications of suicide for the culture that actually experiences it.

It is common for American horror films to focus solely on a single protagonist, showing his or her story and nothing more.⁸⁸ In an individual portrayal, much of the nuance of Aokigahara’s societal impact is lost on the viewer. The audience becomes identified with Sara only, losing all sense of responsibility or engagement with the actual place being visited. In this instance, dark tourism, and especially virtual dark tourism, might encourage “a total disavowal of any moral responsibility” for the people affected.⁸⁹ The distance between viewer and place and the narrowed focus on individuals and plotlines discourage audiences from participating fully in a mediated environment. Furthermore, Willis has noted that tourist experiences are rarely suited to storytelling, because stories leave out so much of the larger narrative.⁹⁰ Stories have “narrative resolution” that “necessarily reduce[s] the unimaginable scope of the catastrophe.”⁹¹ The history and culture of Japan is reduced to 95 minutes of a fictional tourist’s story.

At the end of *The Forest*, Jess finds her way out of Aokigahara and reunites with the search party that was looking for Sara. Even though

Sara sacrifices herself in the process, she achieves her goal of rescuing her sister. *The Forest* ends, and the viewer is comforted that Jess is home, out of the scary, evil Aokigahara forest and odd Japanese culture. Sadly, the influence of the forest and its function as a suicide destination remain unchanged and unaddressed and the viewer is left with little knowledge of Japan, Aokigahara, or the epidemic of suicide.

Conclusion

The Forest is a contemporary example of Orientalism, where negative stereotypes of Asians are used for their entertainment value in American media. The foreignness of Asian culture provides the backdrop for juxtaposition and conflict with American protagonists. Horror and tourism both engage ideas of the “Other,” which helps to amplify a sense of the Americanized, Western self. In visiting an Asian country or viewing Asian countries through screens, people form a set of expectations, develop judgments, and construct a sense of reality. With only the narrowed, mediated images of a small portion of a country, virtual dark tourism experiences have the power to shape and contour a viewer’s perspective. In the genre of horror, which is well suited to tourism and issues of the Other, there is a risk of contributing to the negative portrayals of foreign countries and cultures. While *The Forest* should not bear the burden of changing the entire American film industry, it is important to note how the film is representative of a continuous and detrimental presence of Orientalism in mainstream media. When the evil of a film is a foreign country, including its people, mythology, and social practices, the film serves to separate and divide what could have been united through travel and tourism. Indeed, Willis has argued that tourism can bring cultures together in spite of their differences,⁹² but this cannot be achieved through racial stereotypes and othering. In bringing new and inventive ways to explore other cultures, virtual tourism, and especially virtual dark tourism, takes on extra responsibility to create accurate and engaging representations without supplementation from a physical and immersive experience.

If virtual dark tourism experiences do influence a person’s travel intentions, what will a potential tourist to Japan think after viewing *The Forest*? At the beginning of the film, Sara’s husband, Rob, warns her not to follow

her sister, not to go to Japan at all, saying it's a "bad decision." Almost every Japanese character Sara meets warns her not to go into the forest and not to "leave the path." With repetitive cautions and bad omens, would viewers still want to visit Japan and experience Aokigahara themselves? At worst, how many people might be influenced by the "role of suggestion or infectiousness in suicide" and travel to Aokigahara or another suicide location to take their own lives?⁹³

In portraying a present, currently evolving location, it is imperative to view virtual dark tourism sites through an epideictic lens. Instead of focusing on the past associated with these sites and why people travel to them, dark tourism sites offer reflections on the values of contemporary culture and how actions of praise and blame can influence future actions and beliefs. *The Forest* is now part of a canon of horror that underscores Orientalism as a defining feature.⁹⁴ However viewers react to these images, it is clear that the representations have the potential to be detrimental and foster pervasive Asian stereotypes. Virtual dark tourism through *The Forest* enables engagement with a place distant physically and culturally from many of the film's viewers. In following Sara's journey and virtually learning about Japanese folklore and culture, perhaps some tourists may be enticed to visit, explore their own mortality, and brave the forest themselves. Others, however, may become lost in the figurative forest of degrading Asian stereotypes and thus lose understanding and appreciation of the uniting power of tourism.

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Part III

Internet Tours



9

Experiencing Rwanda: Understanding Mass Atrocity at Nyamata

Michelle Bentley

In July 2014, *The Guardian* website published a 360-degree virtual tour of Nyamata Church in Rwanda to mark the twentieth anniversary of the country's genocide.¹ Users engage in an interactive experience, viewing photographs of the church from all angles, as they desire the camera to show them. The church is a national memorial of the genocide, where the bones of those killed now lie on display. Instead of being buried, the remains have been left in the open. Visitors can look into the very heart of genocide: the extensive piles of bones that represent the approximately one million Tutsi and Hutu sympathizers slaughtered are exhibited in the crypt. The clothes of the murdered are heaped on church pews. Abandoned shirts, dresses, shoes, and shawls—all are left, paradoxically, naked so as to demonstrate to Rwandans and foreign tourists alike the sheer destruction of the genocide.

Nyamata is a major dark tourism attraction. Thousands are drawn to this location every year, not least because the bones provide such a novel experience of death. Dark tourists to Auschwitz or World War battlefields may seek out death (for whatever reason), but at Nyamata they look at death

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face-to-face. Can the virtual experience of this—even one as interactive as this 360-degree tour—take the place of visitation to the physical site? Can this encapsulate the feeling of being next to the bones of someone cut down in genocide? In assessing these questions, this chapter analyzes the 360-degree tour to investigate what motivates dark tourism and the intentions of the photojournalist who created this tour, the acclaimed Martin Edström.² Based on the intentions of the virtual tourists and the artist, how well does this site create a death experience for participants? Despite some limitations, the tour does much to replicate the experience of being a dark tourist at the memorial. It also makes an important educational contribution.

Virtual Nyamata

On April 6, 1994, a plane carrying Rwandan president Juvénal Habyarima was shot down on its descent into Kigali. Habyarima had led the Hutu government in place at the time of the genocide, as well as being involved in the “Hutu Power” movement—a propaganda strategy that preached Hutu superiority over the Tutsi. Habyarima’s assassination marked the culmination of decades of tension between these two social groups. This tension had been recently inflamed by the president’s involvement in the controversial peace process, the Arusha Accords. The accords were so objectionable to the Hutu government that they put in place preparations for genocide against the Tutsi. Habyarima’s murder was the spark that set alight this long-planned strategy of mass killing by government army/police, a government-backed militia—the *interahamwe*—as well as the *impuzamugambi* militia (also a Hutu militia, but associated with a different party to the ruling one), and the Hutu population, who were often directed by the *interahamwe*. Killers were armed with a range of weapons, but especially the now infamous machetes. These had been stockpiled prior to the genocide and distributed under the guise of a civil defense program. Approximately 70% of the Tutsi population was exterminated in one hundred days.

Many Rwandans were killed individually; however, the murderers also targeted them in groups. One massacre took place at Nyamata, which lies 30 kilometers south of the Rwandan capital Kigali, in the Bugesera

District. As killings broke out across the country, local authorities and religious figures encouraged Tutsi to take sanctuary at the town's Catholic church. Approximately 5000 people were gathered there when the *interahamwe* arrived.³ Far from recognizing this as a place of refuge, the *interahamwe* used this as an opportunity to trap the Tutsi and kill *en masse*. Witness Cassius Niyonsaba describes the scene:

The *interahamwe* arrived before midday, singing; they lobbed grenades, they tore down the railings, then they rushed into the church and started chopping people up with machetes and spears ... People who were not flowing in their own blood flowed in the blood of others, it was totally awful ... In the middle of the afternoon, the *interahamwe* burned little children before the front door.⁴

Jean Hatzfeld's interviews with local survivors describe how this horrific scene became a memorial.⁵ At first, the *interahamwe* used bulldozers to bury the dead. Yet the rain washed away the earth and the corpses started to rise up, attracting wild dogs that wanted to eat at the remains. As local authorities could not pay to identify individual bodies and give them a traditional burial, the townspeople exhumed the corpses and placed them inside the church. This act was transformed into a memorial, where survivors sought to try, "in spite of poverty, to restore some dignity worth the name of the forgotten victims."⁶ The decision to establish the memorial was opposed by the Catholic church, who wanted to return the church to a place of active worship.⁷ Yet the scheme received significant support from the new Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) government, who initiated a program of creating open-corpse sites as part of their memorialization strategy.⁸ Nyamata is now a major tourist attraction: it is currently number four out of 43 "things to do" in Kigali on *Tripadvisor*.⁹

Witnessing Nyamata

It's nothing but a horrible visit, to the church at Nyamata. You can sense that something's amiss as you get close to the building, cracked windows hinting at the cause. But once inside, it gets downright painful. Not simply

because you know what happened here (thousands of people slaughtered with machetes), but because of the fact that it suddenly becomes tangible. You can feel it.¹⁰

So explains Martin Edström, a photojournalist specializing in immersive photography. Edström highlights two motivations in designing the tour. First, he wanted to find a way of conveying the experience of Nyamata to someone not physically present at the site:

No visitor could leave untouched by this memorial—whose very skulls tell a silent but vivid story about what human hate can amount to. But texts and images about this place just doesn't do it justice. Instead of putting it into words, or trying to portray the site in a few photographs, I've tried to convey the silent story of Nyamata through a 360-reportage. To let you not only read about, but truly wander through, this memorial—bearing witness to one of the world's worst genocides. As if you were there.¹¹

I did several normal reportages from the church at Nyamata in Rwanda, but I still felt that photos could not really convey the feeling of the place ... that's why an interactive reportage with 360 images comes much closer to the story. People can look around and be touched—almost as if they were there themselves.¹²

Second, Edström designed the tour to be educational. He wanted to send a message that such atrocity was and is unacceptable: “With the many conflicts raging now, in Syria and elsewhere, this is a message we always need to keep in mind.”¹³ The tour is not merely a means of experiencing death, but a learning engagement that encourages users to consider the wider implications of genocide and mass killing. This reflects dark tourism more widely, where education is highlighted as a key motivation, particularly in relation to genocide and the way this expresses sentiments of “never again” and social responsibility in knowing atrocity.¹⁴

The tour begins with an interactive 360-degree photograph of the Nyabarongo River, close to Nyamata. Bird song and the chatter of locals can be heard in the background, alongside the sound of the waves lapping against the grassy bank. An information panel on the left-hand side informs you that, although this is now a pleasant place, in the summer of

1994 the river was choked with dead bodies floating downstream. On the right-hand side are the navigation tools, with arrows to look around and a zoom function. There is another arrow in the center of the screen, which you click to move forward into the tour.

You now stand in the well-kept garden outside the church. Birdsong is replaced by the noise of rain, and you sense the mugginess of a wet day in a hot country. At first you see the church itself, but as you engage with the 360-degree function you notice other details: the broken windows, which are the first physical sign of what has happened here; a local guide at a desk outside the entrance with a blank expression on his face; a purple umbrella left near the door. Another arrow takes you forward.

On entering the church, you now hear the rain on the roof. The pews are piled high with victims' clothes. The information bar tells you to scroll around to see how the clothes indicate the sheer magnitude of the killing that took place here. It says, "Even today, no one knows precisely how many died during the genocide. In a sense, it doesn't matter: the number is too large to comprehend." The walls are full of deeply gouged explosion and bullet marks. Religious elements remind you that you are standing in a place of worship: for example, the altar and a large statue of the Virgin Mary on a shelf behind it. The contrast between these and the evidence of genocide makes them stand out as anomalies to the terrible events that took place here. The emotive disparity between these images of holiness and violence emphasizes the horror of the killing. This is especially true of the Virgin Mary, who (apart from a little dust) stands bright white and untouched, her face looking down at the bloodstained devastation beneath her. Her presence is so intense it has been remarked upon in accounts of physical visits¹⁵ and has been a key part of documentaries.¹⁶ The same contrast applies to the altar. After a few seconds of looking, you realize the cloth is covered with blood. It is said the killers murdered a pregnant woman on it.

With the next arrow, you are told to look up at the ceiling, which is riddled with bullet holes. Many in-person visitation accounts of Nyamata have said this makes the ceiling look like the night sky,¹⁷ and you can see why. It is a mass of holes, the in-coming light giving an impression of the stars.

The tour then moves outside to the crypts where the bones are kept. The arrow forward is not immediately obvious. You are made to look around in order to find it and, in doing so, observe the scene. In the crypt there are shrouded coffins draped in purple and white material that seems almost too festive for the horrific nature of what they cover. This again highlights the contrast between the holy and murder. Beyond the coffins are the open corpses: shelf upon shelf of bones, divided up according to type. All the skulls are together, all the legs, all the arms. The skulls are placed in neat rows, but you soon notice that they lie in different ways, largely due to the damage they have experienced in their murder. The one without a jaw sticks out slightly over the shelf, the upper teeth seemingly biting down on the edge. Several have huge holes in the cranium, which cause them to lie at funny angles. What stands out most are the machete cuts: the perfect slice through the head, not even chipping the bone around it in many cases. It is not just damage that you face, but the details of someone's death. You are seeing their stories—the pain in which they were killed—as well as their bones. The tour finishes with some thought-invoking statistics about the genocide: there was an average of six deaths a minute during the killings.

Why Look?

How successful is this virtual experience as an act of dark tourism, specifically in comparison to being physically present at the site? There are numerous definitions of dark tourism and no consensus over what motivates it.¹⁸ While motivation was previously reduced to voyeurism or an interest in death, debate has since shifted towards viewing dark tourism as the desire for a certain type of experience.¹⁹ Critically, this is a multi-faceted conception of experience that cannot be limited to death. For example, visiting a dark tourist site may be just another stop on a holiday itinerary, where the relevance of death is not a primary consideration: “Visitors may leave Auschwitz or the Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial in Washington, DC, with their questions answered, or dazed and troubled, or looking for an ice-cream and the next destination on the tourist trail.”²⁰ Indeed, Nyamata Church is often considered a tourist attraction alongside the famous gorillas of Rwanda.

Yet, the tourist—intentionally dark or otherwise—is still seeking some type of experience from the tour, and the connection to death cannot be dismissed, given the graphic nature of the site. Two elements of dark tourism are relevant in this case to assess the virtual tour of Nyamata: experience and education. Experience is considered an open concept here—from the idea that dark tourists are motivated by death itself,²¹ to the idea that they are seeking emotional or personal insight,²² or that they feel obliged to visit as “the right thing to do”²³ (among other possibilities). Within this context, the tour may be assessed by whether it accurately replicates and portrays an experience of dark tourism, whatever the motivation behind it. Does this virtual tour authentically recreate a visit to Nyamata to the extent that dark tourists can still have their motivations realized? This question is important because re-creation is primary to Edström’s intention in creating the tour. Analysis must also consider the extent to which Edström seeks to educate through that experience. Critically, these two aspects are not exhaustive of dark tourism motivation. They do, however, provide an analytic model for assessing the 360-degree tour, where these directly coincide with primary desires of the person who designed it.

Experiencing Death

Edström sees the virtual as a way of overcoming the limitations of static photography. Yet his further aim of making this web experience comparable to physically being there could be criticized as overly ambitious. Experts in the field have frequently argued that, while a virtual situation can comprise an experience in itself, it is not a substitute for “real” tourism.²⁴ The vast majority of literature on virtual tourism has focused on extremely limited uses of the virtual because of this concern. Scholars have investigated marketing (for example, virtual tours that show potential tourists what they can experience if they do book a holiday)²⁵ and “augmented reality” apps that enhance physical presence at a tourist location (for example, smartphone apps that can convey extra information to a user).²⁶ Some argue that the virtual is so remote to conventional notions of tourism that it cannot even be called tourism at all. J. S. P. Hobson and

Paul Williams ask, “Is it entertainment when you can experience traveling around the Himalayas from the privacy of your living room—or is it tourism?”²⁷ This is especially the case where saying you actually went somewhere can be a major motivation for tourism, evidenced by endless Facebook profiles full of selfies at exotic locations. There is also an issue of authenticity in terms of what the virtual *cannot* replicate. An analysis of personal accounts from people who have visited Nyamata reveals there are a number of key aspects important to their experience, and specifically their understanding of the death expressed by the location itself, that cannot be captured within the 360-degree tour.

First, physical interaction with the surroundings is missing from Edström’s tour. Note however that even for those physically present, Nyamata contains objects that are beyond physical interaction, particularly touch. For example, in the tour you are invited to look in depth at two objects on the altar—an identity card and machete—which are either too fragile or too dangerous to touch, or at least which most people would feel should not be disturbed. Some would also question whether it is permissible or acceptable to touch the bones and clothes. While the issue of presence is still applicable, therefore, the disparity between different types of “looking” is not as intense as initially suggested. Yet there is still a lack of physical interaction. A story from a similar memorial in Rwanda where the bodies have been left out at the massacre site, Nyarubuye Church, sheds light on this missing element. Author and journalist Philip Gourevitch describes his visit to Nyarubuye. His account is harrowing on many levels, but one of the most compelling aspects is where he recounts walking around the site with his guide:

Standing outside I heard a crunch ... [the guide] stumbled in front of me, and I saw, although he did not notice, that his foot had rolled on a skull and broken it. For the first time at Nyarubuye my feelings focused, and what I felt was a small but keen anger at this man. Then I heard another crunch, and felt a vibration underfoot. I had stepped on one, too.²⁸

As well as demonstrating the importance of interaction (not least where Gourevitch says this physical moment was the first time he could focus his feelings), this passage also reveals the extent to which in-person interaction

shapes understanding of death and the stories the memorial has to tell. The fact that the skulls are so innumerable as to be underfoot exposes the scale and violence of the genocide, as does the act of stepping on one. This act directly influences Gourevitch's experience: it underpins his anger, coupled with the futility of his own inability to show respect for the dead by not crushing the bones. How can you capture this when looking at a computer screen? This limitation also applies to interacting with survivors. Jean-Michel Dewailly says virtual tourism fails to reflect reality where "it does not replace direct social and cultural experience (such as an unexpected conversation)."²⁹ Many visitors to Nyamata recount talking to survivors as a key aspect of the experience.³⁰ This is not captured in Eström's virtual tour.

Second, other senses are ignored, in particular, smell. Roger Cheong has highlighted this issue, saying that virtual tourism cannot replicate the "smell of the open spray and the splash of seawater on one's face."³¹ This critique is relevant at Nyamata, where many visitor accounts explicitly mention the smell of the corpses.³² This was a decisive part of the experience in understanding of the genocide for Andrew Blum: "Strangely, I felt relief. The odor exempted us from the need for imagination. It relieved us of the need for understanding."³³ Smell was a critical aspect of making the tragedy real and gaining a fuller comprehension of the death the memorial seeks to convey. It is an integral aspect of the experience, bridging the gap between imagination or speculation and the true reality of Nyamata. This is not recreated in the 360-degree tour.

Third, there is a question of atmosphere. Elisa Miles says, "the Internet is not able to provide a sense of the sacred, which a physical space and material construction can conjure."³⁴ A parallel can be drawn here between in-person accounts of Nyamata and a virtual one. Janet Jacobs bases her research on an earlier online tour of Nyamata, not Eström's.³⁵ Her commentary nevertheless provides insight into the differences pertaining to the virtual atmosphere:

A view into the crypt reveals thousands of skulls that have been arranged on four layers of shelving. Above the crypts, in the church sanctuary, the pews are covered with the clothes and personal belonging of the Tutsis. On the church's altar, a machete has been ceremoniously placed in the centre of

the room. This weapon of mass violence is said to have been blessed by the Pope. Like the exhibits that house the cans of Zyklon-B gas in the German death camp memorials, the machetes in the Rwandan monuments have similarly become fetishized.³⁶

In contrast to in-person reports, Jacobs's depiction is a much less emotive and more detailed-orientated expression of dark tourism. For example, the discussion of the machete is highly neutral. The description that the machete has been "ceremoniously" laid gives allusion of decorum, even detached technicality. While she does describe it as a "weapon of mass violence"—which could be seen as emotional depiction—the factual anecdote about the Pope reeks of a guidebook as opposed to deeply experienced human reaction. The same applies to her assessment of machetes as fetishized. This is a far cry from the shock and horror of those who see the site in person, none of whom indicate they feel this has been commercialized to any voyeuristic extent. The academic comparison to Zyklon-B indicates further detachment from the scene. The ability to step back and draw complex analytic parallels on symbolism is very different from the stuttering comprehension of those who view Nyamata in "real" life.

Jacobs is also reticent about the details of the dead. She describes the number of shelves that contain skulls, but offers no observation on the skulls themselves: what they look like, what she feels they represent, or her emotions. She does not recount the coffins, including an infamous one containing the remains of a raped woman. She does mention a similar scene in relation to a virtual tour of nearby Ntarama Church, 20 kilometers from Nyamata, another memorial where victims' bones are on open display and "where the skulls of the dead are exhibited with machetes still in place; and where women's bones have been arranged to illustrate the sexual assaults they endured before death."³⁷ Compare this, however, to author Veronique Tadjo's in-person description of the raped body at Nyamata:

Her wrists are bound, and tied to her ankles. Her legs are spread wide apart... A pickaxe has been forced into her vagina. She died from a machete blow to the nape of her neck. You can see the groove left by the impact. She

still has a blanket over her shoulders but the material is now encrusted into the skin. She is there as an example, exhumed from the ditch where she had fallen with the other bodies. On show so that no one can forget.³⁸

This evidence demonstrates a clear gap in terms of experience, even taking into account the obvious counterclaim that Jacobs may personally view death in a more neutral manner than others.

Yet this conclusion ignores Edström's efforts to make the tour as interactive as possible, and so overcome the detachment issues highlighted above. The use of background sound effects is extremely important: the rain noise encourages the user to feel presence within a real environment; the shift from the rain outside to the rain on the roof once you move inside even more so. The high quality of the photography also promotes presence: Edström has captured the detail of the scene, thereby making the experience highly realistic—and more prominent than Jacobs's account would allow for. For example, you do not simply notice the amount of clothing displayed on the pews, but the detail, down to the specifics of the material. A blue and white striped shirt recalls the concentration camp uniforms at Auschwitz. Like Jacobs noticing the relative symbolism of the Zyklon-B cans, that level of more factual thinking clearly influences the user's train of thought as well.

Edström's tour also promotes authenticity through its interactive nature. Users exert significant control over how they engage with the photography. They determine what and how they see. Virtual experiences have previously been associated with a lack of agency, where this has been used to undermine their classification as a form of tourism. Anna Reading says of virtual tourism: "Activity—moving a mouse, pressing a button—... is not the same as agency."³⁹ Yet there is a high degree of agency within the Nyamata tour. Even when users are told to do something by the information bar—such as to look upwards at the infamous bullet holes in the ceiling—they still have to perform that action for themselves. Operating the controls forces the users to engage and discover the scene. This is especially important in the case of the bullet holes in the roof as witnessing these is frequently cited as a key experience in visiting Nyamata, as Thomas Odom does:

The disco lighting effects [from the sun coming through the holes] were from various stray rounds that had gone through the roof. Naturally this story horrified the members of the team; they had never been exposed to this level of savagery. I found I was changing in a disturbing way. I was no longer surprised or shocked by the evidence of genocide. I was more frustrated. I wanted to kill those responsible. I wanted them to wait for their turn at the pulpit of justice until the executioner came for them. I wanted to be that executioner.⁴⁰

Edström promotes this agency further by ensuring that the way forward through the tour is not always immediately obvious. The user has to look around the screen before finding the link to access the next stage. This again forces interaction between the user and the tour, which creates a more immersive and agency-centric experience.

The tour overcomes many problems associated with experiencing death via virtual dark tourism. It plays into optimism concerning what virtual experiences can contribute to dark tourism. It has been shown that tourists will accept different levels of authenticity in relation to their experience. While the virtual may not comprise a perfect replication, it does not have to in order to still qualify as a valid act of tourism.⁴¹ Indeed, the virtual experience does not have to be an identical experience at all. Why can't the virtual constitute a dark tourism experience in its own right, irrespective of the "real" version experienced in person? We live in a world where much of our experience of death comes through the media and, therefore, comprises a virtual presence. Tony Walter highlights that it is now commonplace to associate with death at the virtual level; for example, watching videos of executions in the Middle East online. He asks, "If physically going to witness an execution may be labelled dark tourism, may not turning on a computer or mobile phone to witness the same execution be similarly labelled?"⁴² Virtual experiences of death are also inspiration for in-person tourism: "Thus, travellers begin as arm-chair tourists, as the news camera performs a sort of cinematic reconnaissance for future trips."⁴³ Experiencing death and dark tourism via computer or smartphone as opposed to physical presence is not an anathema. The virtual can comprise a legitimate dark tourism experience on its own terms.

The virtual can even improve the dark tourism experience. Some will proclaim that exposure to raw death is the only appropriate experience, even if this is disturbing. Furthermore, the dark tourist should not be allowed to dictate or ameliorate that exposure. Others, however, see benefit in allowing the tourist to control exposure, particularly within the context of mass killing. While Reading dismisses the agency of virtual experience, she apparently finds agency elsewhere, where she states that allowing people to experience genocide virtually and on their own terms is beneficial: “Witnessing atrocity—however distant—is painful, and perhaps there are some crimes that visitors prefer to witness and integrate as individuals in private.”⁴⁴ The virtual tour may provide a different type of experience, one more suited to realizing the motivations of dark tourism than on-site visitation.

Understanding Genocide

Edström’s second motivation in developing the Nyamata tour was to educate. While the memorial may have initially emerged out of necessity, its development has been motivated by similar sentiments. The RPF has actively promoted the construction of open-corpse sites like Nyamata for this purpose. They have also been accused of doing so for political reasons: for example, to attract foreign aid by effectively guilt-tripping the West for their noninvolvement in the genocide or their justification of government policy, which has been described as oppressive.⁴⁵ Despite these caveats, however, these memorials educate to make the genocide undeniable,⁴⁶ not least where the world was so willing to ignore the violence at the time.⁴⁷ Moreover, where the killers often sought to destroy the “evidence” of the corpses in order to both conceal their crimes and eliminate all Tutsi presence, putting the bones on display provides incontrovertible proof of the horrors that took place. Travel firm *Lonely Planet* describes the rationale: “Today the skulls and bones of the many victims are on display. While the visual remains of the deceased are a visceral sight, their inclusion here is to provide firm evidence to would-be genocide deniers.”⁴⁸

The level of education that a virtual experience of a genocide memorial can deliver is disputed. While it certainly provides thought-provoking evidence, Stephen Feinstein says this communicates little about the actual genocide: “[P]iles of bodies alone do not convey a sense of genocide, except the most vivid representation of its aftermath. For example, a representation of the aftermath tells us little about the ‘why’ of an event.”⁴⁹ Frank Moeller’s work makes this relevant to the virtual by discussing the impact of imagery. While “[v]isual representations, photojournalistic and otherwise, are important components of many genocide discourses... Neither images of actual killings nor images of dead bodies explain the killings. Both often leave their audiences momentarily horrified but largely ignorant.”⁵⁰ Domink Schaller also argues that voyeurism will always obstruct understanding: “I am not sure if the sight of these sad relics really does have an educational value. Rather, former killing fields and concentration camps have denigrated into the ghost trains of the twenty-first century that meet the voyeuristic needs of tourists.”⁵¹

Scholars also question whether people can comprehend mass killings at all. Genocide may be too traumatic to be understood or expressed, even for dark tourists who actively seek to experience death.⁵² Writer Boubacar Boris Diop—author of the genocide novel *Murambi, The Book of Bones*—exemplifies this point of view. Diop’s fictional account of visiting Nyamata has been taken as evidence of the difficulties in understanding mass killing: “Diop wrote fiction, not the travel journal he intended, because the novel was the mode through which Diop was able to communicate what he needed to say.”⁵³ Diop’s feelings were so complex that only fiction could allow him to express them. This may be an issue that even graphic memorials cannot overcome. Paradoxically, people may also not want to understand or care. Comprehension (or lack of it) can also be discussed as compassion fatigue, according to Susan Moeller. She states that policymakers and the public have become normalized to the experience of horrific death.⁵⁴ When an actor is repeatedly exposed to extreme events, often through the media, he or she will become emotionally immune to horror more widely. Being a witness—in person or by virtual means—is not enough.

Accepting these arguments fully is overly pessimistic for two reasons. First, whatever the quality and authenticity of the evidence (the corpses),

it is still evidence. Scholars question whether individuals can place the concept of mass killing into meaningful context when one cannot *see* the reality.⁵⁵ Such evidence is presented in graphic and unavoidable detail at Nyamata. It has been designed to do so. It is also sufficiently novel and explicit to overcome Moeller's compassion fatigue. Moreover, Edström's tour ensures greater access to that evidence than the physical site itself. Particularly for foreign tourists, the country may be difficult to access because of geographical distance and the continuing perception that Rwanda is an unsafe destination due to political instability.⁵⁶ The memorial is also located outside the main tourist location of the country's capital Kigali, again limiting accessibility if not simply appeal. Virtual space overcomes this obstacle to ensure the memorial's visibility, thereby promoting opportunities for understanding that go well beyond those able to visit in person. Elizabeth Anstett argues that, where a museology of extreme violence is extremely difficult (including where this concerns issues of geographical location), virtual elements can fill the gaps: "We might ask whether these virtual spaces have not progressively become substitutes or stopgaps for a museography that is in many ways impossible."⁵⁷ It is, therefore, unsurprising that others have concluded that virtual experiences are extremely beneficial for education, specifically in the context of tourism.⁵⁸

Second, reducing the witnessing of corpses to a neutral understanding oversimplifies the situation. Katherine Verdery argues that dead bodies have political lives that can "speak."⁵⁹ We can learn more from corpses than Feinstein and Moeller would allow. Furthermore, neither the memorial nor the virtual tour were created to educate in terms of political detail, but to educate in terms of understanding the effects of genocide, specifically to instill the value of "never again." This is a less expansive measure of education than the standard by which Feinstein and Moeller hold such memorials to account, and such standards would misrepresent the motivation behind the memorial and create deficiencies in the virtual that do not exist. The tour does in fact facilitate more in-depth levels of understanding, especially when combined with other resources and knowledge. Jacobs's tour demonstrates that, while the emotional commitment to a virtual tour may not be as great as that experienced through physical presence, the virtual still allows a user to capitalize on prior understanding

through witnessing. The connections Jacobs makes are very important in terms of the wider comprehension of genocide, such as the subsequent symbolism attached to objects used. Consequently, the detachment associated with the virtual enables education and inspires new modes of thinking. The virtual tour comprises an important educational and research tool.

As a final point, however, there is one caveat: the memorial at Nyamata is extremely controversial. Some value the message and the memory it conveys, but others would prefer to see the bones buried. They do not believe these memorials respect the dead and argue their presence hinders attempts at reconciliation within the country. Their concern plays into ethical arguments that dark tourism exploits the dead, even more so in the case of Nyamata, where the dead are truly on display. Richard Sharpley summarizes, "More generally, the rights of those whose death is commoditized or commercialized through dark tourism represent an important ethical dimension deserving consideration."⁶⁰ Is it right to "use" the dead in this way, and if not, is it then even worse that their bones are made available to anyone in the world with an Internet connection? In trying to widen access to the memorial are we desecrating the memory and the sanctity of the site itself? Not least where there are fewer emotional barriers in accessing a computer than making a committed decision to travel to the scene, will this sacredness be forgotten? The tour does much to improve contact with an important site, whatever the reason for that (for example, voyeurism, education, interest in a certain type of experience). But for some, this is a memorial that should not exist at all, and certainly should not have the widespread access of the online dark tourist community.

"Almost As If They Were There"

Edström's Nyamata tour was created to make the Rwandan genocide atrocity "real" to virtual visitors. Users should experience the genocide's remembrance as if first-hand. They should feel the same emotions, visually (if not physically) interact with their surroundings in comparable

ways, and let this experience educate them about the travesty of mass killing as if they were standing in the church itself. The tour is not simply about showing the user what the memorial looks like. Edström sought to develop an interactive, agency-centric, and immersive event, one capable of conveying both the emotive sentiment and shock associated with a physical visit. Of course, the virtual is not the same as being there in person; the issue of geographical distance will always remain a factor. Edström's own reference to the tour being "*almost* as if they were there" (emphasis added) demonstrates that even he realizes this is not an identical experience.

Yet this should not detract from what the virtual tour does offer. The tour gives much to the user, particularly one without the means or inclination to travel to Rwanda. Moreover, the virtual element overcomes many of the problems with comprehending genocide through in-person visitation: the greater access to evidence, the ability to relate this event to other knowledge concerning mass killing, and control over one's exposure to death. Depending on the needs of the dark tourist, the virtual can provide a *superior* experience than physical presence. Until dark tourism scholars can agree on what precisely motivates dark tourists, they should not reject any experience of dark tourism as being insufficient, including the virtual.

This caution also applies to the capabilities of virtual technology more widely. Edström was "limited" in that he was working within the boundaries of what the Internet can achieve at present. Technology, however, is advancing. For example, 3D technology and virtual reality (VR) gaming headsets are now producing "increased experienced immersion" comparative to 2D.⁶¹ Users have an "all-around" 3D experience and can also interact with others as if speaking to them in person. This once-elite technology is now available at the mass-market level.⁶² Who is to say Edström's tour could not be transferred to VR in the future so that anyone could access Nyamata virtually, in even more immersive depth than seen here? This medium would potentially overcome many of the detachment issues that still exist, including the inability to talk to survivors at the scene. Our virtual world is increasingly replicating the real. We are closer to atrocity than we think.

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10

Hurricane Katrina Goes Digital: Memory, Dark Tours, and YouTube

Diana I. Bowen and Susannah Bannon

Virtual Hurricane Katrina tours expose underlying strategic efforts of remembering and forgetting. Various videos, news reports, presidential tours, and speeches related to the disaster create a discourse that illuminates the public memory function in the narrative. Virtual disaster tours may be defined as the practice of visiting disaster sites facilitated through e-mediated technology. Virtual visitors “go” to New Orleans, including physical and rhetorical sites of devastation, both of which would be available on an in-person trip. This definition includes the use of media technology—such as voice-overs, footage of the face-to-face tours, and videos of the damage—as a means of taking virtual tourists through various “stops.” Beyond making the tours accessible virtually, the producers of these videos archive Hurricane Katrina in a way that makes the efforts of the various stakeholders visible and exposes how uneasily consumerism blends with virtual (and real-world) dark tourism.

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Virtual visits that include documentary, news footage, and application-based platforms highlight unique forms of virtual disaster tourism, exposing the good, the bad, and the ugly of Katrina tours. In doing so, virtual tours draw attention to the *technologies of tourism practices* and their role in unsettling patterns of globalization. A video on YouTube may serve several functions: for example, an advertisement, news report, or personal story. In addition to or perhaps *underlying* these functions is that of a virtual tour, with its own characteristics. The videos go beyond the simple presentation of information; they show how various players set the stage for what information the public needs to know about Katrina, and they also erase other important aspects of the disaster.

Hurricane Katrina: A Natural and Human-Made Disaster with Tourism Counterparts

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina wreaked havoc on the Gulf Coast, causing devastation in Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. The impact of Katrina was nowhere more apparent than in Louisiana, specifically the city of New Orleans. Breaches of the levee system exacerbated the initial damage of the storm, causing severe flooding in neighborhoods across the city. The next day, news outlets began covering the storm's aftermath. Images of the total devastation of New Orleans—and the desperation of its residents who congregated on rooftops pleading for rescue—rocked the rest of the country.¹

A series of failures at the local and federal levels of government contributed to the chaos that ensued through that August weekend.² As reports of inhumane conditions at the Superdome, where 20,000 people sought refuge without electricity or sanitation for nearly a week, and violent interactions between storm victims and law enforcement rolled in, more and more people asked questions about why things had to get so bad before any help came.³ At the time that Katrina hit, the majority of New Orleans residents were people of color (60% black, 5% Hispanic, and 3% Asian).⁴ Additionally, New Orleans had a poverty rate of 28%, over twice the national average. As images continued to come in through the media, it became clear that the people left to fend for themselves were

overwhelmingly poor and black.⁵ Of the 682 people in Orleans Parish who died as a result of Hurricane Katrina, two-thirds of the victims were people of color.⁶

Katrina also displaced 2,400,000 from homes in New Orleans.⁷ Not all who left returned after rebuilding began, resulting in what scholars have called the *Katrina Diaspora*, a term that describes the “African American children and families from New Orleans who were displaced by Hurricane Katrina and now reside in cities, towns, and suburbs outside of New Orleans.”⁸ Over the last dozen years, the Crescent City has been largely rebuilt but it is undeniably different. Scholars have argued that the forced migration of black residents and resulting *Katrina Diaspora* are rooted in New Orleans’s long history of racial segregation grounded in slavery, institutional racism, and white supremacy.⁹ The poorest and hardest-hit neighborhoods were also the last to receive aid and to reconstruct following the storm—if rebuilding even happened. Scholars examining the intersection of natural disaster and race in New Orleans have drawn comparisons between the treatment of black residents of New Orleans during Katrina and that of black New Orleanians during the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927, when levees were purposefully exploded to preserve the white neighborhoods of the city.¹⁰ With post-Katrina rebuilding came gentrification; recent reports show that New Orleans has a significantly higher number of white residents than before the storm,¹¹ a change that some argue was the intended result of the local government’s inadequate preparation and the federal government’s sluggish deployment of aid.¹²

Katrina disaster tours extend from earlier practices of touring areas of catastrophe and provide insights on research about dark tourism. Phaedra Pezzullo’s post-Katrina fieldwork discusses possibilities for civic engagement,¹³ and DeMond Shondell Miller offers an autoethnography of Katrina tours.¹⁴ Lynell Thomas uses theories of intersectionality and politics of memory,¹⁵ observing that initial attempts at revitalizing tourism in New Orleans meant “shielding visitors from post-Katrina realities”¹⁶; however, “post-Katrina tourists expected and even sought out different stories that might help them make sense of the devastation and tragedy.”¹⁷ Documentaries, promotion materials, newscasts, and even apps for smartphones make up the online repository of information surrounding Hurricane Katrina disaster tours on YouTube. Although it may appear that

these YouTube videos provide informational materials *about* disaster tours, over time these videos have *become* their own form of disaster tourism. As a subcategory of dark tourism, these disaster tours went from being possible only for people physically visiting New Orleans to being available on YouTube, making the damage accessible via digital media. The dark tours of affected areas place the already known tourism destination into a new category, that of thanatourism—visiting sites associated with death and disaster. Catherine Roberts and Philip Stone explain that “traveling to meet with the dead has long been a feature of the touristic landscape.”¹⁸ People’s fascination with going to places that have witnessed death is evident in narratives of Katrina. Prominent tour companies (such as Gray Line Tours) and smaller businesses (such as Tours by Isabelle) responded to the disaster by offering tours led by survivors for audiences wanting to see the damage.

While the tours may have brought curious leisure tourists, educational groups, and even survivors wishing to see what remained of their city,¹⁹ the tours’ virtual presence developed. People can find them by going online and doing a basic search for “Katrina Disaster Tours.”²⁰ Dark online tourism reveals digital public memory practices in an age of globalization; these strategies are publicly available via popular video-sharing websites. The tours provide insights about the strategic rhetorical choices of the companies regarding this “sensitive” topic. The tours are shaped to portray a unifying view in place of one that emphasizes racial and class differences by occluding the visuals that, in the midst of the disaster, made those differences so apparent. This dynamic demonstrates an underlying component of dark tourism: the quest for a unifying and heroic (“persevering”) interpretation of historical disaster, at the expense of forgetting major disruptive elements in the history itself.

Virtual Memoryscapes in YouTube Katrina Disaster Tours

To understand the value of having access to dark tours via the Internet, how narratives in YouTube videos fare with those of the in-person visits, and how these videos help to carve public memory²¹ of Hurricane Katrina—topics that lie at the intersection of tourism, public memory, technology, and

globalization—an approach is necessary that meets the multidimensional demands of this text. Kendall Phillips and Mitch Reyes propose such an approach through their theory of global memoryscapes, defined as “a complex landscape upon which memories and memory practices move, come into contact, are contested by, and contest other forms of remembrance.”²² Hurricane Katrina tours provide an example of Phillips and Reyes’s concept that new remembrance practices may unsettle the dynamic movements of globalization.²³

In particular, new media unsettles the embodiment of touring a physical location while simultaneously demystifying the tour by making it available to the public via a basic online search. The tours inhabit contested grounds: they provide viewers a unique perspective on damage. Media coverage of Katrina tours, while accessible to the public, often focuses on the trip as a shopping experience rather than on what the guides say. On the other hand, publicly available accounts via the tour guides make issues surrounding race and class inescapable to the online visitor. Positive or negative, the various forms taken by these dark tours contribute to a memory of Katrina, one whose fragments can be pieced together by the visitor. Each of the videos we examined on YouTube dealing with Katrina disaster tours plays a role in memorializing the tragedy. Although several parties created the short clips, they illuminate the competing interests and struggles over how to memorialize this moment in history.

Merging of Key Players, Tour Guides, and the Struggle for Meaning

The individuals whose narratives emerge through the Katrina tour videos, or the “key players,” include tour companies, the company leaders, tour guides, and application content contributors and funding sources. The virtual visits highlight what these trips look like through a merging of the guide and company owner, promotional materials and tour, and watching face-to-face tours and attending virtually.

Unlike in-person tours, the online materials must include the entirety of the tour package, including promotional materials and any messages that might otherwise seem external. In the face-to-face situation, these

contextual materials would either be found online (for example, if someone is looking for information to book the tour prior to arrival) or directly at the travel site via brochures or fliers. Informational materials tourists read, such as brochures or online reviews, are all part of the tour. By adding these materials as part of the virtual tours, company owners and the producers of the videos necessarily merge with the tour guides, creating new meanings along the way. The personal narratives of the company's owners set up their business to increase sales and profit margins.

Tours by Isabelle is one of the two tour companies appearing in the videos. In "New Orleans Katrina Disaster Tours," business leader, French New Orleanian, and Katrina survivor Isabelle Cossart identifies herself as one of the first people to offer disaster tours of New Orleans and emphasizes the authenticity of her narrative. Cossart describes Katrina's effect on her life and company primarily as a shift in customer demand for her business. Prior to Katrina, Tours by Isabelle made revenue by giving swamp and plantation tours, but in the years since the disaster, Cossart and tour guide Ginnie Robilotta continue to provide tourists with what she claims they want: disaster tours of New Orleans. In the video, Cossart does not indicate how she was affected by the storm personally; the narrative focuses on her business instead.²⁴ She even contributed a BuzzFeed article, "I Was the Face of Disaster Tourism in Post-Katrina New Orleans," about how she responded to accusations of "cashing in on others' misery."²⁵

A second tour company appearing in the videos is Gray Line Tours New Orleans. Gray Line's business leaders contributing to its narrative include Vice President and General Manager Greg Hoffman, Hotel Sales and Tour Operations Manager Jim Fewell, and Tour Development and Operations Manager Etienne-Emile Skrabo. Gray Line Tours company leaders seem to try to match Cossart's authenticity in the video "Gray Line New Orleans—Hurricane Katrina Tour" by offering their personal accounts of the storm, even though they all evacuated the city ahead of time. They make statements about how the storm did not discriminate according to class, but this leaves out the conditions of discrimination and racism already present. Their stories emphasize a need to shine a light on the perseverance of New Orleans residents in their rebuilding efforts as the rationale for creating the disaster tour. Notably, their accounts do not

detail if and how their personal lives were affected by the storm.²⁶ In a separate video “Hurricane Katrina Survivor Gives Tours of Its Destruction,” a Gray Line Tours New Orleans guide named John Olivard is identified as a “survivor” of Katrina. Olivard provides an account of his experience with his more than 100-year-old home flooding under seven and a half feet of water and, in doing so, matches Cossart’s credibility.²⁷ The only difference is that in the case of the Gray Line Tours, the people giving the contextual information about the tours are the administrators of the company. In some ways, this means that the information contains greater detail because the officials are trying to give a more personal narrative to boost ticket sales. The result, however, is that the tour guide gets less air time, and these business leaders gloss over the survivors’ experiences.

Key players also contribute to dark tourism accessed via smart technology. Through the New Orleans Historical smartphone application, which “features stories and scholarship about New Orleans,” individuals can access the Virtual Levee Breach Tour.²⁸ Although the application is a type of virtual tourism, the YouTube video that describes it is also part of this tour. A collective of state and cultural institutions curated the app: Levees.org, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana State Museum, and the University of New Orleans History Department. Levees.org, the non-profit launched by Sandy and Stanford Rosenthal, New Orleans residents who fled their home during Katrina, is “devoted to educating America on the facts associated with the 2005 catastrophic flooding of the New Orleans region.”²⁹ Another major key player, the Louisiana State Museum, consists of a “statewide network of National Historic Landmarks and architecturally significant structures ... that showcase Louisiana’s history and culture.”³⁰ The key players from state and cultural institutions contribute narratives focused on public education and historical record by employing technology that grants dark tour access to anyone with a smartphone. The description for a public service announcement (PSA) for the application on the Levees.org YouTube channel states, “The app brings the history of the disaster right to the palm of your hand, in a free app. This PSA explains just how cool it is!”³¹ In the case of the application description, the YouTube video serves as another type of informational context that allows users to make decisions about downloading the program. It serves the same function as distributed printed ephemera that

persuade tourists to take a tour, except that its existence on YouTube makes it a virtual tour.

Some Katrina narratives are not represented in these tours. Aside from Olivard's story about his home flooding, none of the major stakeholders provide accounts of the damage caused by Katrina, despite their roles in bringing tourists to that destruction. Note the absence of people of color, specifically African Americans, in the dominant narratives of the videos. While one video shows African American tourists on a bus,³² they are usually presented in the depths of the disaster, fleeing their homes, or carrying their possessions while wading through the flood waters. The stories of the individuals who were most directly and dramatically affected by Hurricane Katrina appear to be missing. The key players craft a somewhat unified memory. We do not see images from the neighborhoods that have not recovered, nor do we hear the experiences of people of color affected by Katrina. A struggle for meaning is present at the intersection of the various narratives represented in these videos, a struggle that is also evident in the commentary posted on the video's YouTube page. Comments allow individuals who take the virtual tours to engage in dialogue about the tour experience and appear to reinforce the unified Katrina narrative created by the tour guides.

Comment sections reveal an intersection between the major players in the Katrina tourism industry. Under the promotional video "Gray Line New Orleans—Hurricane Katrina Tour," the lone comment from "AdministratorLevees.org," states, "Grayline [*sic*] pays the monthly water bill to sustain the beautiful garden at our Levee Exhibit Hall—a featured visiting spot for Grayline's [*sic*] Katrina tour. Our museum quality exhibits explain why the levees breached and the affect [*sic*] on the neighborhoods and lives." This comment serves dual purposes, framing the Gray Line Tours company as one that gives back to the New Orleans community by paying the water bill for the Levee Exhibit Hall, while simultaneously plugging Gray Line Tour and the "museum quality exhibits" at the Hall.³³

Comments also operate as a space where meaning is contested and virtual tourists reflect upon the Katrina narratives promoted through the videos. For example, the National Geographic video "Hurricane Katrina Survivor Gives Tours of Its Destruction" features Olivard, who as described earlier lost his life-long home in Katrina and now leads one of

Gray Line's Katrina tours. The comments focus on Olivard's narrative. Messages, such as "What a good man. Using his pain as a tool to educate is an amazing talent" and "Great job, thank you," call attention to a particular Katrina narrative that the virtual and physical tours promote: positive outcomes despite tragedy and individual perseverance. Drawing a connection between Katrina tourism and recovery, the same commenter praising Olivard for using his pain as an educational tool also makes an argument in support of the disaster tourism industry. This person states that, while they are making a profit, tours also provide opportunities for "rebuilding and education" as well as "opening eyes." A third commenter focuses not on Olivard but on the changes observable in the city of New Orleans and calls attention to what is framed as a positive outcome of the storm. This commenter states that "areas tied to critical and desirable industries have come back" but that "non-viable" parts of the city are what "shouldn't and isn't coming back."³⁴ This problematic comment highlights the person's view that other, less positive interpretations of this event should purposely be excluded and, therefore, forgotten.

The documentary that focuses on local activism, "Disaster Tours: New Orleans after Katrina," includes a dialogue between two commenters about the value of disaster tourism, specifically about the people of the hardest hit areas of the city and the authenticity of the tours. The first comment from *etmeytub* states that people "hating" on the tours need to consider that the tourism industry has to "get the message out" that the city has been rebuilt and is open for business. The rationale for this commenter's argument is that the people of neighborhoods like the ninth ward who work in the French Quarter *need* tourism to survive and rebuild their lives. The last statement of this quote is particularly salient to the focus of this study, as the commenter argues that the tours function to remind people "who may have forgot" about the devastation of Katrina.³⁵

Comments also raise questions about the authenticity of the Katrina narratives produced by the tours, a phenomenon that is also evident in the documentary "Disaster Tours: New Orleans after Katrina." Commenter *etmeytub* argues for the authenticity of locally based tour guides like John Olivard, challenging claims made by Common Ground activists that Katrina tours represent the storm and aftermath inaccurately. The comment admits that this could be true, "unless that tour guide is from here

and lost all his shit too. You don't know who that tour guide is riding by. Most likely a local. most [*sic*] likely a 'victim' too." Responding to etmeytub's comment, Svenson argues that the guide featured in the video is a friend and he is going by a "script" constructed by Gray Line Tours intended to promote a "positive" and "encouraging" version of Katrina. Svenson's comment continues, "There are 'official' stories and unofficial stories. His job as tour guide in this context was to uplift people, to be positive. The tours run off a script that is generic. Lie is a strong word. Different stories or versions might be more appropriate. Problem is most of the time we don't get diverse perspectives or stories—we get the official one."³⁶ Here the struggle for meaning over "official" and "unofficial" Katrina narratives spills over from the actual tours into their comment sections.

Comment sections offer a space for public discourse where virtual tourists attempt to make sense of their tour experience and the narratives embedded in the tour itself. The comments posted under virtual tour videos reflect a unified story of positivity and progress emerging from tragedy. However, the potential remains for these comments to also serve as a disruption to these dominant narratives by calling attention to their scripted nature.

Reluctance as a Persuasive Strategy

Katrina virtual disaster tours have a striking element: they communicate a sense of reluctance or hesitation about taking the tours as part of the experience. This theme emerges from explanations of how the tours came about despite reluctance on the part of the company, a type of *apologia* expressed throughout the narrative of Gray Line Tours and Tours by Isabelle. Although not all videos convey this theme, it is a relevant part of the narrative. This sense of reluctance is evident in both the leadership of tour groups (that is, the owners) and the tour guides. This hesitation also requires explanation and refutation to maximize persuasive attempts at driving business. Reluctance in virtual dark tours includes online materials that might not exist in face-to-face visits (for example, voiceovers and footage of damaged neighborhoods) but that highlight the merging of informational materials along with the tour for the purposes of persuasion.

Through strategic placement of news footage and scenes showing people overcoming feelings of hesitation, the promotional materials become part of the tour. In doing so, the story of the company's leadership erases or forgets the experiences of the tour guides and survivors who may not agree with displaying their personal tragedy.

In "Gray Line New Orleans—Hurricane Katrina Tour," Hoffman succinctly expresses his hesitation about providing disaster tours and, interestingly, these statements *become part of the virtual tours*. Hoffman states that he is unsure of "how the idea of a Katrina tour originated," signaling an uncertain, but also organic beginning. Even though he is uncertain of how this idea came to be, he emphasizes that, "when it was first suggested, we dismissed it immediately." This statement intends to communicate sensitivity. Not only were he and the leadership team of Gray Line Tours *not* the originators of the idea, but they displayed sensitivity by initially opposing the tours. Despite his initial reluctance, Hoffman explains how the idea persisted: "But then, more people recommended to consider such a tour, including our employees, tour guides, family members, and a local convention and visitor's bureau." Hoffman recognizes that as a leader, it is not his position to push this type of tour. However, the push from other parties, as the narrative goes, came from several different places.³⁷

The actions taken by Gray Line provide a contrast to the earlier narrative of reluctance when they go through with the tours. Hoffman recalls, "We launched the tour on January 4th, 2006. It was a cutting-edge day for Gray Line. When the first tour returned and passengers, many wiping the tears from their eyes, exited the vehicle with glowing remarks for the waiting media, we knew we had done the right thing."³⁸ By crafting the company's narrative as one in which they listened to the public, the theme of reluctance becomes a story of success for Gray Line Tours.

The actual tours are also part of the online materials; they merge with the informational materials. The Gray Line New Orleans—Hurricane Katrina Tour, for example, blends images of New Orleans while the company administrators offer their narrative. The second Gray Line Tours video "Hurricane Survivor Gives Tours of Its Destruction" also cuts to one sample tour in which Olivard's story combines with that of the administrators. The difference between the virtual tours and in-person visits is that the guide also provides voiceovers for video footage. The scenes seem

always to exist through narrative interpretation provided by the guides and voiceovers. What also makes the virtual trips different is that they incorporate promotional materials as part of the tour.

The narrative of reluctance is not unique to Gray Line tours. In “New Orleans Katrina Disaster Tours,” Isabelle Cossart explains that when tourists come to her company, she asks what kind of tour they want, hoping that they will choose their traditional options. To Cossart’s perceived disappointment, they continuously choose the Katrina tour. She expresses feeling hopeful to lead a plantation tour or city tour, but based on demand, she leads the Katrina tour. It is interesting that Cossart appears at the top of this set of videos showing hesitation when she has spent much of her professional career over the last ten years stating how important the tours are to other media outlets. As someone who experienced the storm and a tour guide who employs other guides, she is the most authentic choice. Therefore, her response to the demand for the tours provides a glimpse of the mixed responses that residents may have about opening up their personal experience with disaster to the public. The video makes visible an important dimension of tourism: giving visitors what they want.³⁹

Hesitation also serves as a persuasive strategy. By addressing possible uncertainty from audiences, reluctance turns into resolve. For example, the video “Hurricane Katrina Tour” addresses possible doubts about cultural insensitivity: “This tour is operated with the utmost sensitivity to the thousands of local residents who lost their homes and possessions and who are still trying to get their lives back in order.” The virtual excursion also addresses safety concerns: “The tour travels only on major thoroughgs that are open to all vehicular traffic. Passengers will not be allowed to exit the vehicles, except at the refreshment stop,” and just in case people want to base their decision on reviews, “Feedback from this tour has been 100% positive with the standard response being: You can’t believe it until you see it with your own eyes.”⁴⁰

Leaders of the tours are not the only ones who display a sense of reluctance about the tours; Olivard also plays into this narrative. In the video “Hurricane Katrina Survivor Gives Tours of Its Destruction,” Olivard states, “I was semi-reluctant because I would have to live through Katrina once again, but it turned out to be pretty good therapy actually.” He also reassures the tourists that it is okay for them to take the tour: “I look at it

as educational. I look at it as something great for the city of New Orleans because 80% of the city was underwater, and we're making it right, and I'm proud of the city." Olivard acknowledges that audiences might also experience this sense of reluctance, and uses it as an opportunity to make the pitch for the tour. It is okay for people to feel hesitation since he felt it, too; however, his goal appears to be to persuade people to take the tour as a means to give back to the city.⁴¹

Reluctance to go on the tours was a typical response, which is why it makes up such a sizeable element of virtual e-tours. Reluctance was not evident in all of the narratives, but it was available on the first set of hits. Overcoming the obstacle of hesitation on the part of the audience not only becomes a marketing tool but also helps to frame the way in which Katrina tours will be remembered. Moreover, while hesitation appears to be a personal reaction, having the videos take on this feeling enables it to become part of the memory of Katrina tours. Because this hesitation is not just an isolated feeling that stops one individual, and can potentially prevent large numbers of people from visiting New Orleans, overcoming these feelings is an important part of memorializing the disaster. Together, promotional materials and news materials, through images of the tours and voiceovers, serve as virtual tours that advance the perspective that the tours are an appropriate response to the disaster.

Agenda-Setting/Memory-Setting of a Cohesive National Narrative

Both the identity of key players and their sense of reluctance lay the groundwork for what gets memorialized through the tour. Over the course of the videos, a clear agenda of New Orleans's place in history, levee breaches, and relevant structures emerges, along with a narrative of overcoming adversity. This narrative requires forgetting alternative memories and experiences that do not fit a model of consumerism and profit for these businesses.

The virtual tour "Gray Line New Orleans—Hurricane Katrina Tour" provides the clearest sense of how Gray Line made decisions about the narrative. Stating that "there were several elements we needed to include,"

Fewel reminds viewers that certain parts of the story are crucial to the history of Katrina. First, Fewel wants to provide tourists with the feelings that New Orleans residents experienced right before and during the storm through a timeline: “When do we leave? Do we leave? How long do we leave?” These questions dominated people’s thoughts and conversations as the hurricane neared and Fewel expresses that residents were glued to the television following the storm. The second element of the tour includes certain landmarks that repeatedly appeared on television, such as “the Superdome which was the shelter of last resort and the convention center where people waited to be bussed out of the city.” Perhaps tourists know both of the landmarks from seeing them on the news, but they may not have understood the functions of each place. Having an awareness of what each of these structures meant to the overall narrative of Katrina and seeing them as relevant landmarks are major components of the tour. Beyond expressing the tension of the timeline and exploring landmarks, Fewel states that “the most important part of the story” is the “four major levee breaks and the neighborhoods surround[ing].”⁴² Along with the evacuation routes, those elements frame the story of struggle and survival, a narrative that seems to ignore the human-made aspect of the disaster.

Another example of Fewel’s attempt to create a single cohesive narrative occurs when he compares Katrina to another historical event—Pearl Harbor. The voiceover on the video “Gray Line New Orleans—Hurricane Katrina Tour” claims that while Hurricane Katrina and Pearl Harbor were “not one of the finest moments of American history,” they show determination “to move forward in the face of adversity.”⁴³ The company seeks to unite these two events rhetorically. The comparison to Pearl Harbor is significant because it represents an event that is a sure lesson in any history curriculum and makes a strong statement about historical fluidity and public memory. On the one hand, the producers of the video imply that Katrina is just as important an historical event as Pearl Harbor, a defining moment in which the US could no longer remain neutral against an outside attack. On the other hand, Pearl Harbor is not anything like Katrina; even though the hurricane was an “attack,” the devastation resulted from a natural disaster compounded by poor decisions within our borders. The producers’ “memory” of Katrina emphasizes it as the result of an external threat (a “natural disaster”), and not the state’s decision-making. Regardless of the connection, this rhetorical choice of

bringing Pearl Harbor and Katrina together showcases the fluidity of public memory by altering the meaning of one historical event to shape the implications of another.

The strategy behind the tour creates a narrative of victory and survival. However, in making this memory, other essential components of the disaster get completely glossed over in the tours. Gray Line expresses that “Katrina was a storm that hit everyone. It did not discriminate against class level or any of that, and the neighborhoods that we go through show that.”⁴⁴ Although this statement regarding class might seem banal, it hides that this disaster disproportionately affected people of color. Their voices, bodies, and stories are erased from a memory that, while not a static interpretation of the past, creates the illusion of a unified narrative through the amalgamation of virtual tours. As Phillips and Reyes note, “Not only are these contests related to memories that help constitute different publics, but the struggles often revolve around which/whose memories will be made visible and in what ways.”⁴⁵ In the present case, the people who own their respective companies shape the virtual tourism landscape, constituting themselves as publics and minimizing the experiences of people of color and human-made failures leading to this disaster.

Producing such a virtual tour necessarily takes away the ability of survivors to share their stories in an unfiltered way. Or, and perhaps more importantly, it makes evident that which has always been the case. Due to the mediated nature of tourism—working for a tour company, signing a contract or application, work-for-hire agreements—the narratives are not quite the guides’ own. They always must collaborate with the enterprise that employs them. Some companies might have varying degrees of wanting to preserve survivors’ stories; however, when profits motivate organizations, something has to give. In this case, the guides must make their tours “fit” the model of the experience required by tourists.

Through visuals—people speaking in newscasts, promoting the application-based tours, and discussing their ownership of a company—the virtual tours highlight racial disparities. The virtual tours appear “whiter” than the disaster was in reality, ignoring the disproportionate number of people of color affected by the storm; however, this phenomenon also highlights that the individuals who create the narratives of these tours are not always the survivors who lost it all, but the advertisers, the company owners, and so on.

The Struggle Over Memory: Possibilities and Standstills

The virtual tours exhibit the same properties of a history that is told by the people in charge, so to speak. To our surprise, the lived experiences of people of New Orleans and the tour guides were mostly missing in the tours, particularly with the blended narratives of the tour guides and company administrators. Although the Internet offers possibilities for democratization because many people have access to YouTube, the virtual tours display experts crafting memories strategically. What would it take for a real democratization of virtual tours to occur? Phillips states:

Despite our best efforts, however, memories refuse to remain stable and immutable. Their appearance, often unbidden, within our cultural experience is like a mirage: vivid and poignant but impermanent and fluid. No matter their importance or revered place in our collective lives, we cannot grasp them fully nor fix them permanently. We can only envision a fixed stable memory, chiseled in stone or encased within museum walls, when we neglect—or better yet subvert—their nature as appearing. However, if we attend to the appearance of memories in public, then the illusion of their stability is dispelled and the transitory and fluid nature of memory in public is recovered.⁴⁶

The possibilities of expanding the types of narratives communicated via virtual tours are available; however, dominant memories of perseverance, rebuilding, and survival pervade the landscape. Katrina virtual tours elucidate this “global memoryscapes” concept by showcasing the role of memory, forgetting, and the illusion of fixed, stable historical memory of disasters.

Katrina virtual tours also help define the tourism landscape. Virtual tourism is a practice of visiting sites in a mediated way. New technology and platforms make this distinction more relevant. Tourism scholarship has delved into the role of engaging documentary as a form of tourist practice. Pezzullo, for example, includes such a film in her book *Toxic Tourism: Rhetorics of Pollution, Travel, and Environmental Justice* to explore the documentary *Matamoros: The Human Face of Globalization* as a tour. Pezzullo

explains, “Toxic tours are constituted by and circulated through various media, including videos and the internet” and do “not require going to the site of contamination or production.”⁴⁷ Pezzullo shares her participation in toxic tours as part of her larger book project and also suggests that documentary constitutes a separate trip, arguing that “although going to such places is significant, the structure of feeling present should not be confused with physical copresence.”⁴⁸ Important differences exist between watching a mediated show or documentary—which cannot provide “physical copresence”—and taking a face-to-face tour. However, virtual tours and in-person tours share a possibility of garnering affect for important causes.

It is also necessary to consider how Katrina virtual dark tours may evolve in the future. Depending on the popularity of application-based platforms, these forms of virtual disaster tours might grow and reach new audiences. Until then, the YouTube videos and other video-sharing platforms seem to pervade the virtual tourism landscape. Commercialism continues to produce overtly positive interpretations of the disaster based on the blending of narratives of the tour guides and company administrators, but as seen in our analysis, there are pockets of possibility and resistance.

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11

A Virtual Dark Journey Through the Debris: Playing *Inside the Haiti Earthquake* (2010)

Kasia Mika

Ruins Everywhere

“The sigh of History rises over ruins, not over landscapes, and in the Antilles there are few ruins to sigh over, apart from the ruins of sugar estates and abandoned forts,” writes Derek Walcott.¹ His evocative description of the Caribbean, painted in his 1992 Nobel lecture, poetically captures the archipelago’s ruinous pasts and the haunting presence of “imperial debris,”² the many sights and sites of genocidal colonial violence that, over the years, have become an added, sanitized, component of historical tours of the islands.³ Whereas these often remote places testify to a violent,

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bygone era, sites of more recent devastation—one caused, for example, by recurring natural hazards such as earthquakes or tropical storms—cannot simply be left behind at the end of an island cruise. Neither can they be easily categorized as “heritage” or as one among many “dark” tourist destinations. There is nothing stable or fixed there. The suffering is ongoing; it is not just a distant echo in an empty space, reduced to a reference and immobilized on a commemorative plaque.

Port-au-Prince, Haiti’s capital, levelled almost entirely after a magnitude 7 earthquake hit the island on January 12, 2010,⁴ is one such destination. A tourist site in its own right, it provides a junction where the varying motivations behind disaster tourism are being played out as the catastrophe continues to unfold in real time. Years after the earthquake, Port-au-Prince continues to attract a plethora of visitors, along with journalists and nongovernmental organization (NGO) workers, doctors and members of relief teams—an example of a phenomenon known more generally as medical parachuting⁵—drawn to the city equally by their desire to help and make a visible contribution to Haiti’s reconstruction. Yet despite the passage of time and visible material changes in the city, the capital is viewed and represented as a ruined and ruinous space trapped in an ongoing disaster: “all earthquake, all the time.”⁶

Inside the Haiti Earthquake (2010), a free, award-winning online simulation,⁷ is one among many such representations of devastated Port-au-Prince. Using footage from a documentary film on the Canadian Red Cross’s relief efforts after the earthquake, the game attempts to offer a virtual immersion experience of navigating the devastated city for those unable, but willing, to confront the aftermath of the January 2010 tremors. Part of a tripartite multimedia project, consisting of the serious game, a feature-length documentary, and a website, *Inside the Haiti Earthquake* uses documentary footage from the film, diegetic and non-diegetic sounds, and highly emotive narrative to allow the user to embark upon an immersive and epic virtual journey inside the January 2010 disaster. Based on documentary footage from Haiti and “real-life decision scenarios,”⁸ the game combines “a provocative script with real-life documentary footage, photos and stories from Haiti,” hoping, in effect, to allow “users to experience the complexities of disaster relief for themselves.”⁹ To this end, the game and the website construct an itinerant experience for the user who—whether as an aid worker, an earthquake

survivor, or a journalist—trawls the devastated city, seeking his or her way out of the collapsed capital, while attempting to complete the task set for each role, namely, seek assistance and safety, organize a food distribution, or shoot TV coverage on the aftermath of the earthquake.¹⁰

The game attempts simultaneously to provide an experience of the real disaster and to trigger the player's heightened self-reflexivity via the use of fictionalized scenarios and tasks. The compound and accretive perspective it creates distinguishes it strongly from other forms of disaster tourism, adding a level of complexity to the intervention *Inside the Haiti Earthquake* makes and the journey it hopes to chart. In her insightful commentary on the game, Valerie Kaussen stresses its limitations and ethically problematic nature. She argues that *Inside the Haiti Earthquake* can be seen as a site of a double dislocation, a virtual re-enactment and re-imposition of the voyeuristic gaze and unequal mobility of post-disaster tourism "by increasing the distance between mobile subject and static object or seer and seen, a separation produced by the virtual touristic gaze and its technologies of illusion."¹¹ Although the analysis helpfully locates the tensions of the game within the larger problematic of voyeurism and unequal mobilities—obvious limitations to any form of dark and disaster tourism—it falls short of considering the critical potential of the game and the wider project. *Inside the Haiti Earthquake* is not just a translation of a physical tourist experience but also a distinct engagement with the ruins of Port-au-Prince and a critical depiction of the ruinous constructs of aid and humanitarian industries—Haiti's main disaster tourists. For one, in spite of the possibility of failing or successfully completing the tasks, the underlying question of this dark virtual experience—how to chart a new future among the ruins—is not given a definite answer. Rather, if completed successfully, the game finishes by addressing only the most immediate needs of humanitarian outreach. As a result, the simulation clearly points to the dissonance between disaster relief, necessarily oriented towards a sense of completion and visible accomplishments, and the ongoing suffering, "the passive hurt,"¹² of Haitian citizens who are left behind, and are trying to remake their lives, by combatting the material and structural obstacles to their aspirations and dreams, yearning for a future that rises over the ruins. Consequently, rather than just being simply a re-enactment or a double dislocation, as Kaussen suggests, *Inside the Haiti Earthquake* stages a much more complex process of negotiation. While maintaining some characteristics of

disaster tourism and “thanatourism,”¹³ virtual dark tourism is a novel experience. Through its liminality—the ability to pause, revisit, repeat, and replay the same journey and cross the ruined city from differentiated yet simultaneous access points, the accretive perspective the game offers—as well as through its changing contextualization, the simulation creates a distinct itinerary through Port-au-Prince’s ruins.

Playing Disasters

Taking into consideration *Inside The Haiti Earthquake*’s thematic, its design, documentary aesthetic, and wider aims, the simulation can be best described as a “serious game” and a “social impact game,”¹⁴ that is, most broadly, a game “with a purpose beyond play.”¹⁵ A somewhat oxymoronic and far from homogenous category,¹⁶ serious games, in the broadest sense, can be defined as “any form of interactive computer-based game software for one or multiple players to be used on any platform and that has been developed with the intention to be more than entertainment.”¹⁷ Serious games build on the entertainment value of digital games and “add value through an educational component,”¹⁸ yet go beyond the category of “edutainment games.”¹⁹ They have three key desirable outcomes, namely “learning, development, and change.”²⁰ In addition, *Inside the Haiti Earthquake* shares some characteristics with “persuasive games,”²¹ being a “form of procedural rhetoric, [...] able to contain and communicate persuasive messages,”²² where “meaning is communicated through participation in the experience.”²³ Varying in their emphases, the three categorizations all stress the importance of the game’s serious content, its potential impact, and the contribution it can make to the player’s enhanced understanding of complex, real-life situations and crises, among them natural hazards and disasters.

Inside the Haiti Earthquake is not the only earthquake-themed or Haiti-themed serious game to be released in recent years.²⁴ The *Stop Disasters* (2007) simulation is an earthquake-preparedness game that allows the user to choose from a range of natural hazards, an earthquake being one of them. The game creates a more complex and longer scenario for the

player who, depending on the difficulty level, has to build risk-resilient accommodation, a hospital, and a school, protecting as many people as possible before an earthquake strikes in a fictional town somewhere in the Mediterranean. Here the complexity of disaster preparedness and disaster risk reduction are reflected in the nature of the tasks rather than communicated through compelling visuals or an emotive narrative. *Rebuild Chile* (2010) and *Earthquake Survival* (prototype of the game, 2016), for their part, focus more specifically on the aftermath of an earthquake and, similarly to *Inside the Haiti Earthquake*, are also set in realistic locations, the former set in the aftermath of the 2010 Chile earthquake and the latter on the Kapiti Coast of New Zealand, at an unspecified time. Yet neither uses documentary footage or first-person focalization, combined with a comparatively simple gameplay, that would allow an immersion akin to that offered by *Inside the Haiti Earthquake*. In this sense, simulation of the Haiti disaster charts a distinctive journey with the emphasis placed on one's proximity to the experience of navigating the ruined city from the compound and accretive perspective of the ruination gained from playing one or more of the three roles.

In contrast to the other free online games, *AFTERSHOCK: A Humanitarian Crisis Game* (2015) is a commercially developed educational board game "set in the fictional country of 'Carana,' loosely modelled on disasters such as the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and the 2010 Haiti earthquake."²⁵ The game's high starting price (\$84.99), the time commitment (between 90 and 120 minutes), and additional players required for it make it much less accessible to the wider international audience than other earthquake simulations. Some points of connection could be drawn, however, between this board game and the aforementioned forms of virtual dark tourism. For one, *AFTERSHOCK* also hopes to contribute in tangible ways to real life change in disaster-affected areas: all profits from the sale of the game will be donated to the United Nations (UN) World Food Programme and other agencies.²⁶ In interweaving pedagogic and entertaining elements and by employing them towards wider development goals, the game echoes the wider ambition of the *Inside Disaster* project to make an impact beyond the game space, also pointing to the varying reasons motivating dark and disaster tourism, whether virtual or to a physical and defined destination.

Liminal Journeys

The aims of *Inside the Haiti Earthquake* and the mixed methods it employs in order to offer an immersive and impactful experience are central to the simulation's design and its long-term ambitions. Already the opening screen emphasizes the game's composite make-up that translates real-life situations into the fast-paced script of this dark journey: "*Inside the Haiti Earthquake is designed to challenge assumptions about relief work in disaster situations. This is not a game. Nobody is keeping score. By playing the role of an aid worker, journalist, and survivor, you will be given the opportunity to commit to various strategies and experience their consequences*" [italics original].²⁷ A disclaimer on the same page immediately complicates these claims: "Any opinions expressed in this simulation are offered for educational and entertainment purposes [...] Despite originating from documentary material, *Inside the Haiti Earthquake* should be considered a work of fiction, and is intended for educational purposes only."²⁸ This statement points to the tenuous and problematic links between "serious matter" and entertainment that characterizes this post-earthquake simulation and (more broadly) virtual dark tourism in the form of serious games. This virtual journey has a distinct character. The three routes the player can take weave together contrasting elements, existing in a liminal space between a documentary reconstruction and a fictional account of the immediate aftermath of the January disaster, where the player's decision-making is intended to offer experiential knowledge of the disaster and its aftermath.

The first point of access into devastated Haiti when playing the role of the journalist is by car through the Dominican border. For the journalist, tasked with creating news coverage of the situation on the ground, the main challenge is not to commit to an angle on the news story before having first gathered enough evidence. As the journalist, we players experience various moments of trial. First, we witness a food distribution, which turns violent and chaotic; meanwhile the editor-in-chief demands a story with a strong angle. Second, we must decide between contrasting captions to describe a clip of young men gathering electronic items from the rubble. The choices we have to make reflect the multiple pressures faced by the journalist, a seemingly detached observer who is nonetheless caught in

the event she or he is trying to depict. Both rushing to help a woman who is trampled by the crowd and sending a story from a contrasting angle result in the journalist losing his or her story and, in effect, “losing” the game. In contrast, the journalist successfully completes the mission by devoting “time to investigate the reality on the ground.”²⁹ This reality, the game asserts, reveals the resolve of the Haitian people to rebuild their country and resist committing to an angle straightaway.

Rather than accessing the city from the east, when we play the aid worker we fly into the capital, with the long, opening panoramic shots confirming the city’s many needs. Here, we must make the right choice between the clear need to deliver the aid as quickly as possible and the decision to join the UN-coordinated shipment which will most likely delay the distribution. The documentary footage spares no details, including long shots of the omnipresent debris and more focused shots of anonymous victims clearly in our view. The overall success of the aid worker’s mission relies on not giving in to the desire to distribute aid as quickly as possible. Other good decisions include not giving in to a journalist’s request for a polemical clip but instead removing the dangerous baby formula from your shipment or deciding to give aid shipment to the UN/Red Cross so that it can be distributed more effectively by bigger agencies with more experience.

Finally, for the Haitian survivor of the earthquake, the journey starts among the debris, next to Magalie, a distressed neighbor. The destruction, shown through close-ups, is all-surrounding. For the survivor, the main challenge is to seek medical assistance and to find food and shelter. At different moments in the itinerary we can choose to wait for aid, take initiative and seek help in a relief camp or, upon meeting a journalist who is looking for a story, decide to go to Champs de Mars (Port-au-Prince’s key square and a site of one of the tent camps following the earthquake) and see what we can get in the increasingly chaotic food distribution. The latter choice of joining the crowds in an attempt to salvage something from the relief truck turns out to be the wrong and potentially fatal one. Underlining causality over fault and blame, the final screen issues a somewhat mixed message: “You and many others were hurt, and the aid distribution failed. The failure was not your fault but you could have chosen a different path.”³⁰ Similarly, the decision to scavenge for food in the ruins

of a building is a risky one: we are warned that this is a highly dangerous activity and redirected back to the choice panel. Instead, after hearing singing in the distance, we can proceed in the direction of a group of religious worshippers. This move, in contrast, is a successful and rewarded decision.

All three routes interweave documentary footage within a fictionalized script of one's journey among the debris, with the aim of providing an impactful experience of navigating the post-disaster debris from radically different points of entry. Stressing that well-informed decision-making is the key factor determining one's ability to successfully find a way out of, or at least a safe refuge from, the overpowering and omnipresent destruction, the game avoids the more complex questions of blame, fault, or the lack of choice in real-life situations. Rather, the simulation privileges the sense of proximity to the disaster and the multiple pressures of each position, by allowing the user to cross the border, tour post-earthquake Port-au-Prince, and venture into otherwise inaccessible sites. Players tour not just the city as a whole but also highly regulated spaces—such as, for example, the international aid cluster, the Canadian Embassy, or the Internally Displaced People's camp. This sense of access to off-limits areas that the game provides is a virtual extension of the dark tourist experience of visiting a liminal space, one marked by violence and death, that, outside the frame of a tour, remains out of bounds, whether these are former penitentiaries,³¹ highly marginalized urban neighborhoods,³² or a disaster zone. In both virtual and traditional dark tourism, this spatial crossing of boundaries can further translate, among other immediate and delayed reactions, into a deeply personal experience of one's own limits and confronting one's mortality. By “ensuring *absent* death is made *present*” [italics original]³³ dark tourism makes death become “real (again) for the individual,” “existentially valid and therefore inevitable for the individual who wishes to gaze upon this ‘Other’ death.”³⁴ While the player crosses the differentiated and regulated sites of Port-au-Prince, she or he is faced with the constant threat of death, a potential consequence of one's gaming choices, having to acknowledge, at the same time, how one's fragility and survival is, to a great extent, structurally conditioned.

Compound Perspective

The distinctive liminality of the game, its position in between a documentary and a fictional script, which aims to recreate a real-life experience of seeking a way out of Haiti's labyrinthine capital, is directly linked to the twofold, compound perspective *Inside the Haiti Earthquake* offers: first, in terms of the accretive perspective it forges and, second, in relation to the wider critical angle provided by the accompanying website. In contrast to other earthquake-themed games, this Canadian simulation maintains first-person focalization across the three possible scenarios. The consecutive panels of the game as well as the opening voice-over strengthen this internal focus by addressing an imagined "you": "You have a nasty gash on your leg. You're hungry and thirsty, and have nothing to protect you from the blistering sun. What would you do?"³⁵ Here and elsewhere, the game's focalization "operates as a narrative guide through the game universe, [and] has the power to increase a game's drama without forcing it into a linear cage," helping players "to comprehend any given game situation, contextualize the event, create strategies to address it, and ultimately interact with it."³⁶

Focalization can also increase a user's identification with the chosen role and experience of the multiple dimensions of disaster relief, triggering a recognition of the respective challenges of each position and the dangers of running into a potential "dead end" as a result of one's decisions. By enabling the player to experience the same situation (such as a food distribution) from opposing standpoints, the simulation provides insight into concurrent demands of post-disaster relief—made possible thanks to the virtual character of the respective dark journeys. In the process of doing so, the game hopes to engage all five planes of player experience—motivation, meaningful choices, balance, usability, and aesthetics³⁷—reasserting the value of this itinerant liminality, playful and serious, for one's increased emotional engagement with and, consequently, knowledge of the January disaster and its aftermath.

The accompanying webpage provides an added, extended dimension to the compound perspective on disaster and personal and collective loss. As the website layout already makes clear, *Inside the Haiti Earthquake* is only one element of the *Inside Disaster* project and one point of entry, among others, into the overarching questions of humanitarianism, disaster relief,

and the aid industry. The page had 31,532 (21,031 unique) visits between January and October 2010 and 45,678 (33,001 unique) visits between November 2010 and May 2011, contributing to a total of 97,510 page views through direct access as well as referrals from other pages (including sites in the United States, Germany, and Canada).³⁸ The website offers further information on the production process along with background reading on humanitarianism and post-disaster interventions. These additional resources problematize and complicate the experience of the game, nuancing the potential long-term impact of the virtual dark journey created by the online simulation. For example, the first two subpages provide the reader with information on key tensions and controversies in the field of disaster relief as well as resources focusing on Haiti's history, media representations of the country, and the 2010 Haiti earthquake more specifically,³⁹ including further, highly critical, links to aid blogs, books, and documentaries on the history of humanitarianism. Considering the wide appeal and accessibility of *Inside Disaster*, as well as the level of recognition it achieved, the website is well positioned to go beyond the "humanitarianism of pity"⁴⁰ by offering more complex narratives of Haiti's recent history and the reasons for the scale of the post-earthquake destruction. In short, whereas the online simulation, consistent with its generic design, creates a fast-paced experience of the immediate ruins, the website extends this journey by pointing to the factors that made the capital vulnerable to such devastation.

Moreover, the webpage's critical commentary explicitly questions the still-dominant discourses of Haitian exceptionalism and representations of Haiti as an impoverished, failing, and failed country.⁴¹ Within such constructs, Haiti is at once incapable of governing itself and at fault for its current predicament. The visible destruction only confirms Haiti's hollowed state. In the aftermath of the earthquake, these framings have been further sustained, for example in media coverage of the event, through the use of "images of naked and wounded black bodies"⁴²—images of bare life subject to the violence of the viewer's gaze—and translated into material practices of aid and humanitarian intervention. The webpage challenges such practices as well as the game's own use of disturbing imagery, adding, in effect, a layer of critical self-reflexivity and providing a more analytical perspective on Haiti's ruination, both as a discursive trope and as a description of the

immediate surroundings. “Ruin,” as Ann Laura Stoler explains, “can be both a claim about the state of a thing and a process affecting it.”⁴³ “Ruin,” after all, functions as a verb as well as a noun; it is “the state or condition of a fabric or structure,”⁴⁴ but also an action of inflicting “great and irretrievable damage, loss, or disaster upon (a person or community).”⁴⁵ “Ruins” and “ruination,” in this wider sense, can refer to three distinct moments across time, showing how past, present, and future are all shaped by a range of “violences and degradations that may be immediate or delayed, subcutaneous or visible.”⁴⁶ Accordingly, Haiti’s ruination is not just the physical destruction of its capital. It includes the ongoing violence to which its citizens are subjected in the form of institutional failings and neglect, both on the part of the state as well as nongovernmental actors.

Not immediately visible on the homepage, the subpage titled “Why Was the Destruction So Severe?”⁴⁷ directly confronts these longer histories and influences that contributed to the scale of devastation by increasing Haiti’s pre-earthquake vulnerability. Among these factors, the site points to issues such as building codes, construction materials, urbanization, and Haiti’s geological features, offering a longitudinal view on the January disaster and the non-natural reasons for its scale. In contrast to news snippets, attention-catching headlines, and shocking images of news reports, which are criticized with a surprising level of mocking self-reflexivity in the “Haiti in the Media” subsection,⁴⁸ the website presents a nuanced view of the January tremors.⁴⁹ To be a *disaster* an earthquake “requires vulnerability,”⁵⁰ constructed over time, and “needs to be examined as a larger process involving geopolitical structures and transnational tensions”⁵¹ that evolved over time. Disasters “have historical roots, unfolding presents, and potential futures according to the forms of reconstruction.”⁵² As the website makes clear, rebuilding the capital, while necessarily focused on clearing the debris and immediate life-saving aid, must therefore entail a remaking and reshaping of unequal power relations that have had and continue to have visible ruinous consequences. By highlighting the long-term processes and structural factors that preceded the 2010 earthquake, the different subpages together create a layered perspective on the January disaster and its pre- and post-history, namely the ecological and political factors which shaped it and the post-disaster aid that followed upon it.

However, the critical potential of this extended perspective is somewhat decreased, yet not completely undermined, if the simulation is accessed through a different site. *Inside the Haiti Earthquake* is available on the *Inside Disaster* platform page but also, without the accompanying resources,⁵³ on the *Games for Change* website, a nonprofit spin-off from the Serious Game Initiative, which aims to “catal[yz]e social impact through digital games.”⁵⁴ This second placing immediately underlines the formative potential of the virtual journey and emphasizes the correlation between the experiential and emotive elements and the player’s leaning process. Here, the depth and scope of insight provided by *Inside the Haiti Earthquake* depends primarily on the player’s choice to play the other two scenarios since the narrative of the game itself neither requires nor presents the player with any additional information that would complement or complicate the choices being made. Although serious games, thanks to their mixed aims and design, can indeed effectively interweave the informative and immersive components in their engagement with complex sociopolitical phenomena, the critical insights on economic or ecological exploitation analyzed on the website are not embedded anywhere within the script and are not essential to the completion of the given tasks. Rather, players of serious games in general tend to skip or disregard the nonessential information that is not crucial to completing the task within a game, because completing the task itself has precedence.⁵⁵ In response to this challenge, for a maximum educational impact, game designers, according to Michael F. Young and others, need “[to create] additional game elements that require reflection on the historical variables presented.”⁵⁶ Interestingly, the other Haiti-themed game available on the *Games for Change* platform is *Ayiti: Cost of Life* (2006), an online simulation developed by Global Kids and Game Lab, along with a group of American high school students from Brooklyn.⁵⁷ Aimed at a much younger audience, this game stretches over four seasons and has a clear reward system. During that time, the player attempts to meet the basic needs of the Guinard family of five, choosing “a main goal for his/her family: achieve education, make money, stay healthy, or maintain happiness”⁵⁸ and maintaining the challenging balance among these aims. Whereas *Ayiti* is a good example of embedding task-essential information into the narrative, the time commitment required to complete the game does not

necessarily translate into the depth of insight on global inequalities or even the player's emotive engagement with the serious subject matter. Therefore, both *Inside the Haiti Earthquake* and *Ayiti: Cost of Life* face a similar challenge due to the games' narrative arc, which develops from exposition, through complications and climax to resolution; they both risk implying that finding a solution to actual poverty, hunger, and post-disaster devastation is primarily a matter of correct judgment and well-informed choices. Negotiating between thought-provoking realism and inspiring narrative, both games hint at their obvious generic limitation: the reality of the complex entanglement of poverty, food sovereignty, and vulnerability cannot be so easily resolved.

Beyond the Disaster Zone

In seeking to disentangle the knot that is the experience of the earthquake, *Inside the Haiti Earthquake* attempts to chart a progression of events and provide a sense of formal and thematic resolution—an impossible task in the real-life context of post-earthquake Haiti. Recent news of the sexual abuse of hundreds of women by UN peacekeepers,⁵⁹ and the UN-caused cholera outbreak—first documented in mid-October 2010 and still present—appear to write a dark sequel to the game, with no happy ending in sight. It may seem that not only the “sigh of History” but also the moans of present struggles rise over the ruins. Yet these obvious challenges, which are well beyond the scope of the game, do not invalidate the game's impact and its potential as an effective means of forging new approaches to aid and humanitarianism. The parallel and complementary, yet at the same focalized and immersive, experience of space—which at times traverses the same sites of the city or, on other occasions, precisely points to the differentiated, hierarchical access and mobility—is a distinct characteristic and a unique potential of *Inside the Haiti Earthquake*, one that can be built upon, for example, in classroom settings.

For the last few years, Rex Brynen, a professor of political science at McGill University (Canada), has used the game as one of the required readings on his Peacebuilding and Post-Conflict Reconstruction (POLI 450) course,⁶⁰ inspiring an unsolicited discussion of the key dilemmas

and potential “failures” in each of the scenarios. As the students’ feedback testifies,⁶¹ the realism of the game’s aesthetics alongside the ability to play and replay the different tasks and scenarios makes it an effective and thought-provoking learning experience even for advanced undergraduates already familiar with many of the tensions of aid and humanitarianism. One student lauded the game’s accuracy in presenting “complexities that these scenarios present on the scene.”⁶² Another remarked that his or her “entire world view has been opened.”⁶³ Yet another was struck by the ways in which *Inside the Haiti Earthquake* humanized disaster relief efforts:

[i]t was really eye-opening to realize that all the decisions made on the ground are made by real people—it’s easy for me to imagine a UN agency as a single entity robotically working towards maximum efficiency [...] when in fact there are many individual workers and volunteers working with limited resource and expertise and under immense pressures from various actors with very different interests.⁶⁴

These insights, echoed across other comments from the course, affirm the simulation’s ability to go beyond the player’s potential shock and trigger reflection. The game instead stimulates a creative process involving “creative synthesis of discrepant elements” that is rooted in “lingering, looking both forward and back with mindfulness and care.”⁶⁵ Students’ recognition of their own learning curve and their heightened awareness of the multifarious character of disaster relief demonstrate how the game’s liminality and its accretive perspective, whether rooted primarily in the narrative of the simulation or enhanced by the accompanying resources, complicate any claims to easy solutions and ways out of the post-disaster rubble.

The challenges of the present as well as the generic limitations of the game are obvious. Yet rather than invalidating the simulation’s potential, the lack of a “disaster-free” present points precisely to the importance of asking, several years later: “why was (and why is) the destruction so severe?” The immersive, liminal, and accretive experience offered by the game continues to provoke, inspiring a plethora of highly diverse, contrasting, and not entirely programmable and predictable players’ reactions. Their changing positionality, that might even shift from playing one scenario to another, further affects how one responds to the shards of the post-disaster

reality that dark tourist experiences hope to capture. The many personal motivations behind practices of dark tourism and virtual dark tourism further inform the immediate and long-lasting impressions that this virtual dark journey can have on the players' individual lives. Often entangled in, but not limited to, dynamics of consumption and practices of voyeurism, these motivations can also include meaning-making and confronting one's mortality. Together, this multiplicity and unpredictability of responses is the hopeful sequel to the game, one that can help formulate an awareness of the ongoing present of the disaster and the lack of a simple and happy "end" for the inhabitants of Port-au-Prince. Although the player might leave the game and the debris might be cleared away, the everyday labor of remaking a life and rebuilding one's dwelling in the scarred city continues, day in and day out.

Notes

1. Derek Walcott, *The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1993), 8.
2. Ann Laura Stoler, "Imperial Debris: Reflections on Ruins and Ruination," *Cultural Anthropology* 23 (2008): 191–221, 195.
3. One example are plantation tours, also marketed as "rum tours," on St. Kitts and St. Lucia, among others.
4. The earthquake levelled approximately 80 percent of the city. Laura Zanotti, "Cacophonies of Aid, Failed State Building and NGOs in Haiti: Setting the Stage for Disaster, Envisioning the Future," *Third World Quarterly* 31 (2010): 755–771, 756, accessed May 18, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2010.503567>.
5. Daniël J. Van Hoving et al., "Haiti Disaster Tourism—A Medical Shame," *Prehospital and Disaster Medicine* 25 (2010): 201–202, 202.
6. Kaiama L. Glover, "New Narratives of Haiti; or, How to Empathize with a Zombie," *Small Axe* 16 (2012): 199–207, 198, accessed August 20, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.1215/07990537-1894186>.
7. These awards include: Winner—2011 Games for Change Awards (Transmedia); Winner—Horizon Interactive Awards (Best in Show); Winner—2010 Applied Arts Interactive Awards (Gaming); Nominee—2010 Canadian New Media Awards (Best Web-Based

- Game); Nominee—2010 Social Impact Games (Best Social Impact Game); Nominee—2011 History Makers (Best Interactive Production); Nominee—2011 Webby Award (Best Writing in Online Film & Video). “*Inside Disaster*,” <http://insidedisaster.com/haiti/experience> (accessed August 4, 2016).
8. Ibid.
 9. PTV Productions, *Inside Disaster Press Kit* (2010): 18, http://insidedisaster.com/outreach/IDH-PressKit_Dec2010.pdf (accessed May 20, 2017).
 10. Valerie Kaussen’s article (referenced below) provides an extensive description of the different pathways and choices the game user can make and the consequences of each selected action.
 11. Valerie Kaussen, “Zooming In: Virtual Disaster Tourism in Post-Earthquake Haiti,” *Social and Economic Studies* 64 (2015): 33–80, 57.
 12. Edwidge Danticat contests the ways in which the trope of Haitians’ resilience was used after the earthquake to justify the international community’s neglect. She writes: “After three post-earthquake visits to Haiti, I began to ask myself if this much-admired resilience would not in the end hurt the affected Haitians. It would not be an active hurt, like the pounding rain and menacing winds from the hurricane season, the brutal rapes of women and girls in many of the camps, or the deaths from cholera. Instead, it would be a passive hurt, as in a lack of urgency or neglect. ‘If being resilient means that we’re able to suffer much more than other people, it’s really not a compliment,’ a young woman at the large Champs de Mars camp in downtown Port-au-Prince told me.” Edwidge Danticat, “Lòt Bò Dlo, The Other Side of the Water,” in *Haiti After the Earthquake*, ed. Paul Farmer (New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2011): 249–259, 257.
 13. A.V. Seaton, “Guided by the Dark: From Thanatopsis to Thanatourism,” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 2 (1996): 234–244, accessed May 20, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527259608722178>.
 14. André Czauderna, “Serious Games to Games for Impact. Games for Change Europe,” *G4ceurope*, <http://www.g4ceurope.eu/from-serious-games-to-games-for-impact/> (accessed July 13, 2016).
 15. Eric Klopfer, Scot Osterweil, and Katie Salen, *Moving Learning Games Forward: Obstacles, Opportunities & Openness* (The Education Arcade: MIT, 2009), http://education.mit.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/MovingLearningGamesForward_EdArcade.pdf.
 16. Although, there is no fixed definition of a serious game, most scholars of the field “view serious games as: having a learning model embedded, the content is integrated into the game so learning is intrinsic to play, and the assessment of learning may be integral to the game or occur through

mediation around the game.” Mary Ulicsak, *Games in Education: Serious Games; A Futurelab Literature Review* (FutureLab 2010): 27. http://media.futurelab.org.uk/resources/documents/lit_reviews/Serious-Games_Review.pdf.

17. Ute Ritterfeld, Michael Cody, and Peter Vorderer, “Introduction,” in *Serious Games: Mechanisms and Effects*, ed. Michael Cody, Ute Ritterfeld, and Peter Vorderer (London: Routledge, 2009): 3–10: 6.
18. *Ibid.*, 1.
19. These are defined as games that “provide users with specific skills development or reinforcement learning within an entertainment setting” where “skill development is an integral part of product” (Entertainment Software Rating Board, 2007). *Ibid.*, 11.
20. For the editors of *Serious Games*, “learning is defined as the intentional acquisition of skills or knowledge through deliberate practice and training and has therefore a pedagogical focus. With development we emphasize the rather incidental psychological impact of game play on processes of human development such as identity or attitude formation or emotional regulation that may be facilitated or initiated through game play. Finally, change addresses social intervention; for example, political or health behavior.” *Ibid.*, 7–8.
21. Ian Bogost, *Persuasive games: The Expressive Power of Videogames* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).
22. John Ferrara, “Games for Persuasion: Argumentation, Procedurality, and the Lie of Gamification,” *Games and Culture* 8 (2013): 289–304, 294, accessed May 15, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412013496891>.
23. *Ibid.*, 294.
24. Others include: *Rebuild Chile; Stop Disasters!* (2007); *Earthquake Survival; Beat the Quake*; as well as *Save the Children Earthquake Response* iPhone game (2011) or *Tanah: The Tsunami & Earthquake Fighter* (2016), a mobile gaming application released by UNESCO and software developer Open Dream to teach young players to prepare for, respond to, and recover from tsunami and earthquake disasters.
25. Aftershock, “Game Studies 101,” <http://gamestudies101.com/after-shock/> (accessed April 21, 2017).
26. Aftershock, “The Game Crafter,” <https://www.thegamecrafter.com/games/aftershock> (accessed April 21, 2017).
27. A clear warning to the game users is also issued and emphasized in bold: “Please note that this simulation contains graphic and disturbing imagery.” “Inside Disaster,” <http://www.insidedisaster.com/experience/Main.html> [Italics original] (accessed August 8, 2016).

28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. "Survivor," <http://www.insidedisaster.com/experience/Main.html#/survivor/S445> (accessed August 9, 2016).
31. Carolyn Strange and Michael Kempa, "Shades of Dark Tourism: Alcatraz and Robben Island," *Annals of Tourism Research* 30 (2003): 386–405, accessed April 20, 2017, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383\(02\)00102-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383(02)00102-0).
32. Fabian Frenzel, Ko Koens, Malte Steinbrink, and Christian M. Rogerson, "Slum Tourism: State of the Art," *Tourism Review International* 18 (2015): 237–252, accessed April 20, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.3727/154427215X14230549904017>.
33. Philip Stone and Richard Sharpley, "Consuming Dark Tourism: A Thanatological Perspective," *Annals of Tourism Research* 35 (2008): 577–595, 588, accessed August 15, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2008.02.003>.
34. Ibid.
35. "Survivor."
36. Michael Nitsche, *Video Game Spaces: Image, Play, and Structure in 3D Worlds* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2008), 154.
37. Ferrera, 291–292.
38. Documentary Organization of Canada (DOC): Toronto. 2010, "Inside Disaster, docSHIFT: Real Stories to Multiple Platforms (workshop report)," 17, <http://docinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/DOC-Toronto-docSHIFT.pdf> (accessed June 30, 2016).
39. See, for example, "Haiti in the Media," *Inside Disaster*, <http://insidedisaster.com/haiti/the-quake/haiti-in-the-media> (accessed August 3, 2016); "Haiti's History," *Inside Disaster*, <http://insidedisaster.com/haiti/the-quake/haitis-history> (accessed August 3, 2016).
40. Lilie Chouliaraki, "Post-Humanitarianism: Humanitarian Communication Beyond a Politics of Pity," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 13 (2010): 107–126. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877909356720>.
41. For Beverly Bell, "The message [of Haiti as a failed state] had long been drummed, but the tempo picked up after the earthquake, pounded by foreign governments, academics, and media, such as *Time* magazine's piece 'The Failed State That Keeps Failing.' Later, Haiti would even come in fifth in the 2011 Failed States Index of the think tank Fund for Peace, after Somalia, Chad, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo." Beverly Bell, *Fault Lines: Views Across Haiti's Divide* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 80.

42. Nadège T. Clitandre, "Haitian Exceptionalism in the Caribbean and the Project of Rebuilding Haiti," *Journal of Haitian Studies* 17 (2011): 146–153, 146.
43. Stoler, 195.
44. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, "ruin, n." <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/168690?rskey=rk5JU5&result=2&isAdvanced=false> (accessed March 12, 2013).
45. Ibid.
46. Stoler, 195–196.
47. "Why Was the Destruction So Severe?" <http://insidedisaster.com/haiti/the-quake/why-was-the-destruction-so-severe/> (accessed August 3, 2016).
48. The sub-page exposes how media framings of Haiti rely on the repetition of the same words, metaphors, and images. Inspired by a piece by Ansel Herz, "How to Write About Haiti," the authors have used "the LexisNexis database to research how often key terms were used to describe Haiti over a year of print and TV news coverage (August 2009-August 2010), and assembled it into the visualization piece." The tone of the page, echoing that of Herz's piece, is ironic and dry. The importance of this pointed critique cannot be understated in the context of media misrepresentations of Haiti which have long defaced the country, have been the source of anti-Haitian stereotypes, and uphold the image of Haiti as a country in perpetual need of foreign assistance and guidance. Ansel Herz, "How to Write About Haiti," *Huffington Post*, July 23, 2010, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/crossover-dreams/a-guide-for-american-jour_b_656689.html (accessed August 25, 2016).
49. It is important to note that the contextualization provided on the page, as Valerie Kaussen points out, is in no way a neutral one: "The historical narrative of Haiti recounted in *Inside Disaster* elides Canadian as well as international involvement in Haiti's political crises of 2004," a key moment that saw the taking down of the democratically elected Jean-Bertrand Aristide and the subsequent establishment of United Nations Stabilization Mission In Haiti, MINUSTAH. Kaussen, 61.
50. Mark Schuller and Pablo Morales, *Tectonic Shifts: Haiti Since the Earthquake* (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2012), 4.
51. Schuller and Morales, *Tectonic Shifts*, 3.
52. Anthony Oliver-Smith, "Haiti's 500-Year Earthquake," in *Tectonic Shifts: Haiti Since the Earthquake*, ed. Mark Schuller and Pablo Morales (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2012): 18–23, 18.

53. "Games for Change," <http://www.gamesforchange.org/play/inside-the-haiti-earthquake/> (accessed August 4, 2016).
54. "Mission Statement," <http://www.gamesforchange.org/about/> (accessed August 4, 2016).
55. Michael F. Young et al., "Our Princess Is in Another Castle: A Review of Trends in Serious Gaming for Education," *Review of Educational Research* 82 (2012): 61–89, 80, accessed August 15, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654312436980>.
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62. AB, *ibid.*
63. BK, *ibid.*
64. AS, *ibid.*
65. Ellen Rose, *On Refection: An Essay on Technology, Education, and the Status of Thought in the Twenty-first Century* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2013), 30.

Part IV

Gaming Travel



12

Surviving the Colonial Blizzard: The Alaskan Native Game *Never Alone* as a Walkthrough in Cultural Resistance

Juliane Schlag

Imagine you are a little girl running through the snow. Not only because it is winter but because you happen to live in one of the coldest places on earth, northern Alaska. Your survival depends on how well you understand the natural world around you and whether you can find shelter to protect you from a never-ending blizzard. Why are you running? You are running away from a “Terrible Man” who has already destroyed the campsite of your people. But do not worry, you are not alone. The white snow fox, running next to you, will have your back. As you run, you recall the stories the elders have been telling you. Their voices will guide you through the snow.

Never Alone is the product of a cultural outreach approach by the Cook Inlet Tribal Council designed to represent Iñupiaq culture. Published in 2014, it soon became a success even though it was published as an “indie game,” that is, without a major game publisher to finance its production process. The game was published on three platforms: Xbox, PlayStation, and PC. It makes use of rich 3D graphic designs, which helped to attract

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a wider audience. Despite its independent production, *Never Alone's* unique narration and art style, alongside the active involvement of the Native-American community in its development, were positively recognized by the international gaming community. In 2015, the game received The Best Debut Game Award and Most Significant Impact Award.

Indie Games Versus AAA Games

Similar to a general trend in public media, video games within recent years increasingly contextualize traumatic events in history. While *Never Alone* is clearly one of these games, it sets itself apart from the majority within the genre and adds to the understanding of dark tourism as a concept. The video game market is dominated by AAA games, a term used for those made by big publishers whose games have very detailed graphics, complex game controls, and dense worlds with multiple storylines and side quests adding to the main narration. In recent AAA productions, the incorporation of historic sites and events does not necessarily serve the recreation of realistic in-game settings. Often traumatic historic events have been used to enhance a fictive plot line. In the mid-2002 Game Cube game *Eternal Darkness*, the player gets to play different protagonists through different eras of human history in order to prevent a rising darkness from taking over humanity. The player observes that conspiring, corrupted cultists help the rising darkness to manifest its power by taking control over clerical and political leaders. Similar storylines are told in the *Dracula* trilogies, *Assassin's Creed*, and the new *Tomb Raider* series, and have become even more popular in open world scenarios, such as *The Secret World*. This rising trend shows that dark upheavals in history provide popular contexts for games. Yet at the same time, AAA games tend to not only mystify events in history by putting them into a context of a bigger, fictional mystery; they further let the player take an active part in those historic events. In such cases, the historic elements used in the in-game story become detached from the actual historic events so far that the player can react to them and sometimes even "correct" them. While this plot progression might be experienced as thrilling by players, it does not aim to educate them about actual historical trauma.

For example, in the *Mankind Divided* sequel to the AAA *Deus Ex* series, mechanically augmented humans can be controlled through hacking, causing public outbreaks of violence. As they are exiled into concentration camps, the game through symbolism—in the form of posters, slogans, geographic localization, and the representation of militarization—compares the fictive plot directly to the Holocaust. The cynical, mechanic first-person narrator leaves no room for the player to critically question ethical involvement and the dynamics of terror he causes. The plot artificially serves the construction of a shooting game and, by doing so, turns out to be counterproductive to the actual construction of a fictive Holocaust. Comparing the Jewish community and other victims of the Holocaust to a group of cyborgs that can be brainwashed and externally programmed to take over humanity is distasteful and shows—if nothing else—the game’s lack of sensitivity towards historic trauma.

Indie Games and Virtual Dark Tourism

In contrast, *Never Alone*—along with other smaller productions, such as *To the Moon*, *Papers Please*, and *Sunset*—can be identified as context-focused indie games which were made by game developers outside of the main industry with the clear aim to kindle critical thought in gamers through interactive gameplay and unique reward systems. Understanding how *Never Alone* engages with the player through a journey that incorporates trauma without fully resolving it can help us to understand ongoing negotiations about trauma on an individual and cross-cultural level. It can further help us to analyze experiences of dark tourism which go beyond the physical world.

A common definition of dark tourism, explained by Philip R. Stone in 2006, defines it as “the act of travel to sites associated with death, suffering and the seemingly macabre.”¹ The most important aspect of dark tourism is in many ways “locality”: how a place exemplifying tragic events is presented, advertised, recreated, and visited. The aspect of travel consequently is tied to a place as a destination. However, digital media as well as literature have come to provide fictional journeys in which the sense of

place becomes more and more delocalized. Virtual dark tourism takes us beyond places of the macabre and war commemoration and literally brings us to the journey itself. Rather than visiting a dark spot, can one now travel through the event that created it? How does the journey connect the spectator to the event, and how does it change the experience?

Games have not been extensively studied as a possible medium for virtual dark tourism, though they have promising potential. Different from literature and film, they require the active engagement of the player, the effort to interpret and interact with a presented narrative. What Linnie Blake has called the “dialectically mediated symbolizations of loss”² is, therefore, explicitly demanded of gamers in a dark tourism context. Similar to Avril Horner’s understanding of post-apocalyptic writing, the aim is not to overcome trauma and move on, but to comprehend the symbolic loss and understand universal fears on interpersonal and cross-cultural levels.³ This creates a rising tension over what Richard Sharpley and Philip R. Stone have identified as a cornerstone of many actual places of dark tourism: “moral complexities ensure that important epochs remain unchallenged and uninterpreted in the nation’s collective commemoration of the past.”⁴ Considering the continuous suppression of Native-American histories that critically question US nation-building narratives and the ongoing representation of stereotypical Indians in popular culture, counter-narratives produced within the Indigenous community are even more important. They create room for what J. E. Tunbridge and G. J. Ashworth have identified as forms of dissonant heritage and allow for cumulative meaning formation.⁵ Analyzing *Never Alone* can promote understanding of the mediating aspects of stories that connect people to a place, a culture, and a wider social body like a nation—but also on an interpersonal level through the experience of trauma and loss.

Never Alone is a product of a cultural outreach approach representing Alaskan Native cultures. There are 11 recognized Native groups within the state boundaries of Alaska, making up 20% of the total Alaskan population. The game tells a story of the northern Iñupiaq people, their culture and traditional life. In the game, players take on the role of a girl named Nuna and her pet fox to help spirit creatures, fight a Terrible Man,

and investigate snow blizzards. Yet the game goes far beyond pure storytelling: it requires the player to understand and adapt to a different culture, and it transmits postcolonial trauma on an interpersonal level. This concept is a product of the game-developing process itself.

The Quest of the Developers

Never Alone was developed by Upper One Games and published by E-Line Media in 2014. The game development process began three years earlier when the Tribal Council under the lead of Gloria O'Neill reached out to E-Line Media. The council saw itself as protector of Indigenous traditions and the use of the same for commercial enterprises needed to be "handled with upmost care,"⁶ as Gloria O'Neill explained. The main problem with cultural recreation on a commercial scale is often that a culture is modeled into a brand designed to generate sales. This causes problems of authentication, misrepresentation, and inaccuracy and might lead to conflicts within the community that is (mis)represented. The Tribal Council accordingly had to find a way to produce a cultural product which included the diverse perceptions of what Alaskan Native culture was and how it should be presented.

As the game's development began, the two teams of Upper One Games, owned by the tribal council, and Seattle-based E-Line Media had to invert the way in which games are made: elements of cultural heritage should be the focus of the game rather than being illustrative assets to enhance the joy of playing. The problem with using cultural items as assets in video-games is that they are often presented as artefacts of a dead or dormant culture. A good example of this type of usage is the 2013 AAA game *Tomb Raider*. The main character Lara Croft, even though introduced as a trained archaeologist, finds all sorts of items vaguely definable as Asian and is able to link them to a lost Sino-Japanese culture. She just pockets them as she goes along, leaving their ongoing significance for all the different cultures in Asia undisturbed. The alienation process continues as *Tomb Raider* progresses. Objects are continuously linked to an evil force that seeks to destroy Lara Croft as a white woman representing western civilization. The game builds up to a clash of races in which Lara

fighters eastern men in the form of displaced Russians alongside ancient Asian giants and gods—and wins. The makers of *Never Alone* seem to have been very aware of this problem of cultural misrepresentation and silencing, and one of their main aims was to represent Alaskan Native cultures as vital, and objects connect to them as part of everyday life that can withstand and outlive westernization.

For *Never Alone*, 35 individuals of the Indigenous community were asked to participate in the project, a process which lead game designer Grant Roberts understood as crucial to forming a constructive relationship with the native community as “students, not borrowers”⁷ of their culture. Though in terms of game mechanics the developers regarded their product as “not perfect,”⁸ it gained wide popularity and was labelled “very positive” on Steam, 10/10 on Eurogamer, and 4.5/5 on Joystiq (September 2016).

Reflecting on the development process in cooperation with the Tribal Council, co-producer Alan Gershenfeld said, “One of the main goals we’ve had during this project is to make a game that they—Alaskan Natives—can be proud of, and call their own. From what they’ve told us, we’re on the right track.”⁹ On the Indigenous side, Ishmael Angaluuk Hope, one of the Indigenous writers on the set, similarly found the collaboration to be “committed to shining a light on Iñupiaq people. I was immensely gratified to be a part of the process.”¹⁰ The game was approached in an ethnographic manner by asking members of the community to tell stories about their life in Iñupiaq and English. Leo Oktollik Kinneeveauk in one of the game’s Cultural Insight clips describes how he came to be involved: “I got a call one time, my nephew Jeff Kinneeveauk told these guys with the *Never Alone* video game about me. I came over to the Cook Inlet Tribal Council building and they had a camera. I told a story from when I was growing up. I told it in Iñupiaq too, after I told it in English. I never did forget that story. I thought I’d give them my two cents’ worth about how we do things.”¹¹ Analyzing why the game was so well received and found followers far beyond the Native community can help us understand the value of games as cross-cultural transmitters on one hand, and their power as a medium through which to contrast mainstream histories in postcolonial contexts on another.

Never Alone gained an overwhelmingly positive follower base with the wider audience finding that the “entire array of narration, artwork, and design lends an amazing credibility to the story and feels authentic.”¹² The game presents elements of Alaskan Native life through its narration style, art concept, and unique reward system. Analyzing these elements in comparison to existing literary themes and showing how elements of the story kindle critical gameplay point out new ways to transmit postcolonial narratives and pathways for future virtual dark tourism.

Orality

Starting the game, the first thing players are confronted with is the unknown Iñupiaq language, translated in subtitles. As the game begins, an elder starts telling a story as it has been told to him by the famous storyteller Robert Nasruk Cleveland. In Alaskan Native cultures, storytellers “own” their stories, which are passed down in their name. Cleveland recorded his stories in 1965 as he felt that his own language was in decline. Lela Kiana Oman and Priscilla Tyler, who translated the Qayap epic of the Iñupiaq people in 1995, saw their work as “stewardship” and vital to protecting Indigenous legacy. “Language,” they write, “is the most complete embodiment of a culture, and a story without its original language is only a shadow of, or scrapbook of, the original.”¹³

As the gameplay starts, the players act as Nuna and her fox, following the guidance of the narrator. *Never Alone* in this form mimics a traditional way of initiation into this Alaskan Native culture, a cross-generational bridge, where everyone can benefit from the knowledge of an elder. Orality and visuality are cornerstones of Native-American cultures. Robert Davis Hoffmann, a Tlingit artist, in his celebrated poem “Sagninaw Bay: I Keep Going Back,” highlights the recreational element of oral history through storytelling:

The old ones tell a better story in Tlingit [...] Listen, I'm trying to say something – always the stories lived through paintings, always the stories stayed alive in retelling.¹⁴

For the game, Cleveland's daughter, Minnie Aliitchak Gray, an elder herself today, lends her transcription of her father's tale. The original title was "Kunuksaayuka," after the lead, male character who sets out to investigate the origin of the endless blizzard. The choice to change the gender of the character was deliberate, yet in accordance with the cultural ambassadors working with the team:

The team really wanted to create a strong, resourceful, smart, brave character who could be a great role model for girls. Great female characters have historically been woefully under-represented in video games and the team wanted to help change that—particularly since many have young daughters themselves.

Although the original Kunuksaayuka story featured a young boy, instead of a girl, the change to Nuna has no impact on the story itself. Inupiaq stories are filled with boys and girls, men and women, and the gender of the characters is much less important than the wisdom and learning contained in the story.

However, the team wanted to make sure that any changes to the original were made in cooperation and consultation with the community....¹⁵

The female character of the game in a way resembles Gray, who through learning from her father's stories became an elder herself. In retelling his tale in the form of *Never Alone*, Cleveland's daughter gave him a new voice and visual image, extending it "into a new medium, for another generation, and to last another 100 years."¹⁶

Visual Artistry

Traditional art styles were similarly adapted to the modern medium of video games in *Never Alone*. Artist Dima Veryovka, who studied Indigenous art and culture at the St. Petersburg Academy of Arts, in his artwork merges traditional Indigenous art with modern lives of Alaska Natives, a sum of "the familiar, the exotic, and the indescribable."¹⁷ The art concepts for the game were a product of cultural appropriation. As Veryovka recalls, through meetings with "very inspiring people, including Inupiaq

artists, teachers, storytellers, hunters, and students ... we were able to see authentic Alaskan Native art, tools, and clothes up close, take pictures, and even hold several pieces. All of this is not normal practice for game development in general, which is why *Never Alone* has been one of the most interesting and creative projects I have ever contributed to.”¹⁸ On his position as an outsider and the challenge to recreate a different culture, he noted that “it was difficult, naturally, because we felt a lot of pressure to accurately and honorably depict not just an imaginary culture, but real people with profound traditions.”¹⁹

The overall art concept of the game is split into two different types. To represent canonical elements of the storyline tied to the narration delivered by the elder, a traditional art style in pastel tones is used in cut scenes. The gameplay itself is a modern interpretation of the same. The player becomes an active participant in the tale by guiding Nuna and Fox after being introduced to the story in the cut scenes. Therefore, as the characters of the traditional setting shown in the cut scenes find their way into the active game, we see a continuation of the story across generations, from the narrating elder to the player. This cross-generational approach is further embodied by the lead character, Nuna, who is a little girl but throughout the game has to face life-threatening dangers: “Life in the Arctic is harsh even without an endless, debilitating, supernatural blizzard to deal with, so Nuna and Fox have to be resilient to survive. It’s not just physical resilience either—*Never Alone* starts out simple and quiet, but by the time Nuna reaches the end of her journey, players have to show the same resilience as their avatar.”²⁰ The player is challenged to understand the different layers of art and narration style. Listening to the elder and seeing the traditional art, players know that this is a classic tale. As they then embody Nuna in a 3D setting, the tale continues into the present, into the same moment. The classical tale, the hero’s quest, is not told to players but experienced by them. In this scenario, the journey itself gains dominance over time and place. It becomes a universal experience for players all around the world. This inverts the so far static perception that dark tourism is a reaction towards a place. In *Never Alone* it is action within a narrative that transmits traumatic events.

Indigenous Knowledge as a Reward

Throughout the game, Nuna as a character does not enhance physically and neither do her attributes. Instead of focusing on physical development, players advance by leveling their own cultural knowledge and becoming better guides for Nuna and Fox. Players have to avoid the blizzard and solve riddles as they run away from a Terrible Man. For completed tasks, they are rewarded with short documentaries called Cultural Insights in which Iñupiaq community members talk about their life, art, music, and history in the form of documentaries. Those Cultural Insights are tied to important aspects of the story presented in the game. For example, Nuna and her fox help a mystic owl man and are in return rewarded with a Bola, a traditional weapon. In the accompanying short documentary that follows, the player learns that the Bola is indeed a very special weapon. In a 55-second clip, Sr. Roland Aniqsuaq Brower and James Mumigan Nageak inform the player:

The Bola is what we call *kilauwitawinmium*. And the *kilauwitawinmium* is made out of braided sinew, tied to some heavy bone which you could twirl. In my case, we were catching ducks. We were out whaling. Sometimes the ducks start flying. And they're good for duck hunting. You know, if you're a whaling crew, you can't make too much noise, so you can't use a shotgun for killing some duck soup. Handy you know. The Bola is a really handy weapon to use for catching ducks....²¹

Back in the game, the player then has to use the Bola to catch ducks and defend Nuna and Fox against the Terrible Man. The player, through watching the documentaries, comes to understand Iñupiaq culture and thereby learns how to guide Nuna. Elements of the fictional tale are thereby linked to the real people and their living culture. A dialectic relationship emerges in which players gain Indigenous knowledge by watching the documentaries and are at the same time guided through the story by an elder narrating it to them during the cut scene. Using the information provided, the player then becomes a guide for Nuna and her fox. The different artistic elements of orality, art style, and rewards turn the game into a cross-cultural transmitter. Through playing the game, players get initiated into the Native community.

Transmitting Postcolonial Trauma

Through playing, the player gradually develops a sensitive understanding of the threat which the Terrible Man, the most frightening character in the story, represents: he is in fact an embodiment for cultural exodus or, in the Iñupiaq context, forced Americanization. Going back to Robert Davis Hoffmann's poem, we can find this character as an archetype in many Native stories:

Some men can't help it,
They take up too much space,
Always need more.²²

In the game, without a motive the Terrible Man sets out after Nuna, destroying everything in his path with the aim of not only physically harming her but also trying to steal her Bola—a symbol of her cultural identity. The Terrible Man is not part of the original story, and not the reason for Nuna to leave her home. She wants to know where the snow blizzards come from. But the Terrible Man crosses her path and keeps resurfacing throughout the game, causing distress and violent outbreaks. It becomes clear that Nuna and Fox are on a journey to confront him, at which point, the game turns dark and tragic. When rumors surfaced about the death of Nuna's pet fox, new players turned away from buying the game. A whole discussion forum formed in which a player, M. Doucet, said, "I knew this one would be hard, but for me the most emotional part was how it happened. It wasn't gory, but was very hard to watch and I won't be replaying it for this reason."²³ This moment in the game clearly unsettles players. Yet this uncomfortable, deeply disturbing moment evokes emotions which make the tragic history of the Iñupiaq and other Native people partly transmittable to outsiders. When the Terrible Man kills Nuna's fox after he had already destroyed her people's camp, he symbolically kills her connection to nature. The formerly helpful spirits around her disappear, and together with Fox's corpse, she falls into an abyss. The player has to watch how she tries to warm the dead body of her companion, crying, while they both are lying in the cold snow. A deeply troubling scene. Luckily, the spirit of Fox returns, suggesting that the

disconnection with nature was not final and can be restored. Together they still have to fight the Terrible Man again, as he is still out there looking for Nuna.

Fox's rebirth as a spirit animal is a powerful answer to a continued process of alienation faced by Native-American communities, reconnecting them with their Indigenous values, such as resilience. Fox's physical death nevertheless is tragic and the destruction, which the Terrible Man has caused, remains. The trauma is not fully resolved, although there is the promise of healing. In this way, the game reaches out to players from diverse cultural backgrounds, inviting them to embrace and learn, an experience similar to that of the developers themselves: "The process wasn't easy. The team relished the challenge of making a game based on a culture different from our own—and we all grew over the course of its development. We learned to rethink how we thought of stories. We learned how to let go of internalized stereotypes, both seemingly innocuous and otherwise."²⁴

Giving Back to the Community

While the game certainly was aimed at a wider audience, the main goal for the Tribal Council and involved Indigenous members was to reconnect estranged Alaskan Natives with their own culture. Aging is considered a hilly journey in the *Anishinaabe* concept of the hill of wisdom, which needs to be climbed. Priscilla A. Day writes on this subject: "On this hill, one should have the knowledge and skill to pass on to others ... [B]ecoming an elder, in the true sense, literally takes a lifetime of preparation. This is why elders are so revered in American Indian/Alaska Native communities."²⁵ From colonization to the formal establishment of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in 1879, as part of the so called Peace Policy under US Army officer Richard Henry Pratt, well into the 1980s North American Indians attended or were forced into boarding schools.²⁶ Growing up away from their home community in the forced schooling system made it difficult for the generation of today's elders to gain the needed experience to even set out on the lifelong journey to become elders. The gaps in their knowledge will be passed on to the next genera-

tion and in many cases grow into a perceived loss of social identity and cultural memory. In the 2011 Census, 17.8% of the Alaska Native population was over 55 years old, and by definition elders, yet their social position differs from community to community and has been precarious, since 27.6% in the same census reported having no health insurance.²⁷ Some community members involved in making the game were part of a generation that had to relearn Iñupiaq. As Leo Oktollik Kinneveauk relates, “I stayed home one semester from Lawrence, Kansas, because I wanted to watch the old custom dances they have at Point Hope every Christmas week. I got to see them that year. I lucked out—I stayed home that one semester, and a white man and an Iñupiaq man came to teach a course in reading and writing Iñupiaq. That was the first time I was ever in a classroom with my dad—he wanted to learn to read and write Iñupiaq too.”²⁸ Others, such as Fannie Kuutuuq Akpik, were able to resist forced westernization: “Regardless of being punished for accidentally speaking Iñupiaq in school, I learned to read and write.”²⁹

The famous Yup'ik writer Harold Napoleon in his story *Yuuyaraq: The Way of the Human Being* described the social situation of modern Alaskan Native communities as *yuut tuqurpallratni*—the Great Death, a time after: “Yup'ik spiritual leaders, their medicines, and most of their traditional beliefs had been lost ... Napoleon contends that Alaska Natives' negative contemporary situation—addictions, violence, and incarceration—is directly tied to historical trauma. Economic improvement alone will not cure what he views as a ‘spiritual illness’ perpetuated across the generations.”³⁰

Considering the wide gaps of traditional knowledge which modern Native communities face, *Never Alone*—set after the Great Death—aims to revitalize the old ways and language in which traditions were passed on by tying them to a popular medium and encouraging cross-generational gameplay. Ishmael Angaluuk Hope notes,

I hope that it will touch young Alaska Native people. I am hoping that this game will do its humble part to unlock centuries of oppression and colonization of Indigenous people. We need more positive images of ourselves, and we need more equal collaborations and opportunities such as the one this game provides ... I don't expect everything to change overnight, but

I think all these elements closely align: a good game, a rich experience, a great story, empowering Indigenous people, and healing and building bridges along the colonial divide.³¹

Community members personally involved similarly hoped that the game would help the next generation rediscover their own culture. Leo Oktollik Kinneeveauk in one of the Cultural Insights told how he “had two children and one passed away. We have grandchildren we are raising, and we help my granddaughter raise her kids. We moved to Anchorage to be near the Native Hospital for our grandson when he was little. Now he’s graduated from high school. He has special needs. He loves to play video games. I hope this game will help not only the children but the adults in learning more of Our traditions and Our language.”³²

Within a notion of loss, the game nevertheless stays optimistic, with Nuna being able to regain her connection to the nature spirits and her community. With this twist, the game provides a symbolic answer to the angst within the fragmented communities of Alaskan Natives, stating that their old values, such as resilience and connection to the natural world, can help them to regain and preserve their culture. Because of this intention, the tribal members involved in the game saw it as a positive, new form of their cultural heritage. The threat of the Terrible Man is part of many individual stories across Native communities. Nuna’s journey is a spiritual trek through trauma, which allows the player to understand and connect to Alaskan Native heritage. Considering that Alaska is typically not considered a dark tourism destination, *Never Alone* shows how a connection can be created in the form of a journey detached from a specific location.

Conclusion

Never Alone represents the genre of context-focused indie games which address traumatic events in history and the ongoing destruction of marginalized identities. The game provides insights into the history and current lifestyle of Alaskan Natives by presenting their own way of generating their history through storytelling. The story around which the game

revolves is old and embodies the history of the long-time censored, native language. Native orality is one of several key features which present the game in an authentic way to insiders and outsiders, yet also clarifies that the active community of speakers is relatively small and, thus, the game is a tool for language revitalization. The story is also about a journey—one that, told through game-play, allows both modern Inupiaq and outsiders to learn as they travel from and through trauma toward a repaired, though altered, future destination.

The player can link elements of the language and culture presented in the game, such as the Bola, to actual items in use by the living community by watching the Cultural Insights provided throughout the game. The story comes to life in these documentaries. The items used by Nuna and Fox in the game, like the Bola, are both useful and meaningful. The context in which orality, music, and objects are presented and connected to the fictive elements of the game create a learning dynamic. Watching the introductory cut scenes narrated by an elder, players are passively listening. As players gain control over Nuna and Fox, the players themselves become part of the narration. Successful adoption of the narration, by solving riddles and avoiding the Terrible Man as well as the blizzards, then unlock short documentaries. In contrast to the main narration, Cultural Insights are presented in English and follow a western model of interviewing. In these, the modern community is likewise presented authentically. None of the cultural ambassadors is wearing historical costumes; rather, they tell stories of their past which make it clear that Nuna's journey exemplifies their way of life and understanding of the natural world. In this way, Native modes of storytelling and western modes of verifying history coexist in the game. By connecting them, the terror and stress—which the Terrible Man embodies in the game—may be experienced across cultural borders on an interpersonal level. The player is moved by Fox's death. The kindled emotion created by Nuna losing her connection to nature through Fox's death extends into understanding that this must be a devastating feeling of loss, experienced by many Native Americans as the documentaries show how vital their connection to nature is for them. The trauma is deep. Fox's spirit returns even while the destruction caused by the Terrible Man remains. Fox's return nevertheless symbolizes hope and possible healing.

The strongest feature of the game, therefore, is its aim to reconnect its own people to a historical canon of rich stories and strong resistance, showing them that they can successfully withstand silencing and westernization. Only through the medium of gaming and the interactive plot and reward system can the player define the different layers and link them together. They do this within the context of following the Iñupiaq journey through colonial devastation and westernization. Similar to the gameplay itself, the player is challenged to comprehend the tale by linking it to the real-life documentaries featuring tribe members. By being able to identify cultural practices, art, orality, music, and material objects of the Iñupiaq people, the story becomes authentic, even though it remains fabulous. It turns into a real-fiction, incorporating the player as someone both inside and outside of the Iñupiaq community.

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13

Virtually Historical: Performing Dark Tourism Through Alternate History Games

Caleb Andrew Milligan

History, for many a tourist, is settled. Dark tourism, similar to its lighter shade of commercial travel, attempts to recreate that history to help tourists understand it by visiting its locales. But where history remains rooted in canonized past, and dark tourism wrecked in the remains of its physical geographies, a different kind of virtual dark tourism allows “tourists” to go where the world cannot take them—even where the world itself never went. Virtual dark tourism opens the possibility that alternate histories can be important complements to actual history. Video games may participate in that virtual exploration by not only creating rich alternate histories but featuring their users as agents within those timelines. Games operate on not just narrative, but what game studies scholarship calls “ludicity.” Ludic “from Latin *ludus*: game or play,”¹ game studies scholar Astrid Ensslin explains, refers to texts that incorporate “semiotic multimodality, rule-drivenness, playability, relative agency, and interactive variability.”² In other words, games can be played, and when

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their narratives are therefore playable, we participate in what game developer and critic Clint Hocking calls the “ludonarrative.”³ Combining game studies and dark tourism research demonstrates how dark tourism can be ludonarrative, and how games as virtual dark tourism can be performative.⁴ An analysis of alternate history games that highlights their performances of dark tourism offers game studies a distinct practice for theorizing what game studies scholar Alexander Galloway calls games’ “social realism,”⁵ and offers dark tourism an avenue through which to gauge its historical function via representations of what “could have been” historical.

Alternate history games often present disturbing divergent timelines that “tourists” can play. Ken Levine’s *Bioshock* and *Bioshock Infinite*, for example, take place in the violent ruins of science fictional cities, each set in past technological moments that could not plausibly support the dark advances their games depict. The unfeasible horrors of these alternate versions of 1960 and 1912, respectively, offer players imagined evidence of the havoc that uglier hypercapitalist, racist, and oppressive values of early twentieth-century America would wreak unchallenged. On the opposite side of the historical timeline, the *Fallout* franchise, especially once revived by Bethesda Game Studios, fathoms a twenty-third century of nuclear apocalypse. Beginning in a deviated timeline from our recorded past, *Fallout* imagines an America stagnating culturally in the mid-century modern values and aesthetics of the 1950s, exploring unprecedented scientific advancement in “atompunk” technologies, and eventually destroying itself in nuclear war with China. Its alternate historical future thus creates for players a dystopian world full of the ashes of utopian promises.

The worlds imagined by these titles are virtually historical, in both senses of the word “virtual”: they are imagined via immersive digital media, and they are virtually imaginable, drawing on the term’s other meaning of “nearly” or “almost.” These games present almost-histories. Therefore, dark tourism can be a gaming opportunity that creates spaces in which we can explore the violent trajectories that our almost-histories may have taken. Furthermore, we can discover through games where those histories brush the negative borders that canonical history approached too closely. By contrasting the *Bioshock* series’ foray into our

fictionalized past against the *Fallout* series' foray into our fictionalized future, we can explore where these gaming franchises find roots in the facts between. Performing dark tourism through alternate history games involves the player in another side of the historical: the virtually historical.

From Virtual to "Virtual"

Virtual dark tourism does not have to stop at the digital representation of what has already happened. What has already happened is anyway a blur at best, according to Walter Benjamin. He argues, "The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably."⁶ If these "images of the past" are not preserved in the present, then tourism's historical exploration ends up with nothing to tour. Lutz Kaelber explains what the virtual offers dark tourism. "Traumascape"—what Kaelber defines as "sites of atrocity"—often are "difficult to reach, have been substantially altered, or no longer exist."⁷ The virtual, where the actual has been erased, offers a solution: "For visiting a physically obliterated traumascape that is difficult or even impossible to access physically, pilgrims and tourists can engage in alternative, technologically mediated appropriations of darkest tourism sites."⁸ Virtual dark tourism helps those interested to reach infamous locations beyond physical reach because, according to tourist studies scholars Michael Bowman and Phaedra Pezzulo, tourists have always been drawn to sites where death has occurred.⁹

Dark tourism locations draw crowds through their traumatic intimation that "something happened here," so tourists come to see what remains of the terrible happening. Yet when all that is left are memories, virtual dark tourism puts people in touch with what they cannot reach. Users "tour" virtual sites and still find ways to witness the histories these sites offer so that the stories become part of a collective memory. In fact, virtual avenues into dark tourism more effectively allow users to be part of what they witness, a desire increasing alongside the rise of memory "as

the word most commonly paired with history.”¹⁰ Speaking to this desire, Kerwin Lee Klein posits, “Memory appeals to us partly because it projects an immediacy we feel has been lost from history.”¹¹ Virtual dark tourism makes history more immediate than ever, when memory becomes a process we actively participate in, especially through gaming spaces. Yet when games like *BioShock* and *Fallout 3* present bleak alternate histories, Klein’s claim that “memories shaped by trauma are the most likely to subvert totalizing varieties of historicism”¹² finds creative subversion. Trauma theory scholar Susannah Radstone elucidates what trauma means for memory: “The subject of trauma theory is characterized by that which it does not know/remember.”¹³ The trauma of alternate history is that it presents a historical memory no one remembers. Gaming alternate timelines affords players the power to trace that memory-without-remembrance to its historical tensions, to better understand our own historical memory from its points of divergence.

Virtual dark tourism, therefore, can venture into the darker possibilities of what may have been or will be. The *BioShock* and *Fallout* series both take up these potentialities, which contribute to their alternate histories as gaming spaces for players to explore. In these games, history provides the backdrop to their violently different settings where its counterfactuals are transmogrified into worst-case scenarios. These counterfactuals map onto historical memory through trauma where players get to experience what cannot be remembered, for “testimony (to trauma) demands a witness.”¹⁴ Playing these games means witnessing their traumas, for both alternate histories feature the darkest science fictional horrors that only virtual dark tourism could survey: not just what cannot be remembered, but what no one should have to remember. Sarah Clift states that “memory has thus been given the task of creating a better future by virtue of past events that *must* remain passed—that is, located safely in the past.”¹⁵ *BioShock* and *Fallout* differ in that the former’s events never happened and the latter’s have not yet occurred—but their shared “future” is our present, where we should be contemplating how these what-ifs reflect our what-happened. Fredric Jameson suggests that “to read the present as history,” we must adopt “a Science-Fictional perspective of some kind,”¹⁶ which matches well the fantastical plots of these

thematically resonant games. To read the present as history means to explore through virtual dark tourism how our timeline scrapes the borders of these alternate horrors.

Immersive realistic gameplay helps extend dark tourism into a virtual consideration of what “almost” occurred, calling on the other definition of “virtual.” These games virtually depict, meaning simulate through software, the virtually historical, what almost “could have happened.” That “almost” highlights an important distinction regarding the “real” in gaming. Alexander Galloway distinguishes “realistic-ness” from “realism,” claiming the terms are “most certainly not the same thing.”¹⁷ He writes, “If they were the same, realism in gaming would just be a process of counting the polygons and tracing the correspondences . . . Realistic-ness is important, to be sure, but the more realistic-ness takes hold in gaming the more removed from gaming it actually becomes, relegated instead to simulation or modelling.”¹⁸ Galloway’s point suggests that when virtual dark tourism involves gaming alternate timelines, “simulation or modelling” becomes inadequate. Games should, Galloway argues, strive for realism, which “often arrives in the guise of social critique.”¹⁹ But realism, for Galloway, is not the “social critique” of alternate history on a thematic dimension—it is social critique built into action. “Realism in gaming is a process of revisiting the material substrate of the medium and establishing correspondences with specific activities existent in the social reality of the gamer,” in Galloway’s estimation.²⁰ In other words, the actions of thumbs, the pressing of buttons, et cetera that comprise gaming experiences must similarly feature and matter within the games themselves.

BioShock and *Fallout* provide action-oriented, high-intensity gaming experiences, featuring science fictional horrors, so realism on both narrative and gameplay components sounds suspect at first. But reflecting upon her own play-through of *Fallout 3*, Sara Mosberg Iversen explains that interfacing with the game’s *Pip-Boy 3000* device to keep track of her character’s health, equipment, game maps, notes, and more feels like her real job: “Just as I do when carrying out my actual work, a great deal of time in F3’s world is spent tabbing between various menus in order to access information which . . . may all be seen as residing securely with the diegesis presented by the game.”²¹ *BioShock* likewise features character

management menu elements through its own plasmid upgrade system. By stretching Galloway's requirements for realism into domains of dark tourism, we see further how each game similarly works the experience of touring historical locales into its gameworld, an activity (even subverted) that many would recognize from their own experiences.

For what makes games unique as exercises of virtual dark tourism is their interactive and agential qualities. These facets especially factor in critically considering these games' virtual tours of alternate timelines. Jerremie Clyde, Howard Hopkins, and Glenn Wilkinson's research proposing a gamic mode of history supports this argument's stretch of Galloway's requirements for realism. Clyde, Hopkins, and Wilkinson claim, "games also create a sense of realism for the player based on the player's actions rendering expected results, a type of realism that stems from the players' control over the game, as opposed to the presentation of historical evidence in the game or narrative; a sort of unavoidable rhetorical device."²² Game studies scholar Ian Bogost dubs this rhetorical device "procedural rhetoric," what he considers "a general name for the practice of authoring arguments through processes."²³ Similar to J. John Lennon and Malcom Foley's original conception of dark tourism residing outside the virtual,²⁴ Bogost begins his argument outside games: "*Procedural representation itself* requires inscription in a medium that actually enacts processes rather than merely describe them. Human behavior is one mode of procedural inscription. Human actors can enact processes; we do so all the time."²⁵ In visits to physical dark tourism locales, human actors enact the processes of finding the traumatic sites and learning their histories through exploring them. Characters in the *BioShock* and *Fallout* games enact similar processes in virtual arenas. But their centrality to their own exploration makes the gamic mode of virtual dark tourism distinct, for, "[i]n games, as soon as the player has agency to make meaningful choices and they are playing with the past, every action is a counterfactual."²⁶ Performing dark tourism through alternate history games means becoming part of those histories. And when "tourists" not only tour but enact alternate history through virtual dark tourism, they learn through active gameplay how actual history is comprised of concrete actions that kept the canonical record from veering onto darker paths.

Science Fictional Settings as Alternate Traumascapes

Ken Levine's *BioShock* and *BioShock Infinite* depict hauntingly rich alternate histories that players get to discover through gameplay. Created by many of the same developers, Levine included, that worked on the futuristic *System Shock* series, *BioShock* takes the future into the past. *BioShock*'s fictional world is influenced by both fictional and nonfictional references, ranging from the literature and philosophy of Ayn Rand to the business magnate John D. Rockefeller. Given these intensely capitalist influences, its timeline can be critically elucidated by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's theory of history as "desiring-production." Deleuze and Guattari define desiring-production as an active laboring force which explains the function of humans as desiring-machines.²⁷ Put simply, humans work to get what they want: this summary explains how we are desiring-machines and how we labor in societal conditions of desiring-production. Indeed, these conditions comprise the flows of history itself, in Deleuze and Guattari's estimation: "Hence everything is production: production of productions, of actions and of passions; productions of recording processes, of distributions and of co-ordinates that serve as points of reference."²⁸ Those points of reference are where Levine's games veer desiring-production from the historical into the counterfactual.

BioShock takes place in a history that allowed desiring-production to want too much. The game is set in 1960, within the science fictional setting of Rapture, an underwater utopia constructed by ultra-capitalist entrepreneur Andrew Ryan in 1946. More accurately, it is set in the ruins of what Rapture was, for the utopia has already become a dystopia by the time protagonist Jack's plane crashes in the ocean near the above-ground terminus that leads to the city below. Before we arrive through Jack's avatar, Rapture's objectivist paradise has been destroyed by civil war after the discovery of the genetic material ADAM has driven people mad. ADAM is a substance harvested from a fictional species of sea slug that forms potent stem cells able to produce new tissue in the human body and thus generates unprecedented cosmetics and abilities. Rapture's market ran on the commodification of ADAM through injectable "upgrades" called

Plasmids; its collapse into chaos was fueled by the societal lack of any regulation on Plasmids whatsoever. Since the ADAM in Plasmids incites superhuman powers in its users (including Jack), the over-users have mutated into the game's frequent antagonists, "splicers"—inhuman revenants intent on killing the player. This horror scenario hyperbolizes not only Ayn Rand's belief that selfishness should be the highest virtue, but furthermore what happens when desiring-production is not put "under determinate conditions" by social regulation.²⁹ *BioShock's* alternate history gameworld becomes the new media extension of Deleuze and Guatarri's idea that, "Art often takes advantage of [the properties] of desiring-machines by creating veritable group fantasies in which desiring-production is used to short-circuit social production ... by introducing an element of dysfunction."³⁰ While Jack fights to survive his way through Rapture, we learn of many other characters in the city's history, including Ryan's major competitor Frank Fontaine and Dr. Brigid Tenenbaum, the scientist who experimented on the ADAM-altered, drone-like girls called Little Sisters. In Jessica Aldred's and Brian Greenspan's words on *BioShock*, "To play the game is to learn the story of the city's demise."³¹ We play *BioShock* to tour Rapture as a "traumascape."

Similarly, *BioShock Infinite* features gameplay built around discovering more about its darkly science fictional setting. Set in 1912 before the events of *BioShock*, this game is influenced by Erik Larson's nonfiction book *The Devil in the White City* as well as events around the 1893 Chicago World's Fair.³² Taking American exceptionalism to a literal extreme, the game's cityscape this time floats above water into the sky as the flying city of Columbia. Its Chicago World's Fair homage is worked directly into its alternate history: Columbia was first a spectacle which began its journey skyward at that very exposition. However, this almost-history violently diverges when Columbia reveals its battle station capabilities and brutally abbreviates the Boxer Rebellion by bombing Peking to the ground. Refusing to return to the United States to answer for this act, the city secedes from the Union, becomes a theocratic police state ruled by self-appointed prophet Zachary Comstock, and worships American historical figures within a pseudo-Christianity. Though this time the game's action begins while Columbia's culture remains in order, soon a civil war—between the white, elite-class "Founders" and the "Vox Populi," underclass

servants of color—disrupts daily life. Closer to the source of the conflict this time, we not only tour the aftermath but witness what causes it when desire for a different order begets destruction. According to Deleuze and Guatarri, desire is “explosive; there is no desiring-machine capable of being assembled without demolishing entire social sectors.”³³ In the wake of these explosive desires, once again, the player’s avatar Booker DeWitt learns a city by fighting his way through it. Through characters Jack and Booker, we experience these settings via immersive adventure.

These gameworlds can be dark tourism sites if we consider their cities as aesthetic theatres. Bowman and Pezzulo suggest we take the darkness out of dark tourism by reckoning it a performative act, on both the tourists’ and tour sites’ sides. They recognize that “When tourists travel ... what they witness isn’t merely like a performance, it is a performance insofar as the site is often composed of live bodies engaged in acts that are put on display for tourists.”³⁴ The fact that games essentialize action makes them a performative medium, and every performance needs a stage. Both *Rapture* and *Columbia* offer stages that logically and aesthetically support players’ performances through their alternate historical locations. Aldred and Greenspan consider *Rapture*’s “art deco ... steam-punk pastiche” gameworld to represent

what has been called a “critical dystopia,” a historical inventory of utopian styles, plans, and technologies that self-consciously critiques the notion of utopia itself. *Rapture*’s ironic-nostalgic pastiche of failed artistic and technological utopias prompts the player to reconstruct the city’s tragic tale, an objective that, however, holds out the utopian promise of a renewed historiographic consciousness.³⁵

Therefore, *Rapture*’s setting encourages players to consider its almost-history an opportune location for virtual dark tourism. Even *Columbia*’s brighter, more open World’s Fair nightmare—which eschews *Rapture*’s literally dark design—subverts the counterfactuals of canonical history in creepy ways. With respect to Bowman and Pezzulo, approaching these traumascapes performatively does not make them any less dark. Emma Willis speaks to this darkness in performance by citing in both dark tourism and theatrical performance certain spaces “haunted by absence”

which “each in their own manner, traffic in substitutes that attempt to make such absence present, to make it *felt*.”³⁶ The absence in these cities is palpable; they appear largely devoid of life, remains of cultures-that-once-were before tragedy struck. In these absences of society, the substitutes of Rapture are ostensibly the splicers which constantly attack Jack, and even worse in Columbia, its own citizens who, though apparently of sound mind, still hunt Booker. These encounters highlight what Matthew Jason Weise means by calling *BioShock*, “A world full of madness and death ... in which all people behave as expected: violently or not at all.”³⁷ In the virtual dark tourism enacted through the cities of *BioShock* and *BioShock Infinite*, the tours are dangerously interactive, and the player must avoid ending up a casualty of the atrocities being witnessed.

Unlike these titles, *Fallout 3* realizes the alternate history spanning its franchise through a dark location familiar to the American nation: its capital city, Washington, D.C. For a little history of this almost-history, *Fallout 3* is the revival of this series of games, after Interplay Entertainment released the original *Fallout* in 1997 and *Fallout 2* in 1998. Ten years later, the series proper came back to prominence when Bethesda Game Studios took it over and released its third installment. Despite the years of changing hands, *Fallout* has always boasted an ironic, retro-nostalgic, culturally and technologically 1950s aesthetic, its alternate future full of past. Set in a timeline divergent from ours following World War II, its past imagines that American technology continued to advance but American social progress stagnated and ceased. Now America’s future is ravaged by nuclear apocalypse after the Sino-American War of 2077, leaving humanity forced to survive in Vaults which resemble “in-game museums ... of the 1950s,” according to Martin Pichlmair’s discussion of the franchise.³⁸ *Fallout 3* is set 200 years after the original nuclear war cited in the first game, and its world outside the Vault maps out across the familiarly uncanny locations of Washington, D.C., as a traumascape of a future hopefully not our own. Discussing *Fallout 3* in his research on post-apocalyptic fiction, Robert Yeates suggests in light of this dark tourism location, “Setting the game within a semi-recognizable environment has ... the potential to create an uncanny space for the player to explore, one that is all the more defamiliarizing for its being familiar.”³⁹ His invocation of the word

“uncanny” signals Sigmund Freud’s famous definition of the term: “the ‘uncanny’ is that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar.”⁴⁰ Freud explains the concept by sharing his own unsettling experience of walking and getting turned around on the deserted streets of a small town in Italy unknown to him.⁴¹ The streets of *Fallout 3*’s Washington, D.C. feel more uncanny because we feel we have been there before, but a “there” safe from the nuclear future this game has in store for a possible almost-history. Within the gameworld, players tour what is called instead the Capital Wasteland, where possible sights include the remains of the White House, the Lincoln and Jefferson Memorials, and the Washington Monument. This “virtual” dark tourism invokes both definitions of the term by situating its traumascape at not just a recognizable location, but a nationally essential location.

Fallout 3’s alternate future allows players to virtually tour the America we know as a thing of the past. In its Capital Wasteland, where we recognize one of America’s most thriving political and cultural cities, there is only a small number of survivor settlements, where survivors live underground in the Vaults. What remains of an American government we may recognize, called the Enclave, is an antagonist. What is gone—nearly everything—recalls Willis’s “absence” and what is left are only those “substitutes” that have turned the familiar not just uncanny, but hostile. Against these odds, players create a character to feature in a plot that involves finding their character’s father and endeavoring to complete Project Purity, which would purify the Tidal Basin and then the entire Potomac River. Each main character of each *Fallout* entry is always a Vault dweller, identifying with the players outside the game as strangers to this alternate apocalyptic setting.

The America we know is a “post-nuclear wasteland”⁴² that highlights virtual dark tourism’s interactive invitation to feel the pain of a ravaged traumascape. Feeling that pain means risking injury and death, for the Capital Wasteland now houses radioactive mutant creatures intent on killing the player. Pichlmair explains this hostile uncanny by saying, “The universe the player character dwells in is unpredictable, just like the shattered environment around her. In other words: many things that would be weird in our world feel entirely normal in a post-nuclear setting.”⁴³

The weird becomes normal when players not only tour these sites of traumascapes but become part of them. Players become part of them, however, as outsiders, for these tourists are, in Willis's language, "spectator[s] as audience to the unspeakable."⁴⁴ So Pichlmair's point that "[h]umanity [in *Fallout 3*] tries hard to remember former greatness"⁴⁵ is better phrased that only the outsider traveling into the virtual (both digital representational and "almost") can remember it. Performing virtual dark tourism through alternate history games makes players outsiders on the inside, significantly both part of the deviated timeline through their avatars within the gameworld and separate as external operators of that gameworld. The tour is only a visit for us, but we are allowed considerable power in it during our stay.

Dead Media Archaeology

Players in both *BioShock* and *Fallout* become explorers of dark tourism sites through the accumulation of material memories. Klein deems this trope the attempt "to identify memory as a collection of practices or material artifacts" to comprise "the new structural memory."⁴⁶ Across the two franchises, these games aestheticize structural memory through obsolescent media formats—even their separate ad campaigns buzz to the tune of scratchy radio and/or skipping film stock. *BioShock*, for example, according to Aldred and Greenspan's argument, is inundated with "the echoes of Rapture's dead or zombified inhabitants ... all preserved on reel-to-reel dictaphones, Super-8 footage, and other dead media strewn about the city."⁴⁷ Weise quips, "Rapture is not only littered with dead people, but dead people who were kind enough to record their own demise."⁴⁸ This cast of characters Jack almost never meets takes the part of Willis's "absent others ... inhabit[ing] a kind of 'audible silence,'"⁴⁹ the dead whose presence is only communicated through dead media, now made media *of* death. Their contributions to the game's narrative enacts the virtual dark tourism experience and makes it important to the overall narrative. Aldred and Greenspan state, "After all, the goal of gameplay within *BioShock* is to discover the mystery of Rapture—how it

came to be and how it came to fail so perfectly—by collecting these assorted media objects.”⁵⁰ The media objects convey deeply unsettling alternate historical subjects.

The dark backstories distributed across these artifacts could be extensions of Benjamin’s famous statement that “There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.”⁵¹ For there is plenty of barbarism to go around both *BioShock* and *BioShock Infinite*. The point of the games is not only collecting these documents of barbarism, but also collecting them as documents of their civilizations.⁵² *BioShock Infinite* features similar strategies of structural memory collection; therefore, *BioShock* and *Infinite* are not just alternate histories in context, but in ludonarrative procedure: “The act of gathering and playing these recordings becomes an integral part of the game story and experience, being thereby transformed from a non-diegetic into a diegetic act.”⁵³ Even on the non-diegetic level, nevertheless, if players can collect every single media document throughout each game, their avatars earn the rank of city Historian.⁵⁴

The rigor of this narrative and ludic achievement is absent from the *Fallout* series, however. *Fallout 3*’s virtual dark tourism is more incidental, an exploration off the beaten path of advancing the plot. Trevor Owens remarks of his own play-through of *Fallout 3*, “I was enthralled with playing the game as a kind of future archaeologist, excavating our present through traces left on these terminals and strewn about the physical landscape.”⁵⁵ But the material “strewn about the physical landscape” has more space throughout which to spread than the city settings of the *BioShock* games, so discovering these traces of the past ends up feeling more sublime. Sarah Grey explains this notion of the sublime in her philosophical examination of *Fallout 3* via Theodor Adorno. Regarding these disparate logs, documents, et cetera, she points out, “They do not add anything specific to the plot, nor do they change gameplay However, if the player explores the area, she will find powerful, if loosely told stories of loss and helplessness.”⁵⁶ Unlike the diegetic media archaeology at play in *BioShock*’s virtual dark tourism, according to Grey’s argument, in *Fallout 3* these material encounters with traumatic memories “jolt ... one from

immersive, flowing gameplay ... to provide an opportunity for reflection.”⁵⁷ She concludes, “Paying attention to dissonant moments and to unsettling micronarratives embedded into otherwise seamless gameplay is one way to reject thoughtless immersion and mimicry,”⁵⁸ demonstrating again how the gamic mode of virtual dark tourism is not just “simulation or modeling.”

Where *BioShock* draws the player in through narratively motivated dark tourism, *Fallout* takes the player back into the real world where the effects of virtual traumascapes register. Yet both strategies uniquely become ludic practices of Michel Foucault’s *Archaeology of Knowledge*. Foucault notes:

[Archaeology] does not try to repeat what has been said by reaching it in its very identity It is nothing more than a rewriting; that is, in the preserved form of exteriority, a regulated transformation of what has already been written. It is not a return to the innermost secret of the origin; it is the systematic description of a discourse-object.⁵⁹

In other words, piecing together the dead media documents of either game franchise’s entries is not a representation of what those formats contain. It is instead a “rewriting,” the story of piecing them together. This experience is unique to the virtual variant distinct from actual dark tourism. Unlike the prepared and prewritten experience most expect of some tours, these games present interactive tours in which the “tourists” locate and accumulate what they want to witness. Spectatorship becomes an active rewriting when we perform the role of media archaeologist in these almost-histories.

Players, Tourists, and Performers

BioShock and *Fallout 3* invite players to perform not just the role of spectators to what happens, but actors determining what *will* happen. Their gameworlds foster virtual spaces that involve players as tourists. According to Bowman and Pezzulo, tourists are already performers: “The

emphasis on the instrumentality of tourists' social performances ... conjures images of the tourist as ... the prototype ... of (post)modern, alienated individuals who go on tour to escape the artificiality of everyday life, only to find themselves failing, falling ever deeper into the abyss of the simulated, the staged, the 'fake.'"⁶⁰ At first provocative glance, these games allow players to succeed, not fail, in the simulated staging of their alternate timelines. For example, in *BioShock* the central ludonarrative mechanic of choosing whether to "harvest" (kill) or save the Little Sisters for more or less ADAM has ethical complications, gamic concomitants, and narrative consequences that all contribute to a "contemplative approach to history."⁶¹ Ryan Lizardi suggests that in *BioShock* "[p]layers are ... given the ludic gameplay option to follow Ryan's self-interest thinking or not through the decision to 'harvest' the Little Sister characters or save them."⁶² In this context, players can decide if they want to participate in the tour by playing a citizen of Rapture or an outsider to its atrocity. Whichever amount of ADAM the player receives for her or his decisions, using the genetic material through Plasmids on oneself creates an in-game power-up which opens startling, new fantastical abilities. The game functions on a first-person-shooter engine, however, so we don't quite see Jack's mutated body. We therefore more fully inhabit this avatar, making the game's dark tourism as virtual as possible. That tour we find ourselves part of eventually takes two distinctly forking paths depending on how we treated the Little Sisters. To harvest them guarantees an even more dystopian ending, and we end up not just witnessing Rapture as a site of atrocity but making it more atrocious ourselves. To save them, on the other hand, brings a happy ending which rewards the player for acting ethically in a post-ethical ruin. Taking up a similar ethical tangle, Willis argues regarding the tourist's gaze that, "The ethical problem of such a gaze or attention is clear ... to turn the pain, suffering, and death of the other into a drama for one's own gratification suggests a total disavowal of any moral responsibility for that other."⁶³ *BioShock* offers a chance to intervene on behalf of the other and bring light out of the dark tourism site of Rapture.

Fallout 3 features a similar mechanic of gamifying ethical behavior in dark tourism exploration. Like the main series entries before it, this game continues *Fallout's* Karma system, unique from other popular games with

stricter, binary mechanics gauging morality for its ability to allow characters to be good, bad, neutral, or varying moralities in between. In its performance of virtual dark tourism, *Fallout 3* lets players decide for themselves how to act in a post-ethical world which imposes no morality, enabling individual “responses to death [to be] culturally bound and historically variable”⁶⁴ each unique play-through. Marcus Schulzke argues that *Fallout 3* enhances this mechanic because “it is set in an open world that grants the player freedom of action—including the freedom to be moral or immoral.”⁶⁵ Unlike the mostly faceless main character of *BioShock*, players get to design their own avatars in *Fallout 3*, thus drawing players closer to their own choices, since it is their very own character through which they make those choices. Their avatar into this gameworld spotlights that it is both them and not them. Similarly, the tourist to traumascapes is part of that history through witnessing it, yet always an outsider, only witnessing.

Nowhere is this outsider status clearer than in the most cinematic and narratively constrained of these titles, *BioShock Infinite*. While Booker looks after the superhumanly talented “damsel in distress” Elizabeth, we discover her ability to tear holes in the fabric of space-time, presenting the player with “alternate” timelines that look just like our own. When our history threatens the alternate world within the game, we are prompted to realize how little control we have to resolve this divergent timeline at risk. Lizardi agrees: “*Infinite’s* narrative is specifically highlighting the counterfactual and indeterminate future of its protagonists, in a game that gives players the least amount of ludic influence on outcomes in the series.” Indeed, *Infinite’s* gameplay is the least subversive of these forays into virtual dark tourism. Nonetheless, its story features several illusive appeals to ludic intervention, giving the player pivotal choices at various intense moments within the traumatic ludonarrative. But all these actions are revealed for their falsity of importance in *Infinite’s* dreamlike concluding “puzzle.” The player controlling Booker walks toward a lighthouse in the distance, and the wood comprising the docks constructs right in front of his feet wherever he may go. This visually clever feature first appears empowering, for the player feels that he or she can go anywhere—the player quite literally makes his or her own path. That path, however, merely builds toward the same

destination no matter where Booker goes. Players realize they are being played once the camera pans out to reveal the same lighthouse repeated dozens of times throughout the shores of this dreamscape. This visual metaphor is a gamic way of confronting *Infinite's* narrative endpoint as a poetic rumination on alternate history itself. Booker learns that no matter what different choices he makes to rescue Elizabeth from Comstock each time—for he likewise learns this game doesn't depict his first attempt—the same thing roughly always happens.

These virtually historical games wrestle with the futility of the “virtual.” With *Infinite*, Levine creates a story that metanarratively critiques the very idea of players' narrative control over a game. He did something similar in *BioShock*, where players learn Jack's “tour guide” Atlas has been making him do everything we have played so far with the triggering phrase “would you kindly?” Hocking considers this reveal to be an instance of what he terms ludonarrative dissonance: “when it is revealed that the rationale for why the player helps Atlas is not a ludic constraint that we graciously accept in order to enjoy the game, but rather is a narrative one that is dictated to us, what was once disturbing becomes insulting. The game openly mocks us for having willingly suspended our disbelief in order to enjoy it.”⁶⁶ Nevertheless, instead of “mocking” the player, *BioShock* and *Infinite* more accurately involve the player in a deconstruction of alternate history at odds with the history we are stuck with outside these games. *Fallout 3* also intentionally “fails” in this regard when the same ending occurs whether we decide to sacrifice ourselves to complete Project Purity or send in our teammate to do it. In the end, Bowman and Pezzulo are right, and the “simulated, the staged, the ‘fake’” of these explorations into virtual dark tourism reveal themselves. The virtually historical remains just that, only virtual. Our own history is too actual to virtually ignore.

Conclusion

Rather than conclude that performing dark tourism through alternate history games is a futile endeavor, this practice makes history matter more. To play the past-that-never-was is to negotiate the trauma in the

traces of what did occur. Benjamin said, tragically in light of his fate, that “[o]ne reason why fascism has a chance is that in the name of progress its opponents treat it as a historical norm. The current amazement that the things we are experiencing are ‘still’ possible in the twentieth century is *not* philosophical.”⁶⁷ Not long after these words, the Holocaust became possible and now its historical traumascapes are locations of darkest tourism.⁶⁸ These alternate timelines then should make us contemplate what was “‘still’ possible” in our history to be mined for material in these violent explorations of dark tourism through the virtually historical.

Each of these alternate history games present almost-histories that highlight how disturbing the “almost” is. *BioShock*’s real world referents include the Objectivist philosophy of Ayn Rand and the disturbing scientific experimentation by German concentration camp doctors during the Holocaust. *Infinite* draws upon “scientifically” backed racism “proving” why non-white races are biologically inferior as exhibited on prominent display during the Chicago World’s Fair.⁶⁹ *Fallout 3* takes literally the real Cold War fears of nuclear annihilation woven into the American suburban aesthetic to propose an alternate bombed-out future. We cannot tour these ideas, but we have the virtual opportunity to explore where they could have taken us. Confronting through virtual means the death and destruction that could have taken place under different circumstances should make us reflect on the darker seeds of life within our actual histories. The virtually historical, in this case, what could have happened, as depicted by digital representational games, makes dark tourism a memorializing ritual of the atrocity possible but not actual to our canonized history. Caught between alternate timelines and actual traumatic potentials, history—the dark tourist realizes—now remains unsettled.

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14

Remembering Fictional History and Virtual War in *EVE Online*

Daniel Fandino

Introduction: The Eve of Destruction

The massively multiplayer game *EVE Online* is a story of intrigue, bitter rivalries, and interstellar war. To support the complicated fictional history of the game, the virtual space of *EVE* features historic sites and memorials commemorating notable events covering a span of 15,000 years. As war and conflict are at the core of the game, many of *EVE*'s heritage sites reflect a history of violence and destruction. Scattered across the vast virtual space of *EVE*, these sites form a link to the fictional past as well as commemorating the continuing exploits of players, reinforcing a collective history that binds together an imagined community and provides the sense of a narratively cohesive universe.¹ However, history is an uneasy subject in virtual worlds, often fragmented, bent to the cause of storytelling, and constantly subject to revision. Dark tourism in *EVE Online* allows players to explore an uncertain collective virtual history on their

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own terms, to connect personal experience with the official narrative. In an unfamiliar world, tourism is a familiar way to engage with a fluid, fictional past.

EVE Online is a massively multiplayer online game (MMO) developed and maintained by Crowd Control Productions (CCP). In an MMO, large numbers of players coexist in an online persistent virtual world where events and gameplay continue to occur even if an individual player is logged out. The game space of *EVE* consists of over 7000 star systems with a player base estimated at over 400,000, although only a fraction of that number is online at any one time.² Despite the size of *EVE Online*, the majority of players reside on a single game server named Tranquility.³ This is in contrast to other games that divide their player base among several servers, with each server hosting an identical copy of the game world.⁴ The importance of a single server is that an action or event within the game has the potential to impact all players, rather than only a percentage on a particular server—*EVE Online* is a single game world, “one universe, one community.”⁵ In such a massive game space, it is difficult for a single player to meaningfully impact the game, so alliances can be formed between players which give special perks and bonuses. These alliances are called corporations; the largest corporations with hundreds of members shape the course of many of *EVE*'s frequent wars. Large corporations are also capable of building massive bases, controlling large areas of space, and financing the construction of the most powerful ships in the game. The motivations of players in an MMO vary greatly. Some have little use for the background of the game, focusing on goals such as fighting other players, accumulating wealth, or helping their corporation establish dominance over a region, while others enjoy immersing themselves in the storyline, exploring the universe, and adopting role-playing elements.

The game itself is set 21,000 years in the future in a distant region of space where mighty empires struggle for dominance. In the game's backstory, colonists from Earth traveled to a distant unexplored region of space dubbed New Eden. When the only connection to Earth was unexpectedly lost, most colonies quickly perished without support from the mother planet. A few colonies managed to survive and evolve into four highly distinct civilizations. However, the long period of isolation and

chaos meant the story of Earth and the true origins of humanity was lost—and in a practical sense, so was any need to connect *EVE*'s story with the history of the real world. Like the colonies of New Eden, *EVE* starts anew, divorced from the expectations and the burdens of real-world history, but reliant on familiar means of commemoration to tell its story.

Players in *EVE Online* assume the identity of capsuleers: practically immortal pilots who are capable of mentally controlling a starship while their physical bodies are suspended within a small pod. Death for the player is simply a matter of inconvenience as capsuleers can survive death by transferring their consciousness to a clone body. Capsuleers occupy a rarified position in the universe of *EVE Online*, forming a powerful elite minority, outside of the control of governments, and empowered to act as independent agents.⁶ The role of an immortal capsuleer automatically places the player in a position of privilege and removes them from the pedestrian terror of death, something that factors heavily into the way *EVE* chooses to commemorate historical events.

In his essay "*EVE Online* as History," Nick Webber states that for a game set in the far future, "*EVE* is pervaded by a sense of its own past."⁷ History, commemoration, and dark tourism are tightly intertwined in *EVE Online*, as the game has adopted elements of real-world forms of remembering to reinforce the sense of a cohesive universe with a long and storied past. The role of history in *EVE* is vital in creating a believable world for players for as Timothy Mitchell notes, a nation that wants to show itself as a modern state needs to be able to produce a past.⁸ History serves the needs of the game by producing a framework upon which the fabric of the game world is hung. The creation of a fictional past allows *EVE* players to connect with each other and the game through a shared history and common culture.⁹

History in *EVE* is a peculiar affair. Two separate yet intertwined narratives come together to form the universe's virtual past. The first is the fictional background created by the game developers. The second is the actions of players. *EVE* incorporates both into its ongoing story, although a tension exists between the official history by CCP and the personal history generated by players.¹⁰ While the ongoing story of *EVE* is heavily driven by the past, the details of this coproduced history are to be found outside the game in short stories, forum posts, and websites

maintained by both players and CCP, as well as in novels, comics, and other works.¹¹ The fragmentation of the story is compounded by the lack of a central authority on *EVE*'s history, as CCP retreated from maintaining their own official wiki in early 2016, effectively handing over chronicling the game's increasingly complex past to player-run efforts.¹² While CCP still reports on major events, the removal of the official wiki and the constantly changing nature of the Internet can lead a search for a specific moment in *EVE*'s past to a trail of dead links and long vanished websites. Player-run web pages pose other dilemmas. Much of player-generated history is unrecorded or unreliable, leading to large gaps and unanswerable questions.¹³ Player accounts can be biased, as they reflect personal histories and affiliations within the game, an aspect central to the *EVE* experience.¹⁴ The scattering of the story across different media, deleted web pages, potential bias, and lack of a definitive central archive means piecing together particular moments from *EVE*'s past can be a difficult affair.¹⁵

A second consideration is the loose definition of history within the game. Events in the past within *EVE* are often referred to as "story" rather than history. History is treated in a manner akin to that of the storyline of a novel or television program, which can be revised or ignored when needed. *EVE Online*'s own official web pages refer to the past as backstory rather than history.¹⁶ The background of *EVE* also includes speculation, legends, and elements of uncertain canonicity. The fluid nature of the fictional past in *EVE* is part of the reason background information in games is often referred to as "lore" rather than history, to reflect the differences from the real-world definition and discipline of history. The term is a useful one, as it encompasses the diverse elements that make up *EVE*'s background while maintaining a distance from the academic rigor and expectations of modern history. Framing history as lore allows players to view the events of the game as a flexible, malleable narrative that can suit different purposes rather than a rigid official historical chronicle—*EVE*'s world is their personal story, subject to their additions and embellishments.¹⁷ Despite the divide between the twin narratives of the game in official CCP chronicles, the development and exploration of personal history is a major driving force within the game and a key

component of virtual dark tourism. CCP focuses on the player experience when discussing lore and in marketing, claiming the most “interesting stories are those about the real actions of the players that inhabit this universe.”¹⁸ As Jay Winter astutely states, “history sells, especially as biography or autobiography.”¹⁹

The issues with history within the game world are not unique to *EVE*. Erik Champion writes, “Though games are great learning environments, they are not so well suited to explaining and expressing cultural significance, history and heritage.”²⁰ With detailed information on the past absent from *EVE* in-game, it falls to the sites of remembrance to fill in the gap between detailed external histories and the game world. New Eden contains memorials, battlefields, and ancient ruins that attest to the violence of *EVE*’s past. Most notable locations in New Eden are shaped by war and conflict, and every site in New Eden is effectively a destination for travelers, intended from the beginning for the consumption of players to add to an immersive experience.

From this conceptualization, *EVE Online*’s sites of history and commemoration connect to the practice of dark tourism. The treatment of history, the economy, and other topics in *EVE* have garnered a fair amount of journalistic and scholarly attention. However, there has been little substantial examination of dark tourism within *EVE Online*. Dark tourism, as defined by J. John Lennon and Malcolm Foley, is “the presentation and consumption (by visitors) of real and commodified death and disaster sites.”²¹ When players encounter historic sites in *EVE Online*, they are encountering the ghosts of a collective past that exists only for their benefit.²² Within these heritage sites, the disconnect between history and the game world experience starts to be bridged, yet in *EVE* the shadow of violence is ever-present, promoting a particular idea (and ideal) of historical remembrance revolving around commemorating conflict.²³ In this manner, *EVE* borrows from the most common of real-world dark tourism destinations, as Valene Smith notes that places associated with war probably constitute “the largest single category of tourist attractions in the world.”²⁴ Players are able to take cues from real-world forms of commemoration to use as a guide to engaging with a fictional past in a virtual universe.²⁵

The nature of history and commemoration—and life and death—in a virtual world creates two distinct variations on dark tourism. Tourism in *EVE* is marked by a lack of one of the more emotional elements of visiting sites associated with death and destruction: grief. The dark locations of *EVE* are sites of memory, but rarely sites of mourning.²⁶ Virtual worlds have the traditional horrors of war stripped away and while there may be unending player rage, there are no real casualties in simulated starship combat. *EVE*'s background furthers this detachment from death, as the player's avatars are effectively immortal within the fiction of the game. For all the emphasis on conflict, consideration of death and mortality is rarely the focus of travelers to the dark sites of the New Eden cluster. *EVE* boasts a “lighter” form of dark tourism, akin to dark rides or attractions centered on the concept of death, and this gives players the leeway to choose how they wish to approach interacting with a site.²⁷

A second element of tourism in *EVE Online* is a close connection to personal history. Many players were present or affected by the events that became commemorative spaces. As participants in a shared virtual history, this generates another imperative for tourism in *EVE Online*—the desire to connect their personal history with the greater story of the game. An observation by Philip Stone helps further define the personal nature of tourism in *EVE Online*: “There’s no such thing as a dark tourist, only people interested in the world around them.”²⁸ Although Stephen Miles states that those who study dark sites “might therefore be doomed to a frustrating realization that there is little positive desire for visiting a dark attraction,” the virtual nature of *EVE Online* provides many positive motivations for the curious traveler.²⁹

Interstellar Battlefields and Starship Graves: Dark Tourism in New Eden

A recent addition to the list of *EVE*'s dark tourism sites is the wreck of the *TAS Seraph*. In a live game event in 2015, a non-player faction known as the Drifters attacked and destroyed the *Seraph*, killing the non-player character Empress Janyl Sarum.³⁰ Sarum was the leader of the Amarr

Empire, one of the four major factions in the game. This event was scripted and planned by the developers of the game and players had no ability to impact the outcome. To commemorate the event and its importance, the ramifications of which are still unfolding, a massive wreck was put in place at the site of the *Seraph's* destruction. The wreck allows players who missed the event to see the aftermath, to view their virtual history in motion, and to ponder the significance of what occurred.

Players who pledged in-game allegiance to the Amarr found compelling reasons to visit the *Seraph* and travel to the wreck quickly took on elements of a pilgrimage for players invested in the story and their faction.³¹ Soon after the death of the Empress, players loyal to the Amarr gathered at the vast wreckage of her starship. In the story of *EVE Online*, failed claimants to the Amarr throne commit ritual suicide. To show solidarity with the fallen Empress, one group of players followed their own take on the Amarrian tradition and committed suicide by destroying their ships and pods.³² Naturally, for players this was a symbolic rather than permanent gesture of sorrow for the passing of a leader. Other players took less drastic action, positioning their ships around the *Seraph* in a candlelight vigil.³³ Yet others simply showed up to view the massive wreck. Honoring the fallen Empress was not a universal reaction, however, as the factional differences embedded in *EVE's* gameplay meant some players were pleased to learn of the Empress's death or were at least apathetic.³⁴

When the actions of players have a major impact, CCP finds ways to memorialize events, as in the case of the Titan *Steve*.³⁵ *Steve* was the first Titan constructed on the Tranquility server in late 2006. As Titan vessels are expensive and difficult to build, as well as being the most powerful vessels in the game, the launching of the *Steve* was considered a momentous occasion for the entirety of the *EVE* player base. Equally momentous was the destruction of the *Steve* just a few months later. While the destruction of the *Seraph* was a scripted event, the construction and eventual loss of the *Steve* were completely player-run affairs.

As destruction of the *Steve* was a landmark event, the developers saw fit to commemorate the loss of the ship with a memorial.³⁶ The wreck of the *Steve* became a permanent addition to the game, intertwining the action of players and the developers' storylines. As Titans were exceedingly rare

sightings in the early years of *EVE Online* and usually guarded more diligently than the luckless *Steve*, it was difficult for most players to see one in person and up close. The wreckage of the *Steve* offered an opportunity to witness player-generated history and to view the twisted wreck of a Titan, a sight never before seen. The wreck of the *Steve* also allowed players to know that their efforts meant something in the greater scope of the game. The *Steve* wreck became a personal monument for those involved in the battle and for the alliance of players known as Band of Brothers, which was behind the destruction of the ship.

The memorial created for the Battle of B-R5RB, also called the Bloodbath of B-R5RB, is another commemoration of war except on a far grander scale. In early 2014 two player coalitions that had been locked in a war poured ships into an otherwise unremarkable solar system named B-R5RB in an attempt to gain control of the area. By the end of the battle, 75 Titans and a host of smaller ships had been destroyed.³⁷ While Titans had become a far more common sight since the destruction of *Steve* seven years earlier, the number lost was unprecedented in the game. Although the magnitude of the battle has since been eclipsed, at the time the scope of the destruction was vast enough that once again CCP opted to commemorate the virtual carnage by installing a memorial at the site of the battle.³⁸ Instead of a single wreck, the memorial took the form of dozens of Titan hulks clustered around a statue set atop a wrecked space station. The site was given the name Titanomachy, a reference to both the number of Titans lost at B-R5RB and the story in Greek mythology of the conflict between the Titans and the Olympian gods. The beacon at the center of the Titanomachy broadcasts a message, one of the few ways *EVE* contextualizes historic sites within the game itself:

Here lie the wrecks of monstrous ships, commemorating a battle that blotted out the sky on Jan 27–28 in YC 116. Two coalitions of capsuleers clashed in vessels numbering in the thousands, causing destruction on a scale of war never before seen by human eyes. CONCORD elected—after advising with the various empires—to leave a few wrecks left on the field for all spacefarers to see. Ostensibly this was a warning to capsuleers of where their folly would lead them, but those who’ve encountered the immortals will know it was more likely taken as an ideal of death and destruction to which they can aspire from now until the end of time.

The warning broadcast by the Titanomachy reflects *EVE*'s attitude towards remembering the past. The broken wrecks exist only for the benefit of the players, connecting the battle to all players in the game and promoting the commemoration of conflict—the more destructive the better. As the message noted, the lessons to be learned by the battle of B-R5RB are for the “immortals,” the players themselves who are free to act without consequence or fear of death. While the reaction of tourists to real-world war memorials may vary greatly, an *EVE* player will likely view the Titanomachy as a feat to be emulated. *EVE*'s view of war is permanently colored by the optics of a positive view of violence.

Compounding the draw of the Titanomachy as a dark tourism site was the attention given to the battle by mainstream media. While game-oriented websites had been covering activity in *EVE Online* since before the game launched, the Battle of B-R5BR brought large scale media attention to the game.³⁹ For the most part, news of the battle was distilled down to the numbers of players and ships involved and the strong possibility it was the largest online player-versus-player battle to date.⁴⁰ The resulting notoriety made the battle and the Titanomachy a must-see for curious players and members of the general public who otherwise may not have had an interest in the game.

The creation of memorial sites within *EVE Online* is not limited to the game developers, history-making moments, or to massive actions involving hundreds or thousands of players. Individuals are also able to make their mark on the game and create their own forms of commemoration and memorials. However, player memorials are subject to different forms of engagement from other players as they lack one crucial element: the invulnerability afforded to the sites created by the developers.

Illustrating this is the case of the *EVE* Cemetery, created by a player known as Azia Burgi. The memorial consisted of hundreds of capsuleer corpses, euphemistically dubbed “biomass” by the game. As noted earlier, players assume the role of immortal capsuleers. Within the fiction of *EVE Online*, capsuleer ships are still crewed by up to thousands of “normal” people. The invisible ordinary crew leave nothing behind when a ship is destroyed, as they are assumed to have either died or abandoned ship—if players even bother to consider that part of *EVE*'s fiction at all. However,

players can eject from their mortally wounded vessels and use their pods as a means of escape. If a pod is destroyed the immortal player still continues play from a clone, their memories and experiences instantaneously transferred from the previous host at the moment of death. However, the frozen corpse of the previous clone is left behind, floating in the cold dark of space. To the game, the remains are treated the same as any other form of transportable cargo. Player Azia Burgi found the plight of an untold number of abandoned frozen corpses drifting through space a sad one. To give the virtual clone bodies some virtual closure, she created the *EVE* Cemetery⁴¹:

The *EVE* Cemetery is a monument to those fallen in battle. A place where one can go and say those final words they would like to the fallen, and even though we are in a clone-age, where one really doesn't die, the bodies entombed around the cemetery are both a reminder and warning about our own mortality.⁴²

The *EVE* Cemetery presented a different message from the kilometers-long wrecks of the Titanomachy. Rather than focusing on the glory of warfare, the *EVE* Cemetery offered a more personal message that provided an opposing sentiment to the glorification of war, imploring visitors to remember that even in the rarefied air of science fiction immortality there is a price to be paid for unending violence.⁴³ Through her message and memorial, Azia Burgi was able to contest *EVE*'s prevailing narrative. Burgi and the members of her corporation began collecting biomass for the *EVE* Cemetery and actively encouraged other players to gather and donate bodies to the memorial, at one point attaining a backlog of over 5000 corpses.⁴⁴ Eventually, knowledge of Burgi's thanatotic project became widespread and with increased visibility came unwanted attention. An offshoot of the Goonswarm corporation, one of *EVE*'s most powerful player alliances, attacked and destroyed the Cemetery.⁴⁵ The players who destroyed the memorial claimed they were upset at the use of their own virtual bodies, taken and displayed without permission—although it bears noting players could go and retrieve their former remains at any time. While this was the explanation offered by the corporation

involved, the far likelier motivation is that the attackers knew they faced no consequences for their action. As the Titanomachy noted, the act of destruction itself is idealized within the game. Ultimately, the *EVE* Cemetery tread too closely on personal histories, altering personal narratives to a degree unacceptable to some. It was too public a memorial and too easy a target. In any event, the next incarnation of the *EVE* Cemetery featured a well-armed fortress at its center to defend the floating mausoleums, although that failed to deter another attack.⁴⁶

The emphasis on bodies for the *EVE* Cemetery is an unusual one for commemorative efforts in *EVE Online*. For the most part, human bodies and human lives are a disposable commodity in *EVE*, which is why the burnt out hulks of massive and expensive vessels form the of core of most historical sites. The battlefields of *EVE* commemorate the machinations of the powerful, the epic sweep of great man history in the grandest singular sense of the term, both in regards to the primarily male player base and the one man/one ship model of the game.⁴⁷ The common virtual crewmember is rendered insignificant and invisible. As players are an elite rarity, able to fuse with the starships they command, they are identified as much by the ships they pilot as by the often temporary, disposable clone bodies they inhabit. The emphasis on the mechanical rather than the biological when considering the duality of the players' existence means the technology of war, in the form of spaceborne installations and starships great and small, are commemorated more than the virtual flesh and blood of their captains and crews. The Empress Jamyl Sarum is memorialized by the wreck of her ship. The Titan *Steve* was piloted by a player named Cyvok, yet the memorial is to his ship and not to the capsuleer (who after all survived and will always survive) or his crew. This is in contrast to real-world war memorials which often feature names or figurative human sculptures, although the Titanomachy does list the pilots of the Titans lost in the battle but is still dominated by the massive wrecks of destroyed starships.⁴⁸

As *EVE Online* is a game fixated on technology, the emphasis on machine over man is fitting. By focusing on the technological aspects of the game, *EVE* sanitizes a history of violence and presents a "clean" vision of war to visitors. There is little that is unpleasant to a visitor about a commemorative site in *EVE*, aside from any mental imagery conjured up by a player aware of the underlying history. There is a majesty in a starship

wreck, a careful presentation meant to maximize the “wow” factor for players in the form of a gigantic shattered hull floating silently in the interstellar night. The broken remains of *EVE* starships present a vision of war that is far removed from the idea of hundreds of broken, flash-frozen corpses tumbling through space. Like the capsuleers in their pods who never need to interact with their mortal crew, *EVE* shields the players from the consequences of their actions through a dazzling aftermath of war that will never fade or return to the elements. The price tag of a virtual war is not measured in deaths but the loss of costly starships.

EVE's dark tourism sites feature the safe, “interesting” elements of conflict, the broken war machines like old tanks and bunkers in the real world.⁴⁹ In effect, an *EVE* site is closer to a museum's recreation of an event but without offering interpretation or explanation. To fill in this gap and help others navigate the close relationship between a fictional past and historic sites, a particular form of tourist has appeared in *EVE Online*—the virtual travel writer.

A Light in Dark Places: The Travel Bloggers of *EVE*

Despite the appeal of historical sites within the game and their function as the connective tissue between the story and the game world, the nature of *EVE Online* presents several challenges to virtual tourism. *EVE* is a game about a universe at war, where peace is a rarity and a measure of safety can be found in only certain parts of the virtual game space. The game promotes an aggressive war mentality, as evidenced by an ad in the summer of 2016 which declared, “Build your dreams. Wreck their dreams.”⁵⁰ Due to the constant state of sanctioned conflict, tourism in *EVE* is a risky venture, with the possibility of incurring significant losses within the game. In *EVE*, war and the tourism possible by war exist side by side.⁵¹

Space in *EVE* is broadly divided into three areas: high security, low security, and null security. High security areas are patrolled by the in-game non-player police force CONCORD who quickly deal with those

who break the peace and attack other players with overwhelming force.⁵² The areas surrounding high security space are low security, where hostile actions initiated against peaceful players are noted and automated turrets at certain locations provide a modicum of safety. Most of *EVE*'s universe is lawless null security space where players who wish to attack others may do so without fear of repercussion by CONCORD. Players in null security space are often highly aggressive, zealously guarding their territory or simply preying upon weaker ships for fun or profit—usually both. While the underlying motivations may differ, the result is the same for the would-be tourist caught by hostile players: destruction.

Many of *EVE*'s battlefields and memorials are in low or null security space, as they are the areas where open conflict is possible. For the same reason, these areas are not safe for a solo player to visit. Death, while not permanent, results in the total loss of often very expensive virtual spacecraft, making any venture into low or null security space a dangerous one. The risk/reward ratio for something as intangible as tourism or a personal pilgrimage is slim within *EVE Online*. Ships in *EVE* require a significant investment on the part of a player to build, using resources gained through hours of mining, fighting, or trading within the game. Even if a pilot is flying a smaller, less expensive ship the loss may be a burden too great to bear as the wealth of individual players varies wildly. The massive corporations that control large swaths of space may be able to shrug off the loss of a dozen Titans; a single player in a smaller corporation may not be willing to risk losing his hard-won ship, paid for by months of effort.

By way of comparison, persistence and a great deal of patience can lead a player to almost any location without incurring any real loss in *World of Warcraft*. Tricks and shortcuts are available which reduce the cost of travel to a remote and dangerous location in *Warcraft* to merely an investment of a player's time. *EVE* has no such shortcuts. Attempting to traverse null security space is possible in the "free" basic spacecraft obtained when a player dies without a replacement vessel available, but it is also a venture with a high certainty of failure.⁵³ The danger to the player's virtual possessions and wallet are substantial. This sets *EVE*'s historic sites and its variation of virtual dark tourism apart. The path for the would-be tourist is a treacherous one, more akin to real-world adventure travel to dangerous hotspots than a visit to Disney. It just isn't easy to see the universe.

As a result, a sizeable portion of players have never traveled to the more remote null security sites, an analogue to real-world travelers who have the desire to visit dangerous far-off locations but lack the means, ability, or willingness to undertake the risks involved. One way players navigate the dangers inherent in *EVE* tourism is much the same method used by real-world tourists: finding safety in numbers. Organized group expeditions are one way to see the sights of *EVE*, relying on strength in numbers and comrades with bigger guns for defense against predatory elements and led by players with experience traveling to the sites to be visited or navigating the dangers of low security space.⁵⁴ These tours can also provide the guidance and historical context that *EVE* leaves players to obtain on their own. Yet even in a group, the element of risk remains. When organizing tours, the *EVE* University corporation warns players to only fly what they can afford to lose, to insure their ships, to ready a clone at a suitable location, and to remember the corporation is often at war: tourists should be prepared to be blown up.⁵⁵

The general inaccessibility of many tourist locations and the sheer vastness of the game space has led to the rise of virtual travelers who go where others do not dare and share their experiences outside the game. These players stream their encounters with the more interesting and dangerous areas of the game via services such as Twitch or post their results on YouTube, on forums, and on blogs. Through their posts, podcasts, and videos, amateur chroniclers of travel open a new means to engage with history in *EVE Online* as they mediate between an event and their viewers and provide context that the game frequently does not.⁵⁶ These bloggers follow the patterns of other fandom experts by sharing their knowledge with others, forming a crucial link between the *EVE* community and the game.⁵⁷ Although the media they utilize differ, for simplicity these virtual tourists will be collectively referred to as “travel bloggers.”

Some travel bloggers offer straightforward commentary on what they see and how they traveled to the area.⁵⁸ Others produce reports in-character as a denizen of *EVE*'s online world, revealing personal biases molded by their own experiences, their interpretations of *EVE*'s fictional history, and their allegiances.⁵⁹ An example of this form of travel blogging

is the work of Mark726, *EVE Online* player and author of the *EVE Travel* web site. The entries in *EVE Travel* are written by Mark726 in character as a capsuleer exploring New Eden.⁶⁰

In comparison, the video by YouTuber StrokeMahEgo on the Titanomachy is recorded from the perspective of a player, explaining the battle, commenting on the game, and most crucially offering tips on how to reach the memorial safely as the player travels to the site.⁶¹ The different approaches to travel blogging provide viewers with the two sides of *EVE*'s history: the actions of players in a game and the fictional story of future empires among the stars. As the major sites have their own short in-game descriptions that appear to players, travel bloggers can challenge or add to the existing narrative in a manner similar to that of Azia Burgi's *EVE Cemetery*.

Their efforts are effective as the information required to understand the entire story behind an event in *EVE Online* is often spread across multiple websites. Travel bloggers unpack the information for their audience while injecting their personal thoughts into their commentary.⁶² Their work is akin to the roles of amateur historians and battlefield guides as they step in to fulfil a role that CCP has been reluctant to provide. As the historic sites of *EVE* are effectively left frozen in time without official interpretation or development, the travel bloggers operate without supervision or oversight, potentially becoming de facto authorities on the story if their work becomes popular.⁶³

As the travel bloggers tend to be players and not professional reporters, the quality of their work varies wildly. The writing can also be clumsy or polished, the videos full of detailed facts or stream-of-consciousness rambling. Even so, some travel bloggers have achieved a measure of fame within the *EVE* community for their efforts, with their sites becoming noted destinations for information seekers as well as would-be tourists.⁶⁴ The work of the travel bloggers forms an important link to the complexities of real-world dark tourism. Just as reporting by the media impacts real-world tourism, travel bloggers encourage tourism within New Eden.⁶⁵ Effectively acting as modern travelers sharing their experiences via social media, tour guides mapping out routes to emulate, and amateur

historians interpreting the past, the travel bloggers place their stamp on the events of *EVE Online*. Their audience is potentially wider than only *EVE* players due to the games' steep learning curve. *EVE Online* is well known for its complexity, earning itself the nicknames *Excel Online* or *Spreadsheets Online*. Whereas in *World of Warcraft* most of the world is accessible even to a novice, albeit with some help and determination, *EVE* places substantial hurdles in the path of a new player. Travel bloggers form an accessible means to engage with *EVE*'s historic spaces for both players and those who do not play but are interested in the story.

The media attention surrounding the Titanomachy provides an example of a surge of outside interest in *EVE Online* to which the travel bloggers catered. New players enticed by the idea of fighting glorious interstellar battles found they could not easily travel to the Titanomachy nor quickly master the difficult game. For those unwilling to invest the time and money needed to personally visit locations, travel bloggers provide a tour, history, and their own context to the casual visitor, new player, and hardened veteran. Like real-world travel writers, the *EVE* travel bloggers allow others to experience something that would normally require a large investment in time and money—often beyond the means of most readers. However, their position and the difficult nature of history in *EVE* allow them to color the impressions of their audience through their interpretation of the narrative. *EVE*'s history is coproduced by CCP and the actions of the entire player base, but it is a relative few who interpret the story for others; in doing so they exert a large measure of control over the way the events of the virtual past are understood.⁶⁶

Conclusion: An Ideal of Death and Destruction

Stephen Miles has stated that dark tourism is “understood as a function of the attitude of the viewer and the extent to which a site has been developed to exploit this attitude.”⁶⁷ Dark tourism in *EVE Online* presents an opportunity to explore the ways virtual history in an online game is commemorated, and the means through which players devise their own ways of engaging with history while taking cues from real-world sites of remembrance.⁶⁸ *EVE*'s story-oriented approach to the past and historical

sites is created with development of a game world and the enjoyment of players in mind. It is based on a very loose notion of history, where details are scattered and context and interpretation difficult to find, wrapped within a flexible conceptualization of the past as a commodity.⁶⁹ Within the unreality of a virtual world, with a permissive environment and varying levels of authenticity in the past, the door is opened for the value of a site to be defined by each visitor, depending on his or her interests, involvement with the history of the game, and commitment to the role-playing aspects of *EVE*.⁷⁰ This is moderated by real-world concepts of memorial spaces superimposed over the virtual landscape, which serves as a guide to encountering a fictional past.

Despite the opportunities afforded in a new world, it is impossible to escape the guiding fictions of the game. The very essence of *EVE* is predicated on conflict and celebrates war.⁷¹ The attitudes of players are shaped by this sentiment. To view the dark sites of *EVE Online* is to witness the continuing cost of an eternal conflict with wonder, and even a wish to have been present, feelings rarely shared by real-world tourists.⁷² Sensations and actions which are verboten in real-world dark tourism are acceptable in *EVE*, where technology shields players from the consequences of their actions and stands in for the casualties of war. The detachment from death means the emphasis on remembering conflict serves to impart no lesson about the consequences of violence, regardless of the internal or external commentary on the event.

Yet while history in *EVE* is often rendered as invisible as the mortal crews of the capsuleer starships, the interest in dark sites shows that even immortal space pilots need a fixed connection to the past to understand their place in the universe. Dark tourism sites in the real world allow for the contemplation of life and death and can provide a “moving experience, bringing war, oppression, violence, and injustice to gut-wrenching life and deepening the capacity for compassion and empathy.”⁷³ In *EVE*, death is abstracted and mourning is conspicuously absent, or optional at best, depending on the desires of the tourist. As the Titanomachy warned (or promised), the major lesson offered to players by the dark sites of tourism produced by war in *EVE Online* is “an ideal of death and destruction to which they can aspire from now until the end of time.”⁷⁴

Notes

1. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 6–7. Despite being scattered across the world, *EVE* players have formed various communities online and offline, often meeting in person such as during the *EVE* Fanfest held yearly in Reykjavik, Iceland.
2. Brendan Drain, “*EVE* Evolved: How Many Subscriptions Does *EVE* have?” *Massively Overpowered*, accessed August 17, 2016, <http://massivelyop.com/2015/04/19/eve-evolved-how-many-subscriptions-does-eve-have>.
3. Due to Chinese government regulations, Chinese nationals are not present on the Tranquility server. Chinese players are on their own server, Serenity, operated by the entertainment company TianCity in partnership with CCP.
4. By way of comparison, *World of Warcraft* spreads out its players among over one hundred servers.
5. *EVE Online*, accessed August 20, 2016, <https://www.eveonline.com>.
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15

Afterword: Where Is Virtual Dark Tourism Going?

Kathryn N. McDaniel

Memorialization of disaster involves more than statues and sites. The preceding essays make clear that through journeys we participate in the remembrance of devastation and thereby make it a shared, communal experience, even if only in our imaginations. Considered all together, the chapters in this volume not only provide examples of virtual dark tourism but help define the field. Although it is not a new practice, the virtual expression of dark tourism has multiplied and expanded in the modern age, from the written word to new media. And yet, for all its variety, virtual dark tourism has definable features and common concerns. Its development reveals the creativity stimulated by new technologies and increasing exposure to diverse peoples and histories. It should also be considered a reaction to the global information age, an acknowledgment of both emerging interconnections and persistent boundaries. Words, images, and stories still shape our reflections on traumatic experiences (whether our own or those of others), facilitate understanding of past, present, and future identities, and contribute to knowledge of what is

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possible in the realm of human existence. Using the term “virtual dark tourism” helps us to investigate the interconnections present when people imagine voyages to disaster sites, participate in tourism to fictional places, or create death memorials in virtual settings, as people clearly do frequently and often with great creativity.

Even as literature continues to be a vital medium for expressing virtual travel, emerging technologies enhance its complexity and provide new strategies for identifying with past or foreign peoples—as well as strategies through which to come to terms with sometimes inconceivable tragedies. Visual and interactive media similarly show deliberate craft in the construction of sophisticated messages for modern, participatory audiences. As a result, the question of authenticity looms large in all such expressions. The performative aspect of virtual dark tourism allows people in their imaginations to try on the roles of those experiencing devastation, loss, and death. It therefore allows people to question the boundaries of their own identities, and perhaps even reshape them in response.

Virtual dark tourism flourishes where it encourages empathy toward others from different places and times, thereby building bridges to people distant from ourselves and inspiring positive actions and reactions in the face of disasters, old and new. It runs aground where it manipulates and exploits, and where it builds walls, playing into xenophobia and stereotyping or offering oversimplified, comforting bromides that such devastation will not or cannot happen to us. Either way, virtual dark tourism serves a social function: reinforcing or challenging beliefs, confirming or elasticizing identities, and allowing for ritualized approaches to mortality and calamity that may be experienced individually or collectively. In our global age, the accessibility of disaster tourism even to people who do not travel will change who we think we are and to whom we believe we can relate.

The crossing of borders is also important for virtual dark tourism scholarship, and thus future work will no doubt follow this volume’s precedent in reflecting the interdisciplinary, multifaceted, and fluid nature of the practice. Additional studies should further unite the efforts of humanistic scholars, social scientists, and the artistic creators of such simulated disaster experiences. Through a combined effort across academic and creative borders, we can deepen the understanding of the

effective construction of virtual disaster sites in the space of the imagination. Scholars should continue our investigation into the ways that the virtual and the real forms of dark tourism interact, reinforce, or subvert each other—and the role of commerce in the lucrative production of such disaster memorials. Thus, we must continue to engage with tourism scholars and the managers of physical tourist sites. New directions in virtual dark tourism criticism will open up as creators combine approaches—both virtual and real—to produce ever-more sophisticated and self-conscious imaginary experiences for virtual travelers into and through trauma.

Key challenges facing the critical field include the need to consider multimodal simulations and diverse analytic approaches, such as those reflected by the authors in this book. Defining and assessing what constitutes “authenticity,” the role of performance (and the many means by which one may “perform” in a dark tourism setting), competing perspectives on tragedy, and the social as well as metaphysical effects of virtual dark tourism experiences on individuals will also remain essential concerns in the field. Contemplating how diverse people experience virtual dark tourism and why we seek out these experiences (even in fictional realms) provides avenues for further investigation from tourism experts, psychologists, sociologists, literary critics, historians, anthropologists, and communication scholars. How do we remember, and how do we forget? Additional research may help us understand the psychology of simulated trauma experiences, the extent to which these simulations fit patterns even beyond genre conformation, and generally the role of society in shaping emotional and spiritual explorations of disaster and death.

Virtual dark tourism provides civic pilgrimages for a global society. In communities with increasingly diverse religious and philosophical beliefs, civil society grapples with human mortality through cultural expression and, as virtual dark tourism reveals, shared communal rituals allowing us to visit and revisit death in order to find its meaning. How does experiencing virtual dark tourism affect you? How does it affect *us*? Our shared journey through such questions has already begun.

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