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Absent Others: dark tourism, theatricality, and ethical spectatorship

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Abstract

To call the twentieth century a catastrophic one, is to acknowledge the collapse of humanist values. Events such as the Holocaust, genocides in Rwanda and Cambodia, and numerous other atrocities demonstrated the utter failure of social and political frameworks. The incomprehensible scope of such suffering also profoundly challenged representational practices; as widely cited, Adorno stated that there could be no poetry after Auschwitz (34). Yet, we cannot turn away from such disasters. This thesis is concerned with how theatricality allows us to face such grievous history, and seeks to engage a theatrical analysis to help clarify what is at stake in such spectatorship.

In order to examine theatricality as a mode of ethical responsiveness, I offer two contrasting sets of examples: tourist sites and theatrical performances. The sites I consider are examples of ‘dark tourism,’ destinations that depict death and disaster. I explore how theatricality arises in response to the key challenge that underlies these places, which is how to make past suffering available to the spectator at the same time as acknowledging that such representation is never completely possible. In discussing a series of sites including Rwanda, European concentration camps, museums and memorials in South East Asia and a New Zealand example, it is this tension, and the difficulty of locating and sustaining an ethical performativity that I explore.

In contrast with the tourist sites discussed, I consider theatrical examples that have sought to represent the same history. I discuss works such Jerzy Grotowski’s Akropolis, Catherine Filloux’s play, made in response to the Tuol Sleng Genocidal Museum in Cambodia, Photographs from S21, and Erik Ehn’s Maria Kizito, which deals with the first trial of Rwandan genocidaires. Through this interdisciplinary analysis, I ask how theatricality’s ability to make available something of the experience of the other might be thought of in ethical terms. I draw on the work of Emmanuel Levinas, particularly his image of the ‘face of the other,’ in order to consider the relationship between spectator and absent other. I intend to demonstrate that a theatrical analysis helps us to understand such encounters, touristic and theatrical, more clearly.
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Introduction: dark tourism, theatricality and ethical spectatorship

If the humanities has a future as cultural criticism, and cultural criticism has a task at the present moment, it is no doubt to return us to the human where we do not expect to find it, in its frailty and at the limits of its capacity to make sense. We would have to interrogate the emergence and vanishing of the human at the limits of what we can know, what we can hear, what we can see, what we can sense (Butler 151).

I think that the human consists precisely in opening itself to the other of the other, in being preoccupied with his death (Levinas in Robbins 124).

Judith Butler’s comment, taken from her recent text, Precarious Lives, urges a reassessment of the limits of criticism – the point at which making sense is profoundly challenged. Such a challenge is the topic of this thesis. I explore it through an investigation of how impossible spectatorship is manifest in two instances: dark tourism – that is, travel to sites of death and disaster – and theatre that attempts to represent the very unrepresentable aspects of human experience that Butler points to. In examining such spectatorship I focus most particularly on the dialectical intertwining of theatricality and absence. I ask how theatricality responds to the representational challenges that underlie such destinations. As Alain Resnais has remarked, ‘what has to be shown is the impossibility of showing’ (Resnais). Freddie Rokem, with particular reference to Holocaust theatre, similarly states that such performances should ‘make it possible for the “naïve” [spectator] to understand, and at the same time show that he or she probably never really will’ (“On the Fantastic ” 41). I argue that dark tourism is marked by the same dialectical tension that Rokem and Resnais relate to their aesthetic practices. Such sites strive to make past suffering available to the spectator, while simultaneously acknowledging that representation is never entirely possible.

Unlike a tourism study, this thesis contains no visitor surveys or analysis of data as would be expected with a more economic or perhaps anthropological approach. Instead, through comparison with performance works, I use a theatrical analysis to examine tourist spectatorship. This analysis has two aspects. Firstly, I trace the journey that each site lays out for its visitors, considering concepts such as narrative
structure, identification, mise-en-scène, and so on. In this sense, I focus on the anticipated experience of the spectator and manner in which suggestions are employed in order to prompt certain responses. Secondly, I examine how each site is marked by a particular theatricality that arises in response to its absences. I introduce the work of Emmanuel Levinas to consider how such theatricality might be thought of in ethical terms.

Dark tourism

In 2000, tourism scholars John Lennon and Malcolm Foley published a book called *Dark Tourism*, which discussed travel to deathly tourist destinations. Their accounts ranged from memorials to historical re-enactments, including museums, Nazi death camps, and assassination sites. While the term thanatourism has been in circulation for some time, the publication of *Dark Tourism* accelerated interest in the field. A number of articles and texts have since been published, a dark tourism forum has been set up (www.dark-tourism.org.uk), and conferences held. Discussion has subsequently extended outside of the academic context and the term is now used in popular media and travel guides, such as *The Lonely Planet* series. *The Guardian* online has a dark tourism tag within its travel section, which includes articles such as, “Forget Disneyland kids, we’re off to Colditz,” “Checking into the Bangkok Hilton” and “Strange and unsettling: my day trip to Chernobyl” (*The Guardian*).

While dark tourism has become a popular contemporary subject, it is in itself not a new phenomenon, and in an article for *The Guardian*, Lennon points to its historical precedents:

As far back as the Dark Ages, pilgrims were traveling to tombs and sites of religious martyrdom. The Battle of Waterloo in 1815 was observed by nobility from a safe distance and one of the earliest battlefields of the American Civil War (Manassas) was sold the next day as a visitor attraction site (quoted in *The Guardian*).

The busloads of Israeli and Polish children who visit Auschwitz daily may be understood in terms of pilgrimage as much as dark tourism. Indeed, Maria Tumarkin argues destinations such as Auschwitz, Gallipoli and places in Vietnam as modern day pilgrimage sites:
The word *pilgrimage*, after all, does not just describe a journey to a hallowed ground; it speaks not merely of a ceremonious outing but of a quest to be spiritually transformed by physical contact with a site considered sacred. That is to say that it is not just where you go that counts but what happens to you when you get there (40).

The transformation implied by the term ‘pilgrimage’ has two aspects: it is both an externally visible performance of reverence and an internally experienced shift in the self. The external aspect can be understood as a means of offering acknowledgment and recognition, whilst internally, as Paul Williams argues, memorial sites can be places for people to mourn, to forgive, to remember, and to receive moral instruction (22).

If pilgrimage is one way of framing dark tourism, then witnessing is another. The term is commonly expressed by both tourists – ‘we came to bear witness’ – and in descriptions of tourists. A recent Associated Press headline read: ‘Tourists visit genocide memorials in Rwanda: Travellers can bear witness to the mass slaughter of innocents’ (Kurash). This flexible use of the term – tourists are not witnesses in a strict sense, but visitors to sites of aftermath that provide evidence of a historical event – has been subject to lengthy discussion in Holocaust and trauma studies. Notably, Primo Levi argued that the true witnesses to the horror of the concentration camps were those who died – those who endured the entirety of the process of cruelty which culminated in death: ‘We who survived the Camps are not true witnesses. We are those who, through prevarication, skill or luck, never touched bottom. Those who have, and who have seen the face of the Gorgon, did not return, or returned wordless’ (quoted in Hobsbawm 1). In Levi’s formulation, as true witnesses are not available to bear witness, every act of witnessing is in some way removed. Levi’s position has been influential in articulating the dialectical tension around witnessing: it is both a necessity, and yet, by its nature, bound by certain limits – it can never completely fulfil its own goal.

Witnessing is further complicated not just by who may or may not be understood as a ‘true’ witness but, as indicated, by how the concept is used broadly to describe different kinds of spectatorship. In *Fantasies of Witness*, Gary Weissman summarizes various reworkings of the term, including ‘secondary witness,’ ‘vicarious witness,’ ‘retrospective witness,’ ‘witness by adoption,’ or ‘witness through
imagination’ (20). While I acknowledge the importance of the term both historically and rhetorically, and will address the aestheticization and affectation of witness, rather than coming up with a variation on the amendments above, and I intend to argue for an understanding of spectatorship that does not rely on an appropriation of witness. That Weismann’s book expresses a deep unease with the wide use of the term does make such reservation important to address, however, for it signals a resistance to the perceived theatricalization of the historical. Weismann cites an anecdote from Edward Linenthal’s memoir of the planning of the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC, which evokes such an image:

In order to impress the story on visitors, simulation of Holocaust experience seemed an attractive option. “A room might be constructed like a railroad car and as individuals are in this rocking chamber, views would pass them.”… There would be a full-scale model Auschwitz and as an emotional climax, a large room with just shower heads. A metal door is clanged shut and then a voice says, “This is the last thing the Jews heard.” (quoted in Weismann 95)

That the plan was rejected indicates the manner in which theatricality is deeply problematized in such settings and tied to simulations of bearing witness. I shall discuss such problems in more detail shortly.

Advancing from notions of pilgrimage and witness – as practices of remembrance and acknowledgment – a third way of understanding dark tourism is as a kind of contemporary tragic spectatorship. What defines dark tourism in large part is the way that, via theatricality, it blends together affective and educative experience. In his article, “Performing tourism, staging tourism,” sociologist Tim Edensor argues for an explicitly theatrical framework for the activity of tourism generally:

> Tourist stages are replete with cues and directors. Props, stagehands, stage-managers, directors constitute a supporting network which facilitates, guides and organizes tourist performance according to normative conventions and industry imperatives (73).

In describing memorial museums as a specific kind of tourism, Paul Williams also argues a theatrical case:

> In a process analogous to the planning of a theatre production – where play texts are selected, casts auditioned, sets designed, and lengthy rehearsals take place – museum objects are spatially arranged and decorated, placed in
showcases and lit, and given explanatory panels and audio-visual augmentation before the show opens (97). Whether museums or specific historical sites, tourist attractions are often made engaging through an attention to theatrical elements such as staging and mise-en-scène, identification and narrative progression. Williams describes such memorial museums as ‘performing museums’ (96). In this sense, I will examine the sites discussed in this thesis as spaces which perform their histories for tourist audiences.

The dramatic aspects of memorial and tourist sites described by Williams and Edensor arise in response to absence and the fact that dark tourism sites are often charged with evoking what is absent heightens their reliance on theatrical affect. For example, near the entrance to Cambodia’s Choeung Ek Genocidal Centre, more commonly known as The Killing Fields, a sign for visitors reads: ‘With the commemorative stupa in front of us, we imagine that we are hearing the grievous voice of the victims… we seem to be looking at the horrifying scenes and panic.’ Inside the stupa are hundreds of skulls excavated from nearby mass grave pits. The sign, which acknowledges tourists by use of the inclusive ‘we,’ suggests the power of the memorial to act as a conductor, channeling painful scenes from the past. The choice of the verb ‘imagine’ is important also, as is the qualification, ‘seem,’ which is attached to looking. The dead cannot be brought back to life to tell their stories. Rather, the memorial acts as an affective prompt that might stimulate the empathetic imagination of the viewer. Above all, the sign is an instruction, indicating how we should direct our attention. Illustrating the central concern of this thesis, the sign guides us through a process of response that is theatrical in nature and which, if adhered to, might make available to us something of the site’s past. I argue that dark tourism is theatricalized through such an interplay of absence and presence as at Choeung Ek, and, further, that it is absence itself which heightens the experience of spectatorship.

While this thesis is interested in how such theatrical responses to absence might be read ethically, such theatricality (and attendant implications of identification and catharsis, not to mention spectatorial pleasure) is often met with suspicion as a kind of emotionally affective thrill-seeking. Indeed, addressing what she perceives as the entertainment aspect of traumatic tourism sites, Ruth Kluger states that tourists who visit them are not concerned with ‘those affected by crimes against humanity’,
but with ‘the amusement of fully enjoying one’s sensibilities’ (quoted in Dean 9).

Lennon also cautions:

“Dark tourism” sites are important testimonials to the consistent failure of humanity to temper our worst excesses and, managed well, they can help us to learn from the darkest elements of our past. But we have to guard against the voyeuristic and exploitative streak that is evident at so many of them (Lennon).

Lennon’s comment echoes Augusto Boal’s concern about the role of emotion in the theatre. Responding to Brecht, Boal argues that emotion is often generated by ignorance, in which case it must be avoided, or, as Lennon notes, guarded against. The way in which dark tourism sites attempt to generate what Boal describes as, the ‘good’ empathy, required to ‘avoid the spectacle turning into an emotional orgy,’ (103) is something that will be explored in subsequent chapters

Furthermore, other writers question what theatrical substitution (or witness-by-imagination) might achieve. Tumarkin uses the example of those who flocked to the rubble of the collapsed World Trade Center Twin Towers to ask:

You can pay respects at memorial services, find solace in temples or in the arms of a beloved. You can make sense of the tragedy in libraries … Why go through barricades, police checks, layers of ash, asbestos, the unbearable stench, your heart accelerating hundredfold, the almost inevitable shock and equally inevitable nightmares to see it all for yourself? Not one person, but tens of thousands. One continuous, unceasing stream (26).

The ‘continuous, unceasing stream’ is not particular to Ground Zero – numerous sites draw such seemingly morbid crowds. In his 1955 film about the Nazi camps, Night and Fog, Alain Resnais proposes a similar question. As the camera pans along the railway tracks that lead to the entrance of Auschwitz, narrator Jean Cayrol, himself once imprisoned in a concentration camp, asks:

Today, on the same tracks, the sun shines. We go slowly along them, looking for what? Traces of the corpses that fell to the ground when the doors opened? Or perhaps those driven to the camps at gunpoint amid the barking dogs and glaring searchlights with the flames of the crematorium in the distance, in one of those night scenes so dear to a Nazi’s heart (Resnais).
Looking for what? The question pertains both to tourists, as in Tumarkin’s comments, and artists, as implied by Cayrol. Both writers suggest a certain futility to the imaginative attempt.

How then, despite this futility, might the ‘unceasing’ crowds be accounted for? By way of replying to her own question, Tumarkin draws on Burke’s notion of the sublime:

Edmund Burke wrote that whatever could excite in people the ideas of pain and danger was the source of the strongest emotion available to human kind. In other words, ideas of pain, death and hardship are much more powerful and affecting than ideas of pleasure. As long as pain is an idea, not a physical reality, it could be unconsciously felt as desirable and enthralling. This does not mean that most people enjoy – in the conventional sense at least – contemplating or coming face-to-face with other people’s darkest moments…. What this means is that the nature and intensity of emotions inspired by encounters with death as an idea, while often unnerving, can also prove to be mesmerizing and addictive (49-50).

In citing Burke, Tumarkin suggests that our attraction to such sites is, in a way, automatic – the lure of these haunted spaces is ‘mesmerizing and addictive,’ suggesting that it is the perceived affect of such sites that makes them powerfully appealing. Experiences that touch on death are tinged with a discernable visceral charge which, as Burke argues, gives a kind of pleasure in itself.

The affective aspect of the excitement that Burke describes is an important idea for this thesis. As such, ‘affect’ is a term which requires some explication. To begin with, it is worth acknowledging Longinus’ discussion of the sublime as, like Burke’s, a precursor to the more contemporary understanding of affect. For Longinus, the sublime transported the audience and took the spectator ‘out of himself:’ ‘Our persuasions we can usually control, but the Sublime […] sways every reader whether he will or no. Skill in invention, lucid arrangement and disposition of facts, are appreciated not by one passage, or by two, but gradually manifest themselves in the general structure of a work; but a sublime thought, if happily timed, illuminates an entire subject with the vividness of a lightening flash (Longinus 2-3).
Whilst Longinus was, in a manner not dissimilar to Plato, deeply sceptical of the emotional exaggerations of tragic theatre, which he considered the antithesis of the sublime, he nonetheless maintained that sublime experience could as equally be conjured by art as it was by nature. In bringing the concept of the sublime to dark tourism, the problem is obvious. How could abjection, as depicted at such sites, bring about a sublime experience in the manner that Longinus describes? Indeed, in accord with Plato, Longinus insisted that only imitations of great virtue could inspire sublime response.

Burke, however, advances the notion of the sublime by removing it from a strictly moral context. He thus opens up a wider range of experiences that might be understood to evoke such excitement in the spectator, including, as Tumarkin notes, pain, death and hardship. In the twentieth century, in addition to the theatrical philosophy of Artaud, which I shall discuss shortly, it was perhaps Georges Bataille who most significantly dealt with the negative aspect of the kinds of tremors that Longinus and Burke describe. In his introduction to *Death and Sensuality*, Bataille argues that it is only through a closeness to death that we can attempt to overcome the ‘discontinuous’ nature of our lives. ‘It is my intention to suggest that for us, discontinuous beings that we are, death means continuity of being’ (13). He further describes the lure of deathly imagery as ‘a deep gulf and I do not see how it can be done away with. None the less, we can experience its dizziness together. It can hypnotize us. The gulf is death in sense, and death is vertiginous, death is hypnotizing’ (13). In the late twentieth and early twenty-first century there has been a resurgence of interest in how affect might be engaged within critical analysis. Such postmodern interest, however, takes the term out of the metaphysical realm, and places it more broadly within the social and political (as well as the aesthetic).

Indeed, Patricia Clough, a key figure in the field of affect studies, and editor of *The Affective Turn*, argues (in a way similar to Butler), that the surge of interest in affect is significant in that it ‘is occurring at a time when critical theory is facing the analytical challenges of ongoing war, trauma, torture, massacre and counter-terrorism’ (Clough *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*). The ‘affective turn,’ seeks to expand the ways in which the experiences of the body might be understood and discussed.

Such a renewed critical and political interest in affect demonstrates its relevance to a discussion of theatricality and ethics. Further, various contemporary understandings of the term reveal its compatibility with a discussion of performance.
Clough, suggests that affect is the feeling – or visceral apprehension – of what is beyond conscious perception (Clough "The Affective Turn" 17). Citing Brian Massumi, she describes affect as that which makes us ‘vibrate with intensity’ (quoted in Clough 17). James Thompson suggests that affect ‘refers to emotional, often automatic, embodied responses that occur in relation to something else – be it object or observation, recall of a memory or practical activity’ (119). In the theatrical context, he argues, affect is an embodied response provoked by aesthetic experience (135). In her work on theatre and ethics, Helena Grehan draws on Alan Read to describe such affect as ‘when the inexplicable becomes palpable’ (quoted in Grehan 24). Taking into account each of these definitions, I argue that affect can generally be understood as an intense and visceral reaction to stimulation, which precedes, and sometimes surpasses, critical and intellectual response. It is marked by indeterminacy and contingency, it is non-linear, plural and open. This is not to say that it is autonomous: our affective responses are certainly influenced by cultural conditioning. However, affect is a key concern to address in an analysis of tourism and theatrical spectatorship, as its open and indeterminate conditions are important to the ethical context of the inquiry and allows for the difficulties encountered at the limits of understanding.

Within such a theatrically affective schema, it is the role of the spectator that is of primary interest. The theatricality that is motivated by the absences which characterize memorial sites is importantly dependent on the spectator for its realization. It is through the imaginative and affective investment of tourists that objects, such as the displays of shoes and hair at Auschwitz, are rendered meaningful. What is of principal interest to this thesis, therefore, is whether such an engagement might be described in ethical terms. As Alice Rayner notes:

"Audience is an occasion for asking the ethical question, what to do at the boundaries of comprehension? How does the audience/listener operate in order to recognize an implicit context and historical past and to resist simply taking in received meanings that are already formulated? What can be done when hearing or seeing is not automatic, does not come out of a common culture, language, race or gender, does not arise from a shared catastrophe? (252)"

I take Rayner’s argument and use it to offer a renewed perspective on tourist spectatorship. While Zygmunt Bauman argues that the figure of the tourist stands in
opposition to the responsive, ethical spectator – for him, such figures are ‘sensation-seekers and collectors of experience; their relationship to the world is primarily aesthetic; they perceive the world as food for sensibility,’ (quoted in Grehan 13) – this thesis seeks to rehabilitate how we might understand the well worn trope of the morally depleted sensation-seeking tourist. Using the work of Levinas, I suggest that such figures might be understood, through their presence, as responding to what he describes – in an image which is richly theatrically analogous – the ‘call of the other.’

That such a call might be understood in theatrical terms is the central argument of this thesis. I therefore, as noted above, use the term ‘theatricality’ in a way that includes tourist examples. Like Samuel Weber, I argue for theatricality to be understood as a particular medium. Theatricality, he argues, is ‘not as a medium of representation, but a medium that redefines activity as reactivity, and that makes its peace, if ever provisionally, with separation’ (28-29). Weber’s definition allows us to usefully understand spectators, including tourists, as responsive, rather than passive. Rancière, in his recent work, The Emancipated Spectator, similarly calls for spectators to be understood as active participants. This call is grounded in a politics which, while accepting that we may be a society of spectators (acknowledging Debord), asks us to rethink how we might behave as spectators and indeed understand the spectatorial ‘role.’ This sense of a participatory and ethically responsive mode of spectatorship importantly connects theatre and Levinas’ ethics, as I will discuss later in this chapter.

Understanding theatricality as a medium is particularly useful in examining the theatrical aspects of dark tourism sites. As a medium, theatricality is not so much a mere curatorial effect, but rather the very means by which sites’ absences are apprehended: theatricality is the medium of the ‘empty’ space. What takes place at such sites – especially the manner in which emptiness and loss are countered through the appearance of different substitutional objects – might be thus described, as Weber suggests, as ‘theatrical happenings.’ Weber argues that such happenings are marked by a paradoxical (or dialectical) ‘coming to pass:’

[S]uch happenings … can neither be contained within the place where they unfold nor entirely separated from it. They can be said, then, in a quite literal sense, to come to pass. They take place, which means in a particular place, and yet simultaneously also pass away – not simply disappear but to happen somewhere else (7).
Dark tourism often marks the place where ‘something happened.’ It commemorates and memorializes that place. At the same time, the very performance of remembrance, by museums in concert with spectators, is itself a secondary happening. The histories bound to them cannot be fully contained within the place alone. The happening elsewhere, I argue, takes place within the imagination of the spectator. The ebb of arrival and departure, entering and exiting, of tourists can be thus thought of as a kind of parabolic analogy for the dialectic that governs such sites.

Josette Féral describes the imaginative participation of the spectator in both theatrical and ethical terms. Describing theatricality’s dual function as both aesthetic and social, she notes that it takes place under two conditions:

First through a performer’s reallocation of the quotidian space that he occupies, second through a spectator’s gaze framing a quotidian space that he does not occupy. Such actions create a cleft that divides space into the “outside” and the “inside” of theatricality. The space is the space of the “other”; it is the space that both defines alterity and theatricality (97).

It is the latter aspect which is of interest here: the way in which a spectator designates what they see as theatrical. Féral further notes that, ‘more than a property with analyzable characteristics, theatricality seems to be a process that has to do with a “gaze” that postulates and creates a distinct, virtual space belonging to the other, from which fiction can emerge’ (97). In the context of dark tourism, this theatricalizing gaze arises in response to absence. I argue that this fictionalization of the dead is not a dismissal of the reality of what occurred to them, but a process by which that happening is brought to bear on the imagination of the spectator. At memorial sites the concept of ‘listening’ to the dead is the very thing that indicates that the assumed role of listener is a theatrical effect; a process, in the sense indicated by Féral, generated by the spectator. It is the ethical aspect of such theatrical processes which will be examined in the cases that follow from this Introduction.
In his treatise against imitation in *The Republic*, Plato describes theatre audiences as a ‘promiscuous crowd’ (quoted in Dukore 29), willing to divest itself of fidelity to virtue, reason and truth. Such an image is a useful point of contest for considering the foundations upon which a theatrical ethic might be constructed. Like Rancière, I argue for a reconceptualization of how we might think about such crowds. By way of addressing certain aspects of the theorization of performance, I will outline in more detail how such a renewed understanding of spectatorship, one which is ethically responsive, might be constructed. It is important to state that this thesis does not propose a particular type of theatre which is most ethical. Rather, I consider the ethical character of theatrical responsiveness, whether at dark tourism sites, or within a range of performances. The aspects of theatrical theory addressed in the following section, therefore, are not so much the foundations for a particular aesthetic, but examples that consider the general theatrical-ethical questions of the thesis. Each demonstrates a variation on, or relation to, the initial dialectic introduced: the need to show what cannot be shown. In the first example, that of the discord between Plato and Aristotle, it is the nature of theatrical power and its influence on the spectator which is at stake. In the second example, the contrasting theories of theatrical modernists, Bertolt Brecht and Antonin Artaud, are used to illustrate a tension between intellectual and affective modes of engagement, an important concern in considering dark tourist sites. Last, by addressing Hans-Thies Lehmann’s concept of postdramatic theatre, I consider how ‘unknowability,’ and ‘unshowability’ have been addressed within contemporary performance practice. In each example, I consider the characteristics of the spectatorial model proposed relevant for both theatre and tourist audiences.

Unsettling mimesis

Whilst an Aristotelian concept of theatre is largely rejected by the theatrical examples discussed in this thesis, the basis of that rejection – a perceived schism between representational pleasure and ethics, and the inability of an Aristotelian
causal (fatalistic) plot-based framework to capture the reality of non-fictional suffering – is worthy of attention. Indeed, Giorgio Agamben, in *Remnants of Auschwitz*, argues that ‘After Auschwitz, it is not possible to use a tragic paradigm in ethics,’ thus rejecting Aristotle’s proposition primarily on the basis of Auschwitz’ negation of the possibility of heroism (99). Whilst Agamben does not deal especially with the theatrical particulars of the ‘tragic paradigm,’ nor was Aristotle’s theory of tragedy an aspect of his ethics, Agamben’s argument nonetheless reflects a more broadly held skepticism of the relevance of tragic theatre in a post-Holocaust age. Holocaust scholars concerned with theatre have strongly argued against what they perceive as tragedy’s inability to respond adequately to the scale and scope of human loss at sites such as Auschwitz. Lehmann’s postdramatic aesthetic, as I will discuss, is significantly grounded in such a rejection. Whilst I do not wish to argue for a rehabilitation of tragic form as a mode of ethical response, I do wish to consider the central problem it presents us with. As Barish notes: ‘Aristotle, for example, had called attention to a paradox which also created a puzzle, the fact that we enjoy imitations of things that would horrify us in reality’ (31-32). While this section will not provide a comprehensive overview of tragic poetics, I will consider the relevance of the paradox that Barish points to, especially in relation to the practice of mimesis.

The divergent opinions of Plato and Aristotle provide a useful historical context for the argument concerning mimesis (or imitation). On the one hand, Plato sees it as a falsehood that has a socially disordering effect. On the other, Aristotle understands it as a means of educating and perhaps even binding community together. Plato clearly sets imitation at odds with truth and virtue, and finds no place for it in his ideal Republic. The only kind of imitation he will admit is that of virtue – courage, temperance and so on: ‘I should prefer only to admit the pure imitator of virtue’ (quoted in Dukore 17). Sorrowful spectacles depicted by poets, which rouse only negative emotions in spectators, are forbidden: ‘vice is to be known but not to be practiced or imitated’ (16). The effect of showing evil was not, in the sense suggested by Aristotle, its purgation, but rather its transmission: ‘from the evil of other men something of evil is communicated to themselves’ (30). Thus, Plato argued that imitation was itself a kind of evil in that it allowed vice to disrupt reason and virtue.

The core, therefore, of Plato’s problematization of imitation (of which theatrical mimesis is but one kind) was that it confused distinctions between appearances and reality. He famously describes the work of imitators as thrice
removed from truth (21). Further, imitators not only imitate what has already been imitated once – for example the maker of a bed imitates the image of the bed made by God – they imitate only the appearance of the bed, rather than its reality: ‘The imitator or maker of the image knows nothing of true existence; he knows appearances only’ (24). The effect of such imitations on spectators is confusion as to what is real and what is not: ‘Thus every sort of confusion is revealed within us; and this is that weakness of the human mind on which the art of conjuring and deceiving by light and show and other ingenious devices imposes, having an effect upon us like magic’ (26). Confusion and opposition is created within the spectator. By way of this confusion, theatrical imitation encourages expressions of emotion (in both actors and spectators) which would be held in check in the course of ordinary life. This too sets the spectator at odds with himself. Instead of following virtue and reason, which dictate that troubles should not be lamented but patiently endured, he or she is inclined to recollection and sorrow which is ‘irrational, useless and cowardly’ (28). In this sense tragedy, Plato argues, furnishes ‘a great variety of materials for imitation’ taking advantage of the easily imitated ‘passionate and fitful temper’ of man. ‘Therefore we shall be right in refusing to admit him into a well ordered State, because he awakens and nourishes and impairs the reason’ (29).

Aristotle’s Poetics submits a qualified defense of theatrical mimesis. Firstly, Aristotle suggests that imitation itself is innate to human development: ‘one difference between him and other animals being that he is the most imitative of living creatures; and through imitation he learns … no less universal is the pleasure felt in things imitated’ (quoted in Dukore 33). Thus, the pleasure of theatrical mimesis is suggested as an educative (and universal) one, even if the object might be a ‘pain’ (33) or a ‘dead body’ (34). Despite the fact that audiences watch images of fictional pain, pleasure is able to be attained via such spectatorship because of the manner in which it engages the imagination. Pleasure is derived from not ‘our sight or our hearing, but in our minds’ (Barish 32).

The reason why men enjoy seeing a likeness is, that in contemplating it they find themselves learning or inferring, and saying perhaps, “ah, that is he.” For if you happen to have seen the original, the pleasure will be due not to the imitation as such, but to the execution (Aristotle in Dukore 34).
Mimesis, therefore, may enable recognition, a movement from ignorance to knowledge. Secondly, and order for this to take place Aristotle proposes a series of conditions – largely the structure of incidents, or plot – by which such representations can be understood to have beneficial value: for example, tragedy should represent men as ‘better than in actual life’ (33). Indeed, Aristotle did not suggest depicting abjection, noting that the tragic plot: ‘should not show decent men undergoing a change from good fortune to misfortune; for this is neither terrifying nor pitiable, but shocking’ (Aristotle 16). A well-plotted drama, however, ‘through a course of events involving pity and fear,’ might lead to the ‘purification of those painful or fatal acts’ (Aristotle in Dukore 56).

The clear tension between the positions of Plato and Aristotle are relevant, not just in their critique of theatre, but in a critique of theatricality per se which has been, and still is, more broadly applied. As noted earlier, Linenthal’s account of the construction of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum illustrates this appositely. In another example, Linenthal states that well known Holocaust Historian, Raul Hillberg:

> [C]onsistently emphasized the need for perpetrators to “speak” in the exhibition, so that visitors could penetrate the murderous logic of their world. However, given the boundaries of the commemorative voice at work, this idea threatened to contaminate what was for many a commemorative space’ (199).

The perceived theatrical power of the speaking voice was understood as a threat to the memorial project. In the tourist and memorial examples that follow, there are similar tensions, mostly centred around how to control theatrical affect which inevitably arise at such sites.

Paul Ricoeur, in response to Aristotle, argues for mimesis’ constitutive aspect in a way that helps to provide a useful contemporary framing of the concept and one which I will engage in later chapters. Of Ricoeur’s general proposition, Christopher Prendergast summarizes: ‘The inventions of mimesis … are not just fanciful constructs of the mind arbitrarily put into the world; they are a distinctively human form of knowing what is in the world’(21). Ricoeur emphasizes mimesis’ educative function, the way in which it promotes learning and recognition as a means of allowing the spectator a deepened understanding of the world. Further, Prendergast notes, Ricoeur ‘stresses the “public” or social character of mimesis as, unlike Plato, its
ethical aspect (20).’ Mimesis is understood as a binding force that allows spectators to reflect on what it means to be together, with others, in the world.

In his essay, “Mimesis and Representation,” Ricoeur gives an account of the process of mimesis which breaks it down into three aspects: the prefigurative, configurative, and transfigurative. Prefiguration, firstly, is ‘what takes place in the sphere of everyday practical knowledge; it is the area of “pre-understanding”, and manifests itself … as a “repertory” of social competences’ (Prendergast 234).

This knowing how to do something constitutes a “repertory” common to the writer and his or her reader, and it inaugurates between them a community of meaning preliminary to any entering into fiction. This repertory attests to the fact that the condition of action and suffering, far from being ineffable, is always already understood (Ricoeur 141).

He argues that it is the generally shared understanding of action and suffering that constitutes the basis for the communication of a particular set of actions and suffering. This shared understanding provides the basis for an identificatory relationship. Thus, we can know something of the suffering of the other in as much as we ourselves generally understand what it means to suffer. The basic quality of suffering, aside from its specific manifestations, is what Ricoeur describes as shared prefigurative knowledge; the particular suffering of the other remains ineffable, while the ineffable quality of suffering itself is a shared experience. In observing the suffering of others through mimetic practice, our apprehension of that suffering, based on our own experiences, is expanded due to an already existing commonality.

Secondly, configuration is the representational process that makes sense of prefigurative knowledge:

The configuring agency of the mimetic plot is a production (poesis) actively shaping human doings into an intelligible whole, disclosing and augmenting meanings that are already to be found, although in less articulated form, in the “pre-narrative” shapes of human experience of the world (Prendergast 78).

The mimetic story is a means of giving shape to our experience and counters what is ‘mute’ in that experience (Ricoeur in Prendergast 233). Ricoeur emphasizes creativity as means of making chaotic experience intelligible, and in doing so, binding together those who participate in such processes. In this sense, Prendergast argues that the character of Ricoeur’s mimetic configuration is primarily integrative: ‘The
configurative act is a “grasping together” that has… social implications as well as purely “aesthetic” ones: through recitation, a story is incorporated into a community which it “gathers together” (238). Configuration, as the centre of mimetic practice, is understood not as radically dis ordering, as Plato argues, but rather as constitutive.

Thirdly, in emphasizing the integrative aspect of mimesis, the final stage of the mimetic process that Ricoeur proposes is transfiguration, the work of the audience. In describing this process of reception, Ricoeur emphasizes its active quality: ‘Mimesis is an action about action. What it prefigures in the first stage and configures in the second it transfigures in the third. To transfigure is still to do something’ (150). The configuration of the mimetic plot requires an audience in order for its effect to be felt: ‘If employmcnt can be described as an act of judgment and as an act of the productive imagination, as I have suggested, this occurs inasmuch as this act is the conjoint work of the text and its reader’ (151). Ricoeur points to a mutuality wherein the audience is indispensable to the mimetic process. The transfiguring action of the audience is not simply a passive act of reception, but rather an active instance of apprehension. This is what Rancière, in The Emancipated Spectator, describes as the fundamental activity of the audience; an audience, which in interpreting the world is already active in transforming it (22).

Being a spectator is not some passive condition that we should transform into activity …. We do not have to turn spectators into actors…. Every spectator is already an actor in their own story; every actor, every man of action, is spectator of the same story (17).

Ricoeur’s elaboration of the concept of mimesis is a useful one in its emphasis on shared understanding and a binding together of community. Further, in the use of the term transfiguration, he implies a transformational potential borne within the mimetic act.

Equally useful, however, are the problems within Ricoeur’s argument, stemming primarily from his assertion of suffering as an ‘always already understood’ shared condition. The Holocaust, and other such catastrophic human failures, significantly challenge the notion of our ability to understand the suffering of others. As Susan Sontag notes:
The dead are supremely uninterested in the living: in those who took their lives; in witnesses - and in us. Why should they seek our gaze? What would they have to say to us? “We” – this “we” is everyone who has never experienced anything like what they went through – don’t understand. We don’t get it. We can’t truly imagine what it was like (Regarding the Pain of Others 125).

Ricoeur’s argument illustrates an important tension between the desire to make sense of suffering (and the cruelty that leads to it) on the one hand, and the necessity of accepting, as Sontag argues, that we can never ‘truly imagine what it was like,’ on the other. In response to this dialectic, I have referred to the work of Plato and Aristotle to underscore the fact that whilst differing on its effect, each figure affirms the power of theatre. What I argue, taking into account the range of social and aesthetic possibilities regarding mimesis discussed above, is that by the very nature of what is absent from the represented object – what it is not – mimesis in fact actualizes something of the paradox of human suffering, which is both visible and invisible, representable and unrepresentable – or, as Butler notes, exists at the limits of our capacity to make sense. I will argue that it is this paradoxical aspect of theatre which gives it is power. In the examples that follow this introduction, I consider how usefully such power is ‘exploited.’

Brecht and Artaud: a dialectic of activating the audience

The image of a ‘promiscuous crowd’ is a useful one to bring to a consideration of theatrical modernists, Brecht and Artaud, for each were particularly concerned with how theatre might activate such a crowd to beneficial effect. On the one hand, through defamiliarization, Brecht used mimesis in a highly self-reflexive manner. On the other, Artaud wanted to draw spectators inside of the spectacle, enabling an authentic experience that transcended mimesis. Brecht sought distance, Artaud absorption; Brecht sought knowledge, Artaud experience. If one imagines that Brecht might have said – ‘Look, can’t you see that where you stand is a cemetery. What will you do about this?’ Artaud might be imagined to have offered an invitation to go down into the grave, beyond language, and inside of the mystery. As with an assessment of Platonic and Aristotelian positions, a consideration of Brecht and
Artaud as key figures of modern practice helps to define the discursive terrain in which the thesis locates itself.

The effect of defamiliarization on the audience of Brecht’s epic theatre was intended to counter what he considered the stultifying effects of its opposite – dramatic theatre:

The dramatic theatre’s spectator says: Yes, I have felt like that too – Just like me – It’s only natural – It’ll never change – The sufferings of this man appall me, because they are inescapable – That’s great art; it all seems the most obvious thing in the world – I weep when they weep, I laugh when they laugh.

The epic theatre’s spectator says: I’d never have thought it – That’s not the way – That’s extraordinary, hardly believable – It’s got to stop – The sufferings of this man appall me, because they are unnecessary – That’s great art; nothing obvious in it – I laugh when they weep, I weep when they laugh (quoted in Drain 113).

In contrasting these responses, Brecht emphasizes the passivity of the audience member in the first instance, which clearly references an identificatory paradigm, and their rousing to action in the second. Further, he paints an image of the world as fixed and determined in its dramatic representation, whereas in an epic context, change is a possibility and indeed, the audience are expected to be agents of such change. Suffering in this context is only beyond comprehension in the first instance; it is, secondarily, acknowledged as not only possible but actual; and, thirdly, made as a subject of concern for the audience which is not in fact distant, but pressing and proximate. What is finally important in the quotation above is the fact that the emotions and responses of the characters, and those of the audience, need not be contiguous, and indeed should not be. What is called for is an apprehension not of sameness or familiarity, but rather a peculiar and disturbing difference.

In making a case for what theatre should be, Brecht also makes an equally strong case for what it should not be: ‘The first condition for the A-effect’s application to this end is that stage and auditorium must be purged of everything “magical” and that no “hypnotic tensions” should be set up’ (quoted in Huxley and Witts 99). Further, the audience should not be ‘worked up,’ or ‘swept away;’ by no means should the audience be plunged into any kind of ‘trance’ state (99). His admonitions of dramatic theatre, in fact bring us close to the intended method and
effects of Artaud’s. He too emphasized an awakening, but in reverse. His ideal audience moved from the dream of life to the life of dreaming:

The audience will believe in the illusion of theatre on the condition they really take it for a dream, not a servile imitation of reality. On the condition it releases the magic freedom of daydreams, only recognizable when imprinted with terror and cruelty (26).

The very descriptors that Brecht used disparagingly – hypnotic, trance, magical – were key to Artaud’s theory of theatre, which expressed a desire to bypass the intellect and appeal directly to the visceral, pre-figurative, pre-cognitive or even pre-historical aspect of the spectator:

Infused with the idea that the masses think with their senses first and foremost and that it is ridiculous to appeal primarily to our understanding as we do in everyday psychological theatre, the Theatre of Cruelty proposes to resort to mass theatre, thereby rediscovering a little of the poetry in the ferment of the great agitated crowds hurled against one another, sensations only too rare nowadays, when masses of holiday crowds throng the streets (26).

The ‘ferment’ of the crowd demonstrates Artaud’s emphasis on not just the sensory potential of theatre, but his desire for the event to be equally experienced by all. He attempts to break down the distinction between spectacle and audience, folding the audience within the theatrical happening; distance is obliterated.

In articulating how this theatre might be enacted, Artaud made specific references to the physiological responses that the audience should be prompted to – ‘a show aimed at the whole anatomy’ (27) – and repeatedly stated the need to affect the nerves and organs of spectators. This emphasis on embodiment was part of Artaud’s ontology, which had a dual aspect, physical and interior. By engaging the physical, interior aspects might also be reached – ‘metaphysics must be made to enter the mind through the body’ (quoted in Drain 271).

As theatre redisCOVERS the powers of direct action on the nerves and sensibility, and through the sensibility on the spirit, it abandons the ways of spoken theatre, whose clarity and excessive logic are a hindrance to the sensibility (266).
He further spoke of restoring to theatre its ‘primitive ritual character’ through the use of ceremonial structures, again emphasizing its communal aspects and the complete integration of the audience into the performance (266). Artaud’s theatre is primarily one of affect in which spectators cede or suspend the same critical distance which Brecht calls for. Indeed, the sublime aspect of Artaud’s theorization of theatre is in sharp contrast with the Brechtian model within which, as Boal points out there is an emphasis on ‘understanding (enlightenment), on dianoia’ (103). As I have argued already, this tension is itself central to both dark tourism sites and theatrical representations of historical suffering. Brecht and Artaud provide us two different analytical frameworks, especially useful in analyzing the theatricality of certain sites. While some dark tourist sites emphasize an educative experience, others attempt to draw spectators into more affective terrain – the genocide memorial in Murambi, Rwanda, for example, where the preserved bodies of the dead are put on display.

What is common to Artaud and Brecht, however, aside from their rejection of conventional dramatic practice, is what Rancière identifies as an ambivalent attitude towards the spectator. He argues that, despite Brecht and Artaud’s individual efforts to break the audience free from a passive status, they still assume a fundamental ignorance which needs theatrical correction. While Brecht proposed ‘distant enquiry’, and Artaud’s ‘vital embodiment,’ Rancière argues they each regard the audience as originally in a condition that is ‘the opposite of knowing’ (4). Rancière urges, in a manner which extends upon Brecht and Artaud’s theorizations, for a theatre where spectatorship itself, as we conventionally understand it, is overturned: ‘What is required is a theatre without spectators, where those in attendance learn from as opposed to being seduced by images; where they become active participants as opposed to passive voyeurs’ (4). Grotowski, whose work is important to this thesis, similarly rejected conventional spectatorship. In “Holiday,” published in TDR, he commented:

What does it really mean “the audience”? We are doing something, and there are others who want to meet us; this is not the audience, they are concrete human beings; some are opening their doors, others come to the meeting, there is something that will happen between us. This is more important than having an idea about the “audience” and its role (124).
Erica Fischer-Lichte, in her recent book, *The Transformative Power of Performance*, suggests that the most powerful transformation of the spectator happens when they are no longer a spectator at all, but in fact a participant. She strikingly illustrates this point with a discussion of Marina Abramovich’s *Lips of Thomas*, wherein the audience was called to take responsibility for the suffering of the performer. The performance revolved around Abramovich carrying out a ritual that involved inflicting a series of increasingly painful acts upon herself. Each time the work has been performed, the audience has, at varying points, intervened to stop the ritual. The work only ends when the audience decides that they can no longer be spectators to the pain being performed for them. In this reversal are traces of both the Brechtian call for action, and the Artaudian emphasis on a kind of transfigurative pain. What is significant, by way of Rancière, is the manner in which the audience is emancipated through taking responsible ethical action. Abramovich exemplifies a kind of performative practice within which both the nerves and the intellect are engaged in a way that challenges the very notion of being a spectator.

The dialectic between Brecht and Artaud sets out two particular paradigms of spectatorship, the interplay between which helps illustrate that ethical responsiveness is not reliant, despite Brecht’s argument, on a particular type of theatre. Indeed, as noted, at the various sites looked at in this thesis, elements of both kinds of theatricality are engaged, each at times succeeding and failing on ethical terms. In this way, both theorists offer a way of considering the various situational and aesthetic contingencies of spectatorship. Rancière, whilst calling for the spectator’s emancipation, provides little by way of explanation of how this might take place. And although he generally lauds the spectator as fundamentally equal to the spectacle, he is guarded about the kinds of activities that they may carry out, deferring to phrases like ‘composes her own poem with the elements of the poem before her’ (13). Just as with Plato and Aristotle, the question of the spectator, and indeed, what might be understood as an ‘ideal ethical spectator,’ remains unresolved. This again demonstrates the need for an analysis that can bear the various contingencies that theatricality itself is marked by.
Before finally moving to a discussion of Levinas, I would like to introduce more fully Lehmann’s concept of postdramatic theatre. His proposition can read as responsive to the particular theatrical/ethical/representation problems that this thesis is concerned with. I am interested in the way that Lehmann suggests not an abandonment of spectatorship, but a disturbance of its complacency. As with Rancière and Fischer-Lichte, Lehmann is particularly interested in shifts in the experience and role of the spectator. Lehmann’s argument is that postdramatic theatre is typified by a move beyond the Aristotelian, in the sense of being organized around a causal plot. Rather it is structured around ceremony, disjunctive voices and visual landscapes. He describes postdramatic theatre generally as a ““phenomenology of perception” marked by an overcoming of the principles of mimesis and fiction’ (99).

The effect of this is that, ‘the temporal aesthetic turns the stage into the arena of reflection on the spectators’ act of seeing’ (157). Postdramatic theatre interrupts a continuity that is not solely temporal, but also significantly ideological in terms of the context of ‘ideas, values and conventions’ (162).

His overview of the stylistic traits of this unconventional dramaturgy include: parataxis/non-hierarchy, simultaneity, play with the density of signs, plethora, musicalization, scenography/visual dramaturgy, warmth and coldness, physicality, ‘concrete theatre,’ irruption of the real, event/situation (86). Lehmann’s descriptions of a postdramatic theatre are significant in that he argues that such performances, whilst not abandoning mimesis altogether, attempt to wrest it from Aristotelian convention in a way that aims precisely against the sense of “cosmic” and moral order than underpins Plato and Aristotle’s arguments. That an important aspect of the satisfaction of tragic representation, in addition to the ‘educative element of the imitation explained our otherwise perverse and inexplicable enjoyment’ (Barish 31-32), is the pleasure of spectators’ participation within the representative process, is rejected in Lehmann’s conception of a postdramatic theatre, which he describes as marked by a ‘withdrawal of representation’ (172). I argue that such a withholding of representational pleasure – effected by theatrical practices that contest plot-based causal dramaturgies in favour of fragmented and dissonant dramaturgies of space, bodies and voice – may be understood as a form of response to the very
representational challenges that figures like Adorno have identified. Lehmann notes that: ‘What ancient tragedy already articulated was the thought that there must be some coherence inhering in a human’s life’ (172). What charges the tragic narrative is the sense in which this coherence remains inaccessible to the protagonist – their fate is beyond their conception. Lehmann shifts attention back to the spectator in a way that challenges such a fatalistic paradigm. The attempt to address the essential paradox that Barish identifies – that we derive pleasure from seeing depictions of others’ pain – is by unsettling the mimetic processes that make such images available.

The postdramatic treatment of the body, like Artaud’s, emphasizes its material aspect. Lehmann notes:

The physical body, whose gestic vocabulary in the eighteenth century could still be read and interpreted virtually like a text, in postdramatic theatre has become its own reality which does not “tell” this or that emotion but through its presence manifests itself as the site of inscription of collective history (97).

What interests me in Lehmann’s evocation of the postdramatic body is the manner in which, as suggested above, it might be understood to have emerged in response to the catastrophes of the twentieth century. I argue that examples such as the aesthetic of the body in Butoh, a contemporary practice that emerged out of a post nuclear Holocaust Japan, exemplify this. While Lehmann does not consider non-Western performance examples, the case of Butoh seems a relevant one. Its presentation of the body conforms quite closely to the postdramatic attributes that he describes: impulsive gesticulations, turbulence and agitation, hysterical convulsions, autistic disintegrations of form, loss of balance, fall and deformation (163). Works such as Grotowski’s Akropolis, which will be discussed, also exhibit a number of these features. Similarly, in the same way as the body, speech and the voice are stripped of their coherence:

Frequently we are made aware of the physical, motoric act of speaking or reading of text itself as an unnatural, not self-evident process. In this principle of understanding the speech act as action, a split emerges that is important for postdramatic theatre: it provokes by bringing to light that the word does not belong to the speaker. It does not organically reside in his/her body but remains a foreign body. Out of the gaps of language emerges its feared adversary and double: stuttering, failure, accent, flawed pronunciation mark the conflict between body and word (145).
Significantly these traits contribute to a ‘retreat of synthesis’ (82) and a rejection of totality. The manner in which such performances ‘resist interpretation’ (25) is not simply because of an obliqueness of content but, more significantly, because of the audience’s limitations of perception (in the manner that Sontag suggests ‘we can’t truly imagine what it was like’). This suggests that responsibility – the sense in which, as Weber argues, spectators ‘re-act’ – is itself never a completed action, but an obligation that continues without end.

What is particularly interesting about Lehmann’s elaboration of a postdramatic premise is the common ground it finds with objections to the dramatizations of dark tourism sites. Central to these concerns is the anxiety that, in making history more accessible, it becomes over-simplified, resulting in the specificities of individual experiences being subsumed within a generalized whole. Tourist scholar Michael Harkin notes: ‘Narrative closure and semiotic framing thus constitute the ethnography as an integrated whole. This holism ensures that individual data are always embedded in a total structure of significance’ (665). The desire of such sites to weave their histories into a singular and comprehensible narrative thread is understood to threaten the very complexity and multiplicities that characterize them. This closed and smoothed-over version of the past creates a representative illusion that some argue might actually obscure history. Lennon and Foley posit just such an objection in relation to Auschwitz, expressing concern that efforts to preserve the site through reconstruction might diminish its authentic value: ‘Indeed, there is an inherent danger in constant re-creation of the past, particularly if there is any attempt at stylization which can marginalize and indeed trivialize the enormity of the issues being dealt with’ (29). Of particular interest in Lennon and Foley’s objection is their use of the term ‘stylization,’ which suggests the development of an industry with its own aesthetic (and narrative) conventions which the historical record is made subordinate to.

The fear that these scholarly objections give voice to is that such dramatizations may lead to visitors believing that they understand or feel what in fact is impossible for them to fully comprehend. Indeed, in Night and Fog, Cayrol variously states, ‘A crematorium from the outside can look like a picture postcard. Today tourists have their snapshots taken in front of them… Words are insufficient …. No description, no picture can reveal their true dimension …. Useless to describe what went on in these cells’ (Resnais). Theatricality, then, in subsuming
distance and feigning access, is understood to generate a kind of false empathy in that it is based on simulated (and ‘stylized) experience. Yet visiting dark tourists sites does not always deliver an affectively exciting experience. One tourist commenting on a travel message board remarked:

It didn’t have the impact I thought it would…maybe because what happened is so unbelievable, I simply couldn’t comprehend it. I had already heard about the entrance signs, but it was still chilling to see the sign in German that read “Work makes you free” (VirtualTourist "Auschwitz: I Ventured out To").

The lack of impact that the tourist describes is interesting as it suggests an ethical ambivalence resulting from aesthetic disappointment. On the one hand, it affirms, as most Holocaust scholars argue, a correct experience, which is one of understanding that one can never understand. On the other, however, it suggests that the site has in some way failed to engage this spectator in an experience which would render the visit at least meaningful, even whilst recognizing the difficulty of understanding. Here, one can see the dialectical problem of such sites: they require a theatrical activation in order to draw in the visitor, yet they are charged with simultaneously reminding this visitor that true understanding is impossible.

This very dialectic, which I have argued marks both theatrical works that seek to represent events such as the Holocaust and dark tourism sites, makes Lehmann’s thesis especially useful. I will use his elaboration of an aesthetic which sets aside dramatic conventions, and yet persists with theatricality, to underscore a complex theatrical analysis of dark tourism sites – one which moves beyond a concern with a mere ‘staging’ of history. Like Féral and Weber, Lehmann understands theatre and theatricality not just taking place on the stage, but also within ‘heterogeneous’ social spaces that are in some way scenically marked, accentuated, alienated or newly defined (152). Site-specific works, he argues, are one example of making such heterogeneous space ‘speak.’ Memorial sites are activated on the same basis as site-specific works – spectators are drawn into a dialogical situation in which a ‘conversation’ with the dead is affected. This dialogical relation is not one between bodies, but between bodies and space, bodies and objects. In this way, the imagined voice is one that expresses the ‘reverberation of past events’ (76). This reverberation is most usefully thought of as a kind of theatrical affect, a condition of the theatrical medium. Most importantly, Lehmann’s work usefully bridges a consideration of the
relationship between theatricality and ethics, and the possibility of a theatrical ethic. Thus, for this thesis, the key aspect of his work is the sense in which it can be historically located in terms of representational discourse. In its very resistance to interpretation, it illustrates Butler’s vanishing point and suggests the contemporary demand for the spectator to carry out a different kind of work.

Levinas, theatricality and ethics

As discussed in relation to the problems of dark tourism, visitors to sites which bear the scars of painful history are expected to behave and respond in certain ways. Objections from writers, such as Kluger earlier, reveal a set of ethical expectations which must be demonstrated through the behavioral and psychological restraint of the spectator. Indeed, at Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide in Cambodia, there are clearly posted signs indicating that smiling and laughing are prohibited. Similarly, at the Choeung Ek Genocidal Centre, visitors are asked to meditate briefly before entering. At Auschwitz, visitors must be part of a guided tour and no photos are allowed inside the buildings. Similarly, in the dramatic works discussed, it is the positioning of the audience within the drama that is of particular interest. What I argue that Levinas offers is a way of thinking through the ethicality of such sites by way of certain philosophical propositions that invite theatrical comparison: specifically his concepts of face-to-face encounter, alterity and substitution. In recognition of my emphasis on theatrical rather than philosophical analysis, I engage with Levinas’ propositions regarding responsibility in a broad and general sense. In referencing his work, I draw mostly from interviews he has given on the subject which Robbins has collected together in her useful volume *Is it Righteous to Be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, as well as with relevant sections of *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being*. I also make reference to recent theatre-based use of his writing by Helena Grehan and James Thompson. For me, Levinas provides an important ethical backdrop against which the issue of responsibility generally, and theatrical responsiveness particularly, might be examined. The sense of urgency in his claims is a valuable provocation in a global environment within which a general sense of responsibility for the welfare of others, regardless of social or political contexts, is
sorely lacking. As Grehan notes, ‘Levinasian ethics moves the focus from the subject to the other, and demands that the subject responds to the other’ (19).

For Levinas, the other is fundamentally unknowable. The sense in which the other is an object beyond our grasp is not a cause for melancholy resignation, however, but rather the basis for the emergence of ethical responsibility. As Thompson notes: ‘The depth of our unknowing … makes us uniquely beholden to the other: it acts as a ‘moral summons’ (162). Levinas terms this unknowability ‘alterity;’ from the space of alterity, the other makes a claim upon us, which Levinas frequently characterizes as a call – a ‘moral summons.’ In hearing this call, the listener is positioned:

for-the-other, straightaway in obligation and straightaway as the only one who is ready to respond and to bear this responsibility, like one who is the first to have hearkened to the call and the last, perhaps, to have listened to it (quoted in Robbins 118).

Judith Butler suggests that, in hearing such a call, ‘we come to exist, as it were, in the moment of being addressed.’ This address comes from ‘elsewhere, sometimes a nameless elsewhere, by which our obligations are articulated and pressed upon us’ (130). Thus, we are defined in relation to the other; as Levinas comments: ‘the self cannot survive by itself alone, cannot find meaning within its own being-in-the-world’ (quoted in Butler 132).

The image which Levinas uses to illustrate how this calling/listening relationship might be realized is that of the ‘face of the other.’ Levinas states:

The face, still a thing among things, breaks through the form that nonetheless delimits it. This means concretely: the face speaks to me and thereby invites me to a relation incommensurate with a power exercised (Totality and Infinity 198).

In the sense that it ‘breaks from the form that delimits it,’ the face is the aspect of the other that most concretely expresses its alterity. As Thompson notes:

The face, for Levinas, is used both literally as the face of the other and more conceptually as a term for the limit of our ability to know the other. In the face of a person, we see something of who they are and yet we are also made aware that they are not fully knowable (161).
The call that the other makes is expressed through the face. My particular interest lies in how this face might be made manifest to us, and hold us captive to its claims, through theatrical practice. It is through Levinas’ concept of substitution, I argue, that such a reading is possible:

To substitute oneself does not amount to putting oneself in the place of the other man in order to feel what he feels; it does not involve becoming the other nor, if he be destitute and desperate, the courage of such a trial. Rather, substitution entails bringing comfort by associating ourselves with the essential weakness and finitude of the other; it is to bear his weight while sacrificing one’s interestedness and complacency-in-being, which then turns into responsibility for the other (quoted in Robbins 228).

While the sense in which Levinas engages the term ‘substitute’ is that of the willingness to ‘take on’ the suffering of the other, it can also be understood as an operative principle for making such taking on possible. That is, theatricality enables a realization of this ethical meeting, despite the absence of the other. In thinking through how Levinas’ ethics might be practically realized, I pay particular attention to the dialogical concepts of speaking and listening. I argue that, as a means of responding to catastrophe, theatrical and touristic representations generate performative ways of allowing the living to ethically ‘listen’ to the dead.

At memorial sites, artifacts and architectural evidences are often made substitute objects of identification. It is how we might think about the theatrical-ethical status of such objects which is of interest. For example, displayed above a selection of shoes from Auschwitz displayed at the Holocaust Museum in Washington DC, poet Moses Schulstein’s poem illustrates such personification of evidence:

We are the shoes, We are the last witnesses We are shoes from grandchildren and grandfathers. From Prague, Paris and Amsterdam And because we are only made of fabric and leather And not of blood and flesh, Each one of us avoided the Hellfire (Schulstein).

Such a positioning of these remains gives them a powerful affective charge, as tourist comments often attest: ‘The hair, shoes, artificial limbs etc are some of the worst things, I think are possible to see in life’ (VirtualTourist "Auschwitz: Auschwitz"). At
the same time, James Young argues that such substitutional practices significantly obscure and distance the other:

[B]y themselves, these remnants rise in a macabre dance of memorial ghosts. Armless sleeves, eyeless lenses, headless caps, footless shoes: victims are known only by their absence, by the moment of their destruction…. When the memory of a people and its past are reduced to bits and rags of their belongings, memory of life itself is lost…. That a murdered people remains known in Holocaust museums anywhere by there scattered belongings, and not by their spiritual works, that their live should be recalled primarily through the images of their death, may be the ultimate travesty (132-33).

Whilst I will address Young in more detail in Chapter two, what is of interest to me is how absences might be recognized other than by objects which by their very nature point to such absence. That is, in order for absence to be signified, it needs some referent. As Bert O. States notes: ‘without external representation our subjective understanding of the world remains fleeting and ephemeral, bottled up in the ether of thought, without extension of concrete being’ (20).

What is significant for me about theatrical representations is the manner in which, by nature, they are always shadowed by what Levinas terms ‘alterity;’ the aspect of performance which is, in Levinas’ terms, ‘otherwise than being’ (Levinas Otherwise Than Being 3). Following Féral’s lead in the manner in which she ties theatricality and alterity together, I argue that theatre generally is always marked by alterity, by that which, as States asserts, it is not and can never be (213). Or, as Denis Kennedy argues, live performance is always shadowed by its opposite – death, ‘the perpetual ghost at the spectator’s banquet’ (8). In its very liveness, and its openness to the spectator, theatre and performance is marked by its alterior counterpart. This is why our responses to spaces marked by absence are theatrical in character.

What Levinas describes as alterity, I argue we can usefully understand, in the theatrical (and tourist) context, as a kind of affect. For, as Butler argues, and in a way that echoes Lehmann, Levinas’ conception of the face is a ‘pre-linguistic’ one (Butler 133).

The face, if we are to put words to its meaning, will be that for which no words really work; the face seems to be a kind of sound, the sound of language evacuating its sense, the sonorous substratum of vocalization that precedes and limits the delivery of any semantic sense (134).
In her description of a face which signifies the impossibility or limits of representation itself, Butler’s critique takes on a strongly Brechtian character:

For representation to convey the human, then, representation must not only fail, but must show its failure. There is something unrepresentable that we nevertheless seek to represent, and that paradox must be retained in the representation we give. In this sense, the human is not identified with what is represented but neither is it identified with the unrepresentable; it is, rather, that which limits the success of any representational practice (144).

The face, therefore, does not represent, but rather points to that which it cannot represent. We can therefore read Rokem’s exhortation that Holocaust theatre should ‘make it possible for the naïve listener to understand, and at the same time show that he or she probably never really will’ in a strongly Levinasian context. Levinas’ concept of the face thus seems able to contain or express the paradox of representation that particularly haunts the examples that this thesis deals with.

Drawing from Levinas, Butler suggests that what the face might be understood to reveal is the precariousness of life (134). Indeed, Levinas’ own descriptions of the face of the other often relate it to death. ‘I think that the human consists precisely in opening itself to the other of the other, in being preoccupied with his death’ (quoted in Robbins 124). Butler notes that an apprehension of the precariousness of the other, in order to be ethical, should not be linked to mimetic identification:

This cannot be an awakeness… to my own life, and then an extrapolation from an understanding of my own precariousness to an understanding of another’s precarious life. It has to be an understanding of the precariousness of the Other. This is what makes the face belong to the sphere of ethics (134).

What I will argue throughout this thesis, however, is that the concept of identification need not be abandoned. Indeed, other than by intellectual strategy, it is difficult to argue that empathy is not in fact a deeply necessary response to the suffering of others. As the artist Alfredo Jaar remarked in relation to his body of work made in response to Rwanda:

When we say a million deaths it is meaningless. So the strategy was to reduce the scale to a single human being with a name, with a story, and that helps the
audience to identity with that person. And this process of identification is fundamental to create empathy, to create solidarity, to create intellectual involvement (quoted in "Interview: The Rwanda Project").

Jaar’s work, as will be discussed, importantly strives to give a face to suffering and I believe that such an effort is a deeply ethical one which recognizes, as Butler puts it, the precariousness of the life of the other.

As already stated, the purpose of this thesis is not to prove the theatricality of Levinas, nor that dark tourism might fit within a Levinasian paradigm. Rather, in his insistence on the primacy of the other, I argue that Levinas, as a significant post-Holocaust philosopher, usefully challenges how we might not just think about but also respond to the suffering of others. In the examples that follow, it is the nature of such response that will be considered. Within these cases, Levinas’ work provides a kind of ideal, rather than a measurable equation. Thompson argues, as do I, that, ‘The concept of the face allows us to develop an understanding of the structure of its ethical call and the demands that it is ideally seeking to make – but this is an ideal for which we need to work’ (168). The work of this thesis, therefore, is to investigate how effectively this face is made available in each of the examples discussed. In doing so, I hope to demonstrate how a theatrical analysis is able to effectively illustrate what is at stake within such spectatorship.

Chapter descriptions: an itinerary

The structure of this thesis has a travelogue-like quality, moving from place to place, and clustering discussions of ideas around those places. The method is one of accumulation through productive circularity. Each chapter of this thesis is organized around a particular site of history; the site may be singular, made up of a network of places, or in the most explicitly theatrical sense, a stand-in place that offers a simulacrum of the historical. All but one of these sites are places that I have personally visited. In most instances, I offer my own account as an accompaniment to a more academic approach. In weaving together my experiences as a tourist as well as a scholar, I offer something of my own affective responses to the places I visited. Additionally, each chapter, through a discussion of a site of history – site here meant in the broadest sense – examines one particular aspect of being spectator to a painful
past. In covering a broad geographical scope, I offer contrasts of culture, and of relatively new versus highly codified approaches. I also consider the similarities which the sites exhibit, and discuss how these are indicative of certain patterns of spectatorship. In contrast, I discuss theatre works that have represented the same sites as the tourist destinations discussed, or usefully draw on the sense of place that such sites offer.

The thesis itinerary begins in Rwanda, which is the only major site discussed which I have not visited. I examine the intersection of theatre, tourism and memorial practices by way of two major examples. Firstly, I consider the Murambi Genocide Memorial, notable for its display of the corpses of genocide victims. I take scholar and applied theatre practitioner, James Thompson’s, and artist and scholar, Jeff Stewart’s, accounts of visiting the site as the basis for my discussion. Secondly, I examine Eric Ehn’s play Maria Kizito, which takes as its protagonist a nun convicted of genocidal crimes. In each of these examples, the dead are assigned a kind of theatrical afterlife which bestows upon them a speaking function; the audience is subsequently positioned as those who are required to listen to the account. I ask, therefore, whether any of the audiences or performers discussed can be described as listening communities, and if so whether this might be a form of responding to the call of the other.

Chapters two and three turn their attention to touristic and theatrical representations of the Holocaust respectively. Chapter two explores how concentration camp sites Auschwitz, Sachsenhausen and Dachau are endowed with a theatrical life – the sense in which they perform their own histories and the audience’s subsequent positioning in relation to such performances. Drawing on the dialectic set up in the introduction, I ask how tourists are variously moved between educative and affective aspects of experience. I ask how the theatrical nature of the presentation of these sites is a means of dealing with the absences which are so fundamental to them, and I examine the kinds of substitutes that are put in place to counter these absences.

Chapter three concentrates on examples of theatrical performance in response to Holocaust experience, and the sense in which such performances can be read as what Ludwig Flaszen describes as a call to ‘the ethical memory of the spectator’ (65). Discussing a series of examples, I ask how history in these instances is mapped through the body, rather than through architectural ruins, and ask what this reveals about the role of affect in conveying historical experience. In devoting a chapter each
to tourist and theatrical responses to Holocaust history, I set up a series of strong connections between history, theatre, site and the body.

Chapters four and five, in more depth than the first chapter, interrogate how the face of the other might be thought of in a non-Western context. I particularly consider the ways in which Levinas’ conception of alterity and otherness might be reconciled with representational practices. Across the chapters, I consider various presentations of the face, including the artistic, the face of the guide, the disfigured face by way of documentary photography, and the plaintive faces of the prisoners of Tuol Sleng, which are exhibited in the museum there. By way of drawing connection between Levinas and the tourist examples discussed, I consider Catherine Filloux’s *Photographs from S-21*, a one-act play which deals primarily with the ethical problems of displaying such images as Tuol Sleng’s, and Rithy Panh’s documentary, *S21: Khmer Rouge Killing Machine*.

Finally, I offer a reflection on two New Zealand works: one a tourism reenactment spectacle called *Lost in Our Own Land*; and the other, a creative work that I was involved in making during the early stages of this thesis, entitled, *Dark Tourists*. *Lost in Our Own Land* takes the trauma of colonial contact as its subject, and performs this ‘wound’ for an audience of tourists. *Dark Tourists* explored the same central questions as this study, and in discussing it, I offer an alternative account of the problems of the terrain. In looking at these two works, I particularly consider the *contingencies* of a theatrical ethic, and ask how Rancière’s emancipated spectator might be understood as demonstrating a certain contingent ethic.

The topic of this thesis is inherently inter-disciplinary in focus. As an instance of performance studies, it draws together discourses of theatre, history and tourism. Each of its examples presents variations on the same dialectical problem: the impossibility of knowing the painful experience of the other on the one hand, and the ethical imperative to engage with this past and understand it in some way on the other. Thus the thesis deals in paradox, contradiction, and effects a continuous shifting between dialectical positions. In the end, however, it is most concerned with the potential that the tension of the dialectic itself presents. Thus, I do not propose to ‘solve’ the problems of tragic spectatorship. Rather I examine, in a way which responds to Levinas’ call for us to occupy ourselves with the death of the other, how, through theatre, the suffering of others is made available in ways that might constitute a theatrical ethics of being-present-to, being-near, and acknowledgment.
Chapter one: ‘The World Watched:’ tourism and theatre as responses to the Rwandan genocide

Introduction: speaking, listening and silence

“We” can be articulated not by a presumption of a priori similarity but by a perception of what could be called common “catastrophe.” Such catastrophe—a notion coming from the ancient Greek sense of a “turning” of events that underlies the idea of drama—could equally be a dramatic performance [or] a disaster. (Rayner 220)

“We dance together, we sing, we make handicrafts, build houses. When they confess it gives morality,” she says. When asked how art changed her feelings after losing her husband, she said, “When we sing and dance, we feel happy and excited. I no longer see them as enemies, but those that share problems of the survivor.” (Theatre for reconciliation participant in Breed 509)

Between April and May of 1994 some 800,000 Rwandans, mostly Tutsi at the hands of Hutu, were killed in a wave of massacres that took place throughout the country. Coming at the close of the twentieth century, the genocidal event shocked with its vicious brutality and the sense in which it undermined the ‘never again’ shadow cast by the Holocaust. Paul Kagame, leader of the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front and now president of Rwanda famously commented, ‘never again became wherever again’ (quoted in Mizroeff "The Empire of Camps" 23). The unwillingness of international forces to intervene despite the colonial roots of the conflict, and the notorious withdrawal of the UN, set the stage for a genocide that continues to haunt both African and Western consciousness.

In this chapter I consider tourism and theatre as responses to the genocide that offer outsiders the opportunity to engage with the aftermath of the event. Both are instances of a ‘turning towards,’ gestures of acknowledgment that attempt to counter the historical turning away. To illustrate I discuss two examples: tourism at genocide memorial sites, Murambi in particular; and American playwright Erik Enh’s play about a Rwandan nun convicted of genocidal crimes, Maria Kizito. In considering tourist and dramatic cases side by side I intend to demonstrate a common theatricality between them. In assessing these works, as a way of understanding such
spectatorship, I would like to consider how we might set aside a language of bearing witness. Rather than a pyramid model that places the primary witness at the top, followed by the secondary witness, then tertiary and so on, I argue for the idea of a multiplicity of interrelated viewing and listening positions. Together these positions form a fluid network of responses whose articulations constitute the event as a subject-in-the-world.

In suggesting a move away from witnessing as a framing discourse I am also suggesting moving away from the binary model that inheres to theatrical discourse – that of spectacle and audience. In the context of tourism, this binary is disturbed by the fact that tourists themselves are so much part of the viewing frame. Indeed, on travel blog sites concerning Auschwitz, many tourists comment on the presence of other tourists. Tourists look at the site and its features, but also watch each other. In the case of theatre, there are multiple gazes in operation: cultural, technical and authorial. I will therefore engage the idea of a contingent network of interrelated perspectives which in its totality constitutes an ever-shifting presentation of the subject at hand. This formulation allows us to think about tourism and theatre spectatorship as contributors to what Nicholas Mizroeff calls, with specific reference to Rwandan memorials, a ‘performative network of visibility’ (Mizroeff "Invisible Again: Rwanda and Representation after Genocide" 1). This framework of multiple positions, rather than relying primarily on a gradation of witnessing, which tracks a diminishment of the binary relation, allows for a sharing of the disaster’s experience in the sense that Rayner states ‘catastrophe creates the space for a shared if not identical experience’ (252). This position does not presume equality as much as commonality – the manner in which the catastrophe is of common concern to each subject. In occupying a position within this network, I argue, one becomes implicated and called upon to take up, or in Levinas’ terms, ‘take on,’ some degree of responsibility.

In thinking through how this network might function, and how Levinas’ ethics might be practically realized, I pay particular attention to the dialogical concepts of speaking and listening and the various permutations of this. As a means of responding to the genocide, theatrical and touristic representations generate performative ways of allowing the dead to ‘speak’ to the living. This chapter examines that speaking function and considers how the spectator is positioned as listener to the speaking voice. I also consider silence as a quality that mitigates and,
as I will argue, helps shape the exchange. Silence, rather than a lack, as it often appears within a language of witness, may provide a powerful space into which affect is drawn and shared in a way that binds different viewers or listeners together. Indeed, Alice Rayner suggests that the function of the audience is to, ‘hear both history and desire in the silence … to hear meaning in both the spoken and unspoken’ (262). In examining Murambi I pay particular attention to the way that silence figures within the experience.

The idea of a network of interrelated viewers is, of course, not wholly incompatible with certain contemporary reformulations of witnessing – secondary witnessing, for example, as already noted. And some work has been done which considers this reframing of witnessing in relation to theatrical practices. In a recent article which attempts to address a number of problems arising from characterizing spectators as witnesses, Caroline Wake argues for a taxonomy of witness – primary, secondary and tertiary – that helps to understand theatricalized witness practices. She helpfully expands upon the tertiary witness mode: a third party who can be understood as distanced by space – someone who observes the testimonial exchange between primary and secondary witness – or by time, the third link in a chain that moves further and further away from the original event. To illustrate the relation between theatrical representation and witness, Wake engages Brecht’s description of a man demonstrating an accident to a crowd of bystanders as described in his essay “The Street Scene,” and in his poem, “On Everyday Theatre.”

Within the scene of the accident, witnessing is a mode of seeing whereas within the scene of the account, witnessing is not only a mode of seeing but also of saying and, for the bystanders, a mode of listening (Wake 1).

While I agree that the bystanders are listeners, in this thesis I resist calling them witnesses as such. Certainly, ‘witness’ is a necessary term for describing someone who has seen an event and bears testimony to it, and this function is important both ethically and practically. Rather than a demonstration of a telegraphic expansion of the sphere of witness, however, I believe Brecht’s imagery depicts a network of concerned individuals, whose presence at the scene constitutes it, as much as the wreckage and gesticulating demonstrator. It seems to me that Brecht is vitally concerned with a multiplicity of perspectives as signified by the potentiality of the crowd. I argue that this crowd is most usefully understood, as already noted, as
constitutive rather than reactive; that is, in the aftermath of the event, it is the multiplicity of the crowd which shapes the form that the recollection of the event takes in the world.

What I believe strengthens this argument is the sense that Brecht’s example emphasizes that any demonstration is contingent:

… he gives
Only so much as to make the accident intelligible, and yet
Enough to make you see them. But he shows neither
As if the accident had been unavoidable. The accident
Becomes in this way intelligible, yet not intelligible, for both of them
Could have moved quite otherwise … ("On Everyday Theatre" 177).

There is an obvious vitality at play at the scene of the accident. What the demonstrator offers is a persuasive possible explanation; his demonstration is subjective, or selective – according to him – not an exact or totalizing re-enactment. The listener responds to this account, generating their own understanding of what took place, taking into account what might be multiple and conflicting demonstrative interpretations:

The [street scene] performance’s origins lie in an incident that can be judged one way or another, that may repeat itself in different forms and is not finished but is bound to have consequences, so that this judgment has some significance. The object of the performance is to make it easier to give an opinion on the incident (Brecht "The Street Scene: A Basic Model for an Epic Theatre" 5).

The unfinished, unintelligible, and contingent aspects of the account are the very conditions that make the enquiry necessary; these limits are generative in nature, and their palpability provokes the audience. The demonstrator provides an account which the listener receives and may use as the basis of transmitting their own opinion on the matter, thus expanding the sphere of concern. Removing rather than amplifying the notion of witness from Brecht’s example reveals contingency as the dynamic charge that enables an exploration of the event. Contingency, I argue throughout the thesis, is vital to address as it reveals the inherent instability of the representational object and the context in which it is situated, as well as the multiple subjectivities of spectators.
In understanding an event such as the Rwandan genocide as a contingent sphere of concern that is constituted by all the ways in which it is remembered, accounted for, enacted and so on within the world, it becomes clear that theatricality has an important role to play within this sphere. I offer the second quotation preceding this chapter as a provocative illustration of this. In it, Ananda Breed, an applied theatre practitioner and researcher, describes the response of one woman to the government-supported and community-led process of theatre as/for reconciliation in Rwanda. Theatre, in this instance, allows for a shift in perspective, a movement within the network of relationships that affects not just that therapeutic relationship, but also others connected to it. ‘When we sing and dance, we feel happy and excited. I no longer see them as enemies, but those that share problems of the survivor’ (quoted in Breed 509). The way in which such problems might be shared is the key concern for this chapter, and one which I attempt to situate in relation to Levinas’ ethics. I ask whether this terminology of shared, although highly differentiated, concern might be more helpful than that of witness, and at the same time equally viable as a way of conceptualizing spectatorship. That is not to say that witnesses are not concerned. However, as I develop the premise of a theatrical reading of a Levinasian ethic, I wish to move away from the strong historical and political associations that witnessing carries, to a modality that is more able to bear the contingencies of spectatorship that emerge from a touristic terrain.

In suggesting, as I did earlier, that participation in the sphere of concern means an implication within that sphere I do not mean that one becomes implicated in the original event, but rather in its enactment in the world as a still current concern. This kind of implication, while acknowledging the distance in time and space of the spectator from the experience of the victim or survivor, also asserts an existential condition – a right to be – which, although shared by all, has been wrongly denied to the victims of the genocide. The spectator’s very act of participation within the sphere of concern affirms this essential right. In Levinas’ sense, it cannot be denied, for the spectator’s own existence confirms it; this is, I believe, what Levinas means when he argues that responsibility precedes all else – existence is responsibility. Of course, a spectator may refuse or deny this concern, yet the concern itself – responsibility – exists nonetheless. In looking at theatrical practices I am seeking to understand how they might bring forth this ethical consciousness. I argue that Levinas’ ethics of taking on the other is powerfully theatrically suggestive in a way
that allows us to think about this network of shared concern as a performance in itself, and one which illustrates theatre not as a weak corollary but a vital framework for enacting concern.

**Murambi: the affect of the dead**

In addition to a mass grave outside, tables in each classroom are covered with bodies of the dead preserved in powdered lime. Some of the twisted, contorted bodies resist death, others appear to be resigned to their fate. Their faces are preserved in a wide range of expression, from fear to shock to sheer horror. Some defend themselves; others clutch each other. Some are adults, some children, some babies. Machete slashes are still visible on the shriveled remains. (Kurash)

The genocide memorial at Murambi, Rwanda, is best known for its display of the lime-preserved bodies of genocide victims. Some 800 such bodies are displayed within buildings, formerly a school, at which the genocide took place. The guiding impulse of the site is one of making the dead present: ‘By being on open display, an awful past could bear upon the present – they were paradoxically “live”’ (Thompson 103). Via embalmed remains, the dead are at once both powerfully present, viscerally demanding, and at the same time silent, signifying a fundamental absence. It is this paradox and its relation to a Levinasian ethic that is the subject of this section. I base my discussion of Murambi mainly on two accounts by Western outsiders: an article from Australian artist and academic, Jeff Stewart (“Being Near: Visiting the Rwandan genocide memorial site at Murambi, Gikongoro”) and a book chapter by James Thompson (“Academic Scriptwriters and Bodily Affects”). I also make some reference to tourist sources and other articles. In looking at these accounts, I consider the ways in which the ‘presence’ of the dead derives not so much from an auratic quality that the corpses possess, but rather from the palpable affect that is mapped onto those bodies by spectators as a way of recognizing and acknowledging them. For, indeed, the dead do not speak, but the ways in which we imagine that we hear them confirm not just their power as archival ‘objects’ but, more importantly, an ethical response that makes itself known through our imagination of such voices.

Kurash’s article, cited above, shows how a theatricalising tendency often finds rhetorical expression in the concept of witnessing. Indeed, as noted in my
introductory chapter, her 2008 Associated Press article was entitled: “Tourists visit genocide memorials in Rwanda: Travellers can bear witness to the mass slaughter of innocents” (Kurash). The title illustrates a collapsed distinction between past and present time: travellers in fact cannot ‘bear witness to the mass slaughter of innocents.’ The invocation of the term ‘witness’ reveals the manner in which what tourists experience is inherently theatricalised in order to ethically frame their spectatorship – if tourists are understood as witnesses, and, by extension, capable of transmitting testimony, then their presence at the mass grave-sites is given a certain legitimacy. In attempting to steer a discussion away from witness, I ask how a theatrical ethics might be reformulated in a way that casts tourists less as passive spectator-witnesses and more as responsive ethical audience.

While the Associated Press article uses the term ‘witness’ as a kind of ethical underpinning, such use is fragile. In an article about Rwanda tourism, Nicki Hitchcott cites Phipps to explain the ambivalence that tempers any imagined ethics of witness in places such as Rwanda:

Tourists are caught in a dialectic of innocence, whereby their very innocence as consumers propels them into being guilty participants, even agents of global exploitation and corruption (Phipps in Hitchcott 153).

This is particularly significant in the case of Rwanda, in the sense that Western governments are implicated by their failure to intervene in the killings. Many of the visitors who have recorded their experiences on travel blogs talk about feelings of guilt that relate to this sense of implication:

It is important to visit if in Kigali to try and understand a little of what the Rwandan people went through. We were often moved to tears. The words near the end of the centre and "the world watched" made me feel the guilt. It was important to our Rwandan friends that we went (TripAdvisor).

Figure 2 (bottom): “Mummified victims of the 1994 Rwandan genocide at the Murambi technical school,” photo taken by Emmanuel Cattier, July 2001. Public domain image.
The manner in which tourists are asked to acknowledge the genocide is charged by the ways in which they are drawn into the narrative of the conflict through an emphasis on the fact that ‘the world watched’. Subtly, this phrase asks questions about the watching that tourists now perform; they are ambivalently positioned, both invited to see, and implicated within that which they are seeing. I argue for setting the term ‘witness’ aside in this context as response to the way that it tends, as indicated in the Kurash article, to cover over the ambivalences that make questions of ethical spectatorship all the more pressing. An ethical audience, I argue, is one which is able to recognize its own contingencies.

Such contingency often generates ambivalent response, something apparent in Jeff Stewart’s description of being a tourist at Murambi:

> It is difficult to comprehend that you are amongst the dead; but at the same time those who have been killed are so present that they manage to make you as present as they. The shocking acuteness of this coupling is something I am not familiar with (15).

In a theatrical reversal, Stewart gives the paradoxical presence of the dead precedence, emphasizing the claim that they make upon him. As Butler suggests, ‘we come to exist, as it were, in the moment of being addressed’ (130). As a means of responding to the ambivalence of his touristic perspective, Stewart assigns himself the role of witness:

> They and I coincided in this uncanny space, unsettling my understanding of what a home and a school may be. I was at once displaced, but simultaneously found in place by my act of complicity, which was to bear witness (16).

What differentiates Stewart’s use of the term ‘witness’ from Kurash’s is his connection of it to complicity, here understood as the acceptance of responsibility for having seen, in the sense of ‘the world watched,’ as touched on earlier. The ambivalent tension demonstrated in Stewart’s account is usefully framed in ethical terms by Grehan:

> Ambivalence … is a form of radical unsettlement, an experience of disruption and interruption in which the anodyne is challenged. Ambivalence keeps
spectators engaged with the other, with the work, and with responsibility and therefore in an ethical process, long after they have left the performance (22).

Ambivalence is not so much something that inheres to the performance, in this case the display of bodies, but rather from the spectator’s relationship to those bodies. The concept of ambivalence, as Grehan engages it, allows for experience that is characterized by multiple responses – frustration as well as sympathy, incomprehension as well as tears. It also takes into account the sense in which, while the call to responsibility may precede all else, it may also be rejected or ignored. The attempt by both writers, Stewart and Thompson, to place an ethical frame around their spectatorship indicates the force of this ambivalence and its unsettling qualities. This process does not end with the encounter but continues after it, as their written accounts illustrate. Indeed, both writers point to the difficulty of putting their experience into words. Stewart wonders whether descriptions of violence are akin to an abject reenactment of it, while Thompson asks how he might make the ‘troublesome quality [of affect] spread across the page’ (133).

The dialectical tension between being unsettled on the one hand, and resisting this unsettlement through locating himself as a witness on the other, is marked throughout Stewart’s account:

Standing here in the doorway of this classroom there is a bodily sensation of falling into the racks of the dead, of tilting forward, or backward, recognizing that you too are this person this victim and that you too are the one who killed. Being so close to death, witnessing this smell of decay I fall into the bodies lying before me. There is no escaping. I am displaced, and not allowed any comfortable re-settling, to anywhere that can be named (15).

He describes an uneasy form of spectatorship in which responsibility is problematized in the extreme – ‘you too are the one who killed.’ His observation of the fact that the bodies invoke both the dead as well as their killers is important as it reveals the fragility of point of view in which ambivalence is embedded. It also clarifies why he reiterates himself in the role of witness – it seems the only way of responding to the extremity of the claims that he imagines the dead make upon him.

The susceptibility and contingency of perspective is the central point here. As I argued in the introduction to this thesis, whilst ethical responsibility may, as meant by Levinas, precede all else, in order to make such an ethics manifest, effort is
required. The efforts that Stewart makes are significantly theatrical ones, by which he attempts to take hold of the ambivalences of being a spectator at Murambi in a way that makes his presence there an ethical one. The contingency of these theatrical efforts is particularly apparent in one of his reflections, in which he notes:

There are a number of long dormitory style buildings, some closer together; others set apart, each divided into six classrooms. The first red door of the first classroom in the nearest dormitory is unlocked, and then another and another. Bodies have been placed onto racks, hundreds and hundreds of bodies, all treated with lime, their stretched and dried flesh retaining what is still their humanness. Some have tufts of hair. One woman wears a blue dress, and a child, probably two years old is clothed in an ashen red t-shirt with a faded yellow border around the neck and sleeves. I realize while writing this that I added the yellow edging to the t-shirt, making it one I have had for many years and wear myself (14-15).

His perception of the t-shirt reveals an identificatory process. Significantly this happens at a subconscious level; it is only later, when writing, that he realizes his augmentation of the image. What his account makes apparent are the difficulties of establishing an ethical mode of seeing; the fine balance between taking on or taking over the experience of the other.

While Thompson’s account is similarly concerned with the affect of the dead – the way in which they are ‘paradoxically live’ – he frames his understanding of this quite differently. While engaged with the theatrical pretexts of the site, he is less concerned with how these may make him complicit but rather with a moment of displacement that might resist recourse to consolatory frames such as witnessing:

An autopsy, investigation, dig, withered fractured image of murder. Machete cuts in shoulders, broken skulls, hair, babies, children with skull slices. Warm-cloth-covered, stretched muscle – orange, pink, lime smell. “Classroom” does not fit with chalk-lime bodies on racks. The guide opens “the children’s room”. Line upon line – sleeping, tiny. Archeology waiting archeologists – the bodies were waiting for something. You could almost touch. The stench held in my nose, clothes – held in the air. They had been buried but now were re-dug and on display; in school. A show that had no words on walls, no printed explanatory phrases. Just Emmanuel, one of four survivors – the guide. The response was just above my sternum – nauseous and furious. My nose was numbed by the residue, the smell, for the rest of the day. The bodies remained in the plume of lime stench that got up in the face. April 1994 – 40,000, 50,000 or 60,000 people died on this site. Into another room, the clothes of the dead hang chaotically on lines: a hall-like assembly space. Caked garments again waiting – to be washed, perhaps reclaimed if this was a
tribunal site: discarded, decaying…. This memorial site can’t be permanent, can it? They must be about to do something with them? Do class room after class room of shattered, still fleshed bodies offer the best form of memorial – one half done, about to be investigated but not yet investigated? One that seems to be a research moment without the ongoing process of enquiry. Bodies are suspended between being disinterred and re-interred (91-92).

The extract above is taken from travel notes that Thompson recorded during his visit to Murambi. He positions this excerpt within an extended academic analysis of the site. I include a long section of it here as it usefully illustrates both theatrical positioning, and the ambivalences of spectatorship discussed already. In his description of the displays, the state in which artifacts and remains have been left – the smell and the lack of signage – it is apparent that the Memorial deliberately steers spectators away from an explanatory model and towards an affective mode of encounter. As such, Thompson likens its context to an archeological dig, within which tourists take on the role of forensic investigators. This is a theatre, however, that interrupts itself. Spectators may be drawn into an investigatory project (as kinds of belated witnesses), but they are equally thwarted in this task:

These bodies … seemed to suspend traditional investigatory modes of memory and reconciliation. They were presented as a provisional, half-finished exhibition: a mid-dig display. They appeared to be a frozen, epistemological project, stuck in a limelight, ready for a case to be made, but with no evidence that a case was being made…. Here the bodies did not appear to be coerced into a narrative or easily co-opted into a memory programme (93).

The suspended research moment suggests the halting of the investigatory project as a means of acknowledging the ethical ambivalence that Grehan points to. The idea is a potent one – and one that, perhaps, responds to the suggestion by Butler that we must ‘interrogate the emergence and vanishing of the human at the limits of what we can know, what we can hear, what we can see, what we can sense’ (151). For Thompson, the ‘mid-dig display’ means that, ‘We do not stand mute and still in front of the bodies, but question our ethical relation to this death’ (94). Within this address, the spectator cannot disentangle themselves from the ethical conditions of his or her own viewing experience. The bodies are not problems to be solved, artefacts for which ‘a case must be made.’ Instead, they are a powerful manifestation of the ethical right to
tribunal site: discarded, decaying…. This memorial site can’t be permanent, can it? They must be about to do something with them? Do class room after class room of shattered, still fleshed bodies offer the best form of memorial – one half done, about to be investigated but not yet investigated? One that seems to be a research moment without the ongoing process of enquiry. Bodies are suspended between being disinterred and re-interred (91-92).

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existence, made through a disturbing presentation of the result of the denial of this right.

What both the accounts offered here suggest is that a theatrical ethics inextricably tied to affect is that which makes the inexplicable palpable. Thompson notes: ‘By yielding before the display, something of the power of performance outside a communicative paradigm is hinted at’ (95). Because of the nature of what affect is, however, this response to it is always contingent, multivalent and changeable. That Stewart and Thompson’s similar concern – how might one realize an ethical perspective – is worked through so differently indicates how an interconnected network of response, as I argued earlier, is a useful way of thinking about a spectatorship that is able to accommodate its contingencies. As the varying responses of Brecht’s street crowd constitute the accident as object-in-the-world, so do Thompson and Stewart’s responses contribute to making the Rwandan genocide visible. The unfinished or unintelligible aspects of the enquiry are what provide it with its most powerful charge. By leaving unresolved questions, spectators, as interested bystanders, are called to account. Just as, for Brecht, this process of giving account is a theatrical one, so to it is here. Where Murambi is so different from the street scene, however, is in its silence, and it is this aspect that draws a Levinasian consideration, something that both Stewart and Thompson touch on. While their responses are each quite different, what can be seen at play in both the accounts is an engagement of theatricality as a way of constituting the encounter as an ethical one. This theatricality, I believe, is embedded within Levinas’ concept of ‘being for’ the other. Within this framework he calls for the ‘I’ to be positioned:

For-the-other, straightaway in obligation and straightaway as the only one who is ready to respond and to bear this responsibility, like one who is the first to have hearkened to the call and the last, perhaps, to have listened to it (quoted in Robbins 117-18).

His positioning of the ‘I’ reveals its theatrical aspect in the use of the word ‘like,’ in the phrase, ‘like one who is the first…’ This suggests that it is from taking on a role as if one is the ‘first to have hearkened to the call,’ and ‘last to have listened to it,’ that an ethical relation might arise. For this as if to take effect, however, it must be performed in some way. What both Thompson and Stewart do is attempt to construct such a performance. A Levinasian ‘as if’ arises inasmuch as they both assign a kind
of speaking capacity to the bodies that exceeds their status as objects: ‘they make you as present as they,’ and are ‘paradoxically live.’

What I have offered in this section is a theorization of how we might place a theatrical-ethical frame around tourism at Murambi. As argued, however, such spectatorship is always contingent. Though I have seen images of Murambi, I have not seen the actual bodies, so my tendency here is perhaps to over-abstract the encounter with them. Levinas’ concept of alterity is appealing in the way that it offers a term that seems to take in the very ineffability of facing another’s death. In Stewart and Thompson’s accounts, this same kind of abstraction of the experience emerges. It is perhaps a default mode of response, a desire to ‘make sense of,’ despite Thompson’s acknowledgment of the challenge to such a desire that the bodies make. Are such abstractions of the encounter any more than a sophisticated version of the journalistic designation of tourists as witnesses? Each is an attempt to deal with the fact that the dead have no presence, they do not speak. The lime-preserved corpses are deteriorated, skeletal, facial nuances almost impossible to discern; they are far from the ‘still fleshed bodies,’ that Thompson recorded in his journal. It is not just the encounter with the bodies that is contingent, but the bodies themselves – both real remains and representational devices. My own response to them, as well as Thompson and Stewart’s, makes apparent this dialectic tension: the persistence with which we imagine a meaningful exchange with the bodies, an affective one that makes what is ‘incomprehensible palpable,’ despite their brutal muteness. The key argument for this thesis is that this dialectic is a performative one and that theatre in its ever-shifting counterbalance of absence and presence, life and death, is especially, though not exclusively, able to bring to the fore the ethical problem of belated response.

Maria Kizito: understanding the connectedness of the world

In 1994 a massacre took place at Sovu Monastery in Rwanda. Over 6000 local Tutsis who sought shelter in the monastery were killed, either by machete, gunfire or burning. In Belgium, six years later, two nuns, Sister Maria Kizito and her Superior, Gertrude Mukangangwa, along with two militia men who lived near the monastery,
were convicted of crimes against humanity; Maria Kizito was found to have provided the militia with gasoline. The incident at Sovu was not an isolated one. A church at Nyamata, now a memorial, still bears the stains of blood on the walls, powerfully testifying to the church’s role in the genocide. The shock of this complicity – ‘Nuns watched from the terrace and served tea to the militias during their breaks’ (Edmondson 1) was the impetus for American playwright Erik Ehn’s work, *Maria Kizito*. The play was published in 2008 as part of Robert Skloot’s collected anthology of plays dealing with genocide. Ehn’s research, which he makes note of in the introduction to the play, included ‘witness accounts from African Rights’ *Obstruction of Justice: The Nuns of Sovu*, along with material from Maria’s trial’ (quoted in Skloot *The Theatre of Genocide* 178). In addition to writing *Maria Kizito*, Ehn has been central in the establishment of an exchange program between the School of Theatre at the California Institute of the Arts and institutions within Rwanda. Parties of students have attended Gaccaca court hearings, participated in theatre reconciliation work, and held dialogue with local people.

By following an analysis of the performative contingencies and ambivalences of a memorial site with an explicit dramatic example, I intend to expand upon such analysis in more theatrical detail. In discussing *Maria Kizito* I am interested in how ethical ambivalence might be contextualized in terms of what Laura Edmondson, with specific reference to Ehn’s play, calls an ‘aesthetics of discomfort’ (66). Further, the play explores the problem of what it means to attempt to take on a ‘trauma that is not one’s own’ (Edmondson 82) in a way that helpfully contributes to a discussion of tourist spectatorship. Taken together, these two quite different examples of performing as ‘spectator’ to the genocide – a tourist site and a play – demonstrate a certain theatrical consistency, and it is from this foundation that the following chapters will proceed.

I would like to tentatively describe *Maria Kizito* as a postdramatic text. The particular qualities that Lehmann describes which are relevant here are: text that is divorced from stable characterization and marked by unclear intentions; lack of a single unifying plot; language that may be heightened, its formal aspects emphasized; and lack of a coherent unifying dramatic world. The reason I draw attention to Lehmann’s analysis is that it helps to theatrically situate a play like *Maria Kizito*, which is marked by certain representational tensions: it places language at its centre but equally problematizes its capacity; it sets itself a dramatic task – representing
events which took place during the genocide – and yet pulls apart its own representational efforts; it veers between a giving of account, in the Brechtian sense discussed already, and a heightened and highly affective immersion in the world of violence. Indeed, Lehmann notes that postdramatic theatre, ‘exists in a time after the authoritative validity of Brecht’s theatre concept’ (33), and this is an important consideration to take into account when a play about a Rwandan génocidaire is written by an American outsider. The parameters of the postdramatic are also a useful way of situating the aspects of dark tourism that are not so much dramatic, (i.e., in the sense of having a core narrative, identifiable and intentioned characters, an integrated dramatic world), yet are still highly theatrical; that is, their power derives from their scenographic composition.

As a postdramatic work, Maria Kizito is abstracted, elliptical, uses mixed modes of representation, rejects stable actor-character identification and problematizes processes of narrative historicization. In order to assist a discussion of the play, I would like to sketch its structure and at the same time evoke a sense of the atmosphere it generates. The play requires nine performers to play the parts of: convicted nuns, Maria and Gertrude; Teresa, an American nun who comes to observe the Belgian trial; Rekeraho, a militia man (this actor also provides the voice of the Radio, which is like a character); six sisters; and a variety of different refugees and survivors. In having the same actors play both perpetrators and victims, Ehn prevents close identificatory relationships from taking place. The exception to this is Maria, played by only one actor. The performance incorporates singing, chanting, puppets and other heightening effects which Ehn indicates should create a ‘liturgical’ effect (quoted in Skloot 178). Disjunctive transitions are common throughout the play, and often blur distinct boundaries between fact and fiction. The work is divided into twelve sections. Ehn uses elements of the Liturgy of the Hours to structure these divisions, evoking the daily routines of the nuns. Each of the twelve sections opens with prayers lead by Teresa. The first begins, ‘Third Nocturn of Vigil. Sisters pray from the Bible of Genocide’ (The Theatre of Genocide 183). This is followed in later sections by Lauds, Terce, Sext and so on. In reading from the ‘Bible of Genocide,’ it is clear that these prayers are an abstracted and alternate version of the actual Divine Office. These Hours are woven around a secondary temporal framework, which elaborates the actual events of the massacre. The third time of the drama is that of
Belgium and the trial. The play moves between these different times, within sections as well as between them.

The first section of the play, entitled “Prologue,” introduces the two main characters, Teresa, the American outsider, and Maria, the nun on trial. Teresa opens the action in a speech in which she requests permission from her superiors to travel to Belgium to witness the trial of the Rwandan genocidaires. She is set up as a cipher for the audience in that it is her attention to Maria that allows for ours. Her introduction is followed by a scene which takes place as Maria and Gertrude are in prison, in Belgium, awaiting trial. Maria is depicted as trapped in a delusional state. While Sister Gertrude bangs on the door, Maria feverishly prays, introducing a line which will be later repeated: ‘MY HEART IS A JERRICAN, A JERRICAN OF GASOLINE’ (182). Gertrude stops knocking and Maria calls out lines in Latin from a Eucharistic hymn, then speaks another passage which will be later repeated:

MARIA: This is quiet. This is private. Don’t be ridiculous. This is God. I am in God. I give myself in faith to God. This is morning. This is begun. This is time to go away and shut up and good morning (183).

The problem of prayer is immediately introduced; later action shows that it is in ‘conversation’ with God that Maria carries out genocidal acts. Her constant working through of her position in relation to God is a thread that is carried throughout the work. In this section and others, the structure of the action is fragmentary, disjunctive, and strikingly juxtaposed, making spectatorship an uneasy process, which is an important aspect of the ethics of the play.

The second section is “April 15-18.” The central action concerns refugees attempting to get into the church complex at Sovu. They are turned away by Maria and Gertrude but later come back and break their way in. This action is read and sung from the perspectives of both the refugees and the sisters, almost as if a hymn or scriptural reading. Such heightened use of language is contrasted with a non-poetic testimonial mode: ‘She locked all the doors. We tried to climb in. Pregnant women were climbing. Others managed to get through the cypress hedge in between the barbed wire’ (185). In the introduction to the play Ehn notes that he incorporated trial material directly into the script, and although he does not specifically signal where in the text this takes place, it seems most likely that these testimonial passages are largely documentary material. The tone of the work thus moves between the
unadorned language of testimony, the ornate language of prayer and the poetically heightened prose of the sisters. For example, the description of refugees breaking into the complex is interrupted by the chorus of sisters: ‘Tooth, crack on rain’s cold sunk/ Mouth all thumbs, Baby, tight, broken breath’ (185). Later a chorus of rain appears, telling the story of the refugees from its own perspective.

Section three is entitled “April 19.” The action is as follows: Teresa starts by invoking Lauds, the morning prayers; Maria and Gertrude then go to Butare to ask for military and police protection from the ‘invading’ refugees; Kizito takes a census of all the refugees, separating out the Hutu from the Tutsi; Lauds “prayers” finish; the action moves back to the setting of the trial, where we are offered a moment of Maria observing her observer, which I will later discuss. Within this section Ehn continues to shift between the two modes of testimonial and poetic account.

In section four, “April 20-21,” the police and military arrive; the Interahamwe (local militia) surround the monastery, killing any of those who try to escape. Again, Teresa announces prayers, instructing the sisters to pray Terce. Contrasting and overlapping evidence is given about Rekeraho, the key Interhamwe (militia) figure in the play. His account comes into conflict with those of others as different voices clamour to tell their own story. Within the conflicting testimonial accounts there is a dramatization of the sisters’ refusal to feed or shelter the refugees, who were starving.

The next section depicts the first half of the first day of the killing: “April 22 (before Noon) – The Massacres Begin.” Teresa begins by invoking the Hour of Sext. This is followed immediately by an account of the killing: police shoot refugees, militia men slaughter them with hand tools. Direct eyewitness accounts are tempered with poetic passages; one refugee intones:

Insect leg
Dog beg
Owl twist
Justice
Spent fuel
Broke tool
This day
The colour gray
Remote sound
A grenade against a belly on the ground (195).
Following from the reiteration of the trial setting in the previous section is an important moment where Maria, in the midst of a speech, turns to Teresa and offers a defense of her actions:

The sooner God, the better
The killing starts at 7:30 after prayers and breakfast
Day may not remove itself from day.
(To TERESA)
You have no knowledge of the situation if you don’t believe a threat against nuns and religion is credible (195-196).

The exchange between Maria and Teresa is indicative of a back-and-forth tension concerned with the limits of both representing and being a spectator to a trauma that is not one’s own. The section ends, as it began, with prayers.

Section six, “April 22 (afternoon),” continues the day’s action. This time the section does not begin with prayers, but rather with a continuation of testimony. Refugees who have barricaded themselves in a garage are burnt to death. Maria provides gasoline. This is the central crime for which she was convicted, and which her opening line of the play reflects: ‘MY HEART IS A JERRICAN, A JERRICAN OF GASOLINE’ (182). The incident is dramatized through a poetic dialogue between a refugee and fire:

Refugee: I do not recall my child’s name to call it. The woman next to me has choked to death on smoke. I remember the name of my child and cannot call.
Fire: Move or don’t move. I can take your place.
Refugee: Every system in my body created to signal pain flashes, taking pictures, bulbs in perpetual bursts till pupils explode too. I have to let this go. I cannot talk to you anymore.
Fire: I am the white at your lips. I will hear your every whisper.
Refugee: What they’re saying is right. I am not right for this job.
Fire: What job?
Refugee: The job of feeling this pain.
Fire: You are not expected to do well. You are expected to die.
Refugee: What do you get?
Fire: A space in which to be until you are not (203).

Following the massacre sections there is a short respite entitled, ‘Interlude.’ This returns us to the setting of Belgium and the interior of Maria and Gertrude’s cell. It begins with a strange ceremony in which Maria dips small pieces of bread in gasoline then sets them on fire. Ehn notes that: ‘TERESA watches from a distance.'
MARIA bleeds from the mouth, makes mud from the blood, puts the mud on her own eyes, leans her head back, and plants a lit candle over each socket’ (203). This ritualistic action is followed by a straightforward conversation between Maria and Gertrude where they discuss the trial and their possible fate. The section finishes with Teresa offering some commentary on the trial: ‘Bad nuns, but ridiculous first trial – so low on the food chain. These are the best génocidaires you could find to test your law?’ (205) Then turning her questions to Mary in prayer: ‘Mary, I am not separate from you, Maria, I am not separate from you’ (205).

Section eight is called, “April 23-25. Massacres: Second Wave.” It returns us to the convention of Teresa beginning the action with prayers, this time opening the Hour of Vespers. She states, ‘Praying Vespers I saw’ (206), situating herself at the scene of the crime. More refugees are massacred. This is depicted in a manner similar to previous sections, alternating between testimonial account and the poetic, particularly Maria’s prayers. The section ends with an exchange between Teresa and Maria:

TERESA: In a hundred days a million
In one hundred years millions, millions
If my number seems low, add from adjacent holes.

I pray to Maria
I pray to Maria Kizito

[...]

MARIA: Go to hell.
I have ate my fill. I am
Original from this hill.

Tutsi, Tutsi – easy death
Died too quick, ha ha ha… (209).

Such exchanges indicate a struggle to comprehend on the part of Teresa, and an evasiveness on that of Maria, but also the struggle of theatre itself, particularly the spoken language of theatre as a response to the genocide.

The ninth section, which is short, moves us forward in time by almost two weeks. It is called “May 6 – Last Wave,” indicating the sustained nature of the period of violence. The section continues the testimonial account, mainly focusing on an incident where Maria lies to refugees hiding in the attic, convincing them that they
will be safe when they come down. Section ten is called “Bone.” It is a reflective section, where the sisters, Maria, Gertrude and Rekeraho offer their memories of the massacre. Teresa joins in this conversation. Ehn describes the section in a stage direction at the beginning, which reinforces the postdramatic aspect of the work:

‘Characters, dispersed, consider events, sometimes hearing each other, sometimes not; sometimes enacting, sometimes witnessing, sometimes erasing’ (211).

The final two sections of the play, “Belgium,” and “Old” are focused on the trial setting. “Belgium” is opened by Teresa asking: ‘Do you remember…’ (214) The ‘you’ is significantly ambivalent, referring concurrently as a rhetorical question by Teresa to herself, as an accusation of Maria, and as an ethical provocation of the audience – the use of ‘you’ inherently asks the possibility of a ‘we.’ After Teresa’s opening of the section, Maria and Gertrude are shown waiting in transit at the airport in France; they talk about buying mementoes. Teresa follows by giving background information as to how the nuns were exposed and arrested. It is significant that this information comes so late in the play, and indicates Ehn’s disinterest in a conventional documentary drama. Teresa describes details of the trial, including verbatim material such as the Magistrate’s sentencing and Maria’s reaction to this:

I thank you. The lawyers have explained everything by grace of their intelligence. Since the beginning, I had said that I had confidence in justice. I have courage. I was declared guilty. This is a lie. But I have confidence in justice. I thank you (217).

Finally, in “Old” Ehn gives a wholly fictional account of Maria upon her release from prison. Maria attempts to contextualize her crimes, and reflects on her failures, which she sees as failures of faith more than anything else: ‘I have hidden in fear instead of hiding in God’ (219). Teresa flies home in a silver jet. On the plane she states: ‘Six years after the genocide I tear bread; so important’ (219). The play then ends with a refugee reenacting a memory of the massacre. The play stops mid action. There is no resolution and a sense in which dramatic representation itself must be interrupted.

The intense theatricality of Maria Kizito seems to be a response to a question that Ehn himself proposes: ‘How does fiction represent a very real reality? What does it have to offer that adds to direct testimony?’ (72) The play does not attempt to depict events ‘realistically,’ but rather filters what is known of those events –
evidence gathered from the testimony of primary witnesses and made public through the trial process – through the imagination of Maria’s devotion to God. The work deliberately complicates the contingencies of both witnessing, through Maria, and spectatorship, through Teresa. By way of such complications Ehn foregrounds the role of spectators within the process of confronting the aftermath of the genocide. He calls us to witness whilst at the same time problematizing how we might do this.

It is worth noting that Ehn positions himself as a witness:

The essential action of the artist, the audience, is to see, to experience, to witness (and deriving from witness to give testimony), to trust.

Seeing can be a moral act: we consent to take in, we draw our attention to focus, we turn our heads and open our eyes – we change our own place to put ourselves squarely in the presence of a unique event. We invest will.

In seeing in this way, deliberately committing to a new perspective, we allow ourselves to be shaped by the event – to be created by it (36).

From Ehn’s statement one can detect a tension between a politically charged theatre whose task is to bear witness, and an almost mystical impulse in which one gives oneself over to the event and is shaped by it. This tension, as I’ve already argued, is central to Maria Kizito. In shifting between these two impulses, in what I am describing as a postdramatic manner, the drama expresses – without resolution – the very dialectic tension arising from attempting to bear witness to the unspeakable. What is most interesting about the play are the multiple and interconnected perspectives contained within it and the structures that Ehn devises for bringing these various points of view into relation with one another. It is from the network of interrelated gazes that the tension described above is made meaningful.
Being with Maria: an ‘aesthetics of discomfort’

In an interview with Edmondson, Ehn stated that the purpose of the play was to let us be with Maria:

The play is not meant as an explanation – not even as a condemnation…. It’s meant to provide a space of time in which we can be with Maria. I try not to judge her guilt. I try to let us be with her in her guilt, because her kind of guilt is a key to understanding who we are in the world today (quoted in Edmondson 70).

His comment makes apparent the concerns carried over from the previous section. Following Thompson, how might we resist the desire to ‘clear up’ after the catastrophe by explaining it? In what ways might an ethical complicity be suggested? How might a Levinasian ethics of being near/with/for be enacted via theatrical practice, even in the extreme case of being with a genocidaire? The time that Ehn provides for the audience to ‘be with Maria’ is significant precisely because of its ambivalence which, as already noted, Edmondson describes as an ‘aesthetics of discomfort:’

As it struggles to speak this particular example of unspeakable violence, Maria Kizito generates an “aesthetics of discomfort” through a systematic dismantling of boundaries between nightmare and reality, poetry and fact, the quotidian and the extreme. The play’s unique poetics of violence illuminates the intricate political web in which narratives of the 1994 genocide are entangled and categories of survivor, bystander, and murderer intertwine (66).

The idea of discomfort is multiple. It is what is experienced by the writer, Ehn, in the ‘struggle’ to find a language to speak ‘a trauma that is not his own’ (Edmondson 82). This same struggle is then mirrored through the character of Teresa. Such discomfort is also experienced by the audience in their own struggle to make sense of the play, as well as of the difficult history that it represents. (Aesthetic discomfort might also be considered in relation to the experience of the performers, though this is beyond the scope of this study.) Edmondson’s turn of phrase suggests a willingness to attend to what Thompson describes as the unresolved and difficult aspects of the Rwandan genocide. Ehn does this by deliberately confusing observer and perpetrator in the text as a way of destabilizing the event as distant and other. In doing so, he constructs a
‘web’ or network, in which spectators – principally Teresa as a belated spectator – are intertwined as much as perpetrators, in that the quotidian is implicated in the violence of the genocide. Teresa’s theatricalising gaze, as Féral describes it, demonstrates such an intertwining both in terms of narrative and aesthetics, and this gaze is what makes the text most uncomfortable and hence ambivalent.

I would like to comment on this aspect of discomfort largely through the role of Teresa, the outsider who stands as a proxy for our own interest. Indeed, it is significant that a play entitled Maria Kizito starts not with that titular character, but with her dramatic shadow, the American Nun who seeks her out:

TERESA (to her unseen superior): May I have your permission? Your permission to travel? To travel to Belgium? To see the young nuns? My father will pay. May I deceive you? May I leave aside the veil and stay in a narrow hotel near a construction site? May I take an unscheduled leave to see Maria Kizito? May I watch and discover what our sister was thinking? There are enough dead finally to make one wonder. She is enough an individual to expose something in myself, or, well, someone nearly like me. (Ehn "Maria Kizito" 181)

In seeking out the trial, which itself has a performative quality, Teresa’s attendance mirrors that of the audience to the play. Using a courtroom as a theatrical setting is a common dramatic device and one which implicates the audience as either jury or interested public. In Ehn’s play, however, the courtroom is more a point of departure and contemplation than a literal setting; voices from the court records filter in and out of the imagined Sovu, reminding us of the Belgian setting whilst, in the main, not dwelling there. It is a highly affective demonstration, in the sense suggested by Brecht. Although the space of the trial is evoked in a fairly abstracted manner, it still functions to implicate the audience within its sphere, giving the work a degree of self-reflexivity and implicitly asking how we might perform our role as spectators to genocide. This is reinforced by the fact that in addition to performing as pseudo-attendants who watch the acting out of testimonial material, the audience also watches the act of an outsider attempting to bear witness. In seeing Maria through Teresa, the audience’s attention is immediately drawn to its own role of listening and watching.

Within the trial setting, the play brings into convergence a number of different points of view, which means a number of different ways of being with Maria: Teresa watches Maria; the refugees relate their testimony directly to the audience who
function as juror/spectators (while also inflecting it by their repetitive ritual as nuns); Maria and Gertrude watch the rising violence outside; refugees watch Maria, waiting for her to act, and so on. Maria herself even comments on the fact that she is watched by Teresa:

([Teresa]Cleans her glasses. Maria cleans her glasses too, and studies, Teresa.)
Maria: She watches me sit in my station: the defendant’s glass box
Watches me in glasses behind the glass,
Watches from my left (189).

The chorus of sisters also comment on Teresa’s watching.

The young white nun sits to observe Kizito. Kizito and codefendants hear testimony while secured in a big glass box. There are men on trial too, but these are not – strange enough for Teresa, not as strange as family. Teresa doesn’t know there are Hutus and Tutsis in the audience – she doesn’t yet understand the connectedness of the world (216).

The way in which sense and understanding are confounded in the play is important. In a moment of frustration, Teresa states:

Kizito is hiding. She is hiding from me. I am hiding. I am hiding from language. I speak no Dutch or French or Kinyarwanda ….
I am ashamed of poetry but it is how I believe in anything. I hide by counting according to base poetry rather than rational numbers (192-193).

Kizito’s experience is inaccessible; it remains hidden. Teresa lacks the language to decipher it. Further, she does not know how to use the language that she does have to express the scraps and fragments that she has stitched together. In the face of inexplicability she turns to poetry, as does Ehn, as a way of trying to make an account of it. Her shame at turning to the poetic perhaps expresses Ehn’s own ambivalence.

What is most significant about Teresa’s character is the way that she traverses a number of different viewing perspectives, destabilizing clear delineation between them. In writing about such instability, Wake acknowledges the power of the desire to have seen, which is what characterizes Teresa: ‘In our absence, we wish that we were present and sometimes we wish with such force and imagination that for a moment we might really believe that we were witnesses’ (Wake 13) The transformative desire (a wish for the sublime), which causes one to feel that one really
was there, is what characterizes Teresa. Her position, what Wake would describe as a tertiary witness, is upturned by Ehn, who allows her desire to see to transport her to Sovu. Teresa’s participation in what took place at Sovu is given dramatic concretization through Ehn’s designation of her as the figure that leads the nuns in daily prayers, and it is from this position that she observes much of the action. This positioning of Teresa dramatizes the problems of appropriating a witnessing role. Through watching, Teresa is absorbed into the sphere of violence in a way that suggests she must now be at least partially answerable for it.

Ehn’s dramatic construction of Teresa as an imagined bystander, and, further, an actor in the genocidal event, highlights the ethical problems that arise from the desire to bear witness. As a watcher, Teresa also points to the sense in which, as the memorial at Kigali states, ‘the world watched.’ Any sense of neutrality is therefore removed from the act of watching – it is a highly charged act. Having seen, one becomes implicated in the sense that one has heard the call of others. In this way, Ehn’s dramatic framework suggests that, through our attendance at the play, we too become implicated. The theatrical act becomes a means of enacting a practice of ethical substitution. We are drawn into the sphere of the genocidal aftermath and asked to reflect on what relationship and responsibility we might take for it; that is, we are called to address, in the sense meant by Butler.

The final moments of the play reinforce the ethical address made to the audience by foregrounding the issue of responsibility. In the section “Old,” at the end of the play, we see Maria continue her denial of her role in the killing. Her last line in the play is one of self-defense and, implicitly, also one which denies her culpability: ‘No – they lie – we tried to save lives’ (The Theatre of Genocide 220). She is thus finally rendered as an abject figure, unwilling and unable to face her violent crimes. It is this sense of the unclaimed responsibility of the perpetrator which challenges an application of Levinas’ ethics, raising the problem of how responsibility should be assumed for those who have most barbarically denied the fundamental right of existence to others. The question is pressingly explored through the character of Maria who is ultimately (as she has been throughout) presented as much pathetically human as strangely monstrous. This humanization of the perpetrator, and the way in which we are asked to be with her, is important. What Ehn attempts to create in his poeticization of her violent thinking and action, is something of the affect of Maria’s interior world. He attempts to bring us inside this world not so that we may figure it
out, but, rather, so that we may feel its force as a way of recognizing that, in this instance, the impossible did indeed become possible, and humanly so. In the sense that Levinas describes the face of the other making a claim upon us, the theatrical invocation of Maria’s face does just that. This claim is not easily responded to. Teresa’s last line suggests this. After breaking bread and offering a prayer, she states “There is nothing –” (220). This ‘nothing’ is left unexplained; nothing else to say, nothing else to do, nothing in the places where Teresa searched for answers.

The play ends finally, however, not with Maria or Teresa, but with a refugee ‘reenacting a memory’ that is cut off amid violent action. Maria is described as ‘shadowing’ the refugee, she becomes the ghost who haunts remembering:

REFUGEE (reenacting a memory, Maria shadows her): One of the militiamen at the roadblock knocked me to the ground with a blow from his club. The militia then stripped me completely naked. One of them took me for his wife He – [The End] (220).

It is significant that after the dense poetry of the text, the play ends with a piece of testimony. This story, however, is halted mid-action, leaving the audience with an abrupt violent image. Ehn’s deliberate interruption of the text suggests an endlessness to the violence; because the image is not completed, it continues, violence becomes itself textual. Read another way, the interruption signals enough. It is a reaction against continual reiteration of violence. For me, the interruption is most powerful in the sense that it leaves the audience suspended. Spectators must confront the unclaimed responsibility at the heart of the drama. In being with Maria, we are asked to face her, and through this substitutive taking on asked to reflect on what responsibility we might bear for her. The question is a painful one.

Ehn’s play is a difficult work, both in terms of its subject and the form that it takes. In calling it postdramatic I am attempting not so much to give it an aesthetic label, as I am attempting to indicate the ways in which the form of the play mirrors its substantive concern. In its repudiation of a straightforward plot, stable identifiable characters or clearly defined environments, the play signals the very limits and difficulties of constructing what Lehnmann calls a dramatic ‘fictive cosmos’ (Lehmann 31) that might contain the excesses of the genocidal subject at hand. Whilst an identifiable character whose journey is plotted from beginning to end, Teresa is more significantly a free-floating proxy for the spectator who calls into
question our attempts to ‘attend’ to the catastrophe as much as the event itself. She is a tourist of sorts whose depiction usefully illustrates the ambivalence of theatricalities of witness.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have suggested that the concept of witness, while pivotal in certain contexts, might be set aside here in favour of considering a more pluralistic network of responders to the event. I have argued that this is a more useful way to consider the contingencies of the tourist experience, which is central to the thesis. I have also suggested that such an expansion of the sphere of concern widens the possibility for ‘sharing the problems of the survivor.’ In describing a network of concern constituted by a wide variety of forms of engagement, I have demonstrated a theatrical commonality that permeates it. This theatricality reflects the very absences and impossibilities that are at the centre of the spectatorial inquiry. In the chapter’s core examples, Murambi and Ehn’s drama, the same tension – how might such catastrophic violence be most usefully responded to – emerges for both tourists and theatre audiences. In affecting the voices of the dead, theatre and tourism take up the role of articulating a substitute call which allows an ethical claim to be placed upon the audience. The affective nature of this call is important to Levinas. He states:

> In every death to which one attends […] the resonances of this extraordinary unknown are heard. We apprehend this unknown irresistibly in the other man’s encounter with death (Levinas in Robbins 126).

The emphasis that Levinas places on the unknown signals the affective aspect of the ethical claim – the sense in which the ‘inexplicable becomes palpable.’ Further, by the use of the term ‘irresistible,’ he suggests a certain sublime aspect to such a call – it is something which takes us outside of ourselves. Theatre, I argue, is uniquely able, in the best of instances, to provide this unknown with a manifest form, whilst simultaneously maintaining its alterior character. What the particular examples discussed here show, tourist and theatrical, is the ambivalence that marks such theatrical encounters with the death of the other. As Grehan notes:
Levinasian ethics, with its focus on the other and the subject’s responsibility for the other, provides a framework for subjects who feel compelled to respond but who also understand that any action or response is contingent. It is a framework in which both responsibility and ambivalence are generated (29).

As I move forward with the thesis I will continue to explore the ways in which theatricality, at tourist sites and in performance works, might generate such a productive ambivalence motivated by a spectatorial gaze that recognizes its own contingency.
Chapter two: theatricality, spectatorship, and the ‘performing museum.’

Introduction: dramas of place

In this chapter I discuss former concentration camp sites as tourist destinations, referring principally to Auschwitz, Sachsenhausen and Dachau, each of which I have visited. I explore, as with Murambi, the theatricality of these sites, focusing on the concept of engagement – physical, intellectual and emotional – and asking how visitors are active participants in a drama of place. In this analysis I consider how objects and architecture are presented and particularly how strategies of identification might come into play. Applying a theatrical analysis, I would like to further explore the two opposing theatrical impulses described in the introduction. On the one hand, there is a Brechtian mode in which demonstration serves a pedagogical function. The type of empathy sought is not an identificatory one, but rather one in which a feeling of social responsibility is roused in response to the injustice of the crime: we are asked to acknowledge the demands of justice and mercy. This mode has a degree of transparency and self-reflexivity; tourists are not asked to forget themselves, but rather to continually ponder what relationship they might have to the terrible drama that is presented before them. At a pragmatic level, this mode relies on the provision of dynamic explanatory material, including individual stories, which serve as the various accounts offered at the ‘scene of the accident,’ as it were. The memorial is primarily intended as a stimulus to the intellect with emotional engagement serving this end.

The other mode, rather than relying on critical distance, seeks to immerse spectators within the recreated historical world. This may be thought of as Artaudian, as discussed in the Introduction, but I will here specifically relate it to Genet’s conception of a theatre that takes place in the cemetery: ‘In today’s city, the only place ... where a theatre could be built is in the cemetery’ (69). Genet suggests that the use of such a deathly location foregrounds an existential mindfulness, from which a deep feeling might be summoned that is extra-political, deriving from the mystery of life and death. In doing so he describes a kind of theatre that is performed in
recognition of the fact that our own lives cannot be untouched by those who have died before us. And indeed, that our own lives are always lived in the shadows of others’ deaths. Referring this back to concentration camp tourism, a highly affective mode emphasizes silence over explanation, somatic and affective engagement over intellectual, general over particular. It uses theatre to heighten spectators’ ontological awareness.

In considering these the two modes I do not particularly argue for one over the other, rather I am interested in how they demonstrate a multivalent theatricality in operation. Further, I suggest that it is in the dialectical intertwining of these modes, and the way they affect and augment one another, that the potential for such sites to be nodes of ethical awareness is enhanced. I will finally consider how we might expand our understanding of theatrical identification in this context, and how it might be related to a Levinasian ethics of a taking on of the other. At first glance, the notion of theatrical identification and Levinas’ ideal ethical contract might seem quite unlike each other (and unlike the dramaturgies of Brecht, Artaud and Genet). However, I argue that the manner in which Levinas urges a taking on of the other speaks to the possibilities of identification. I recast this theatrical idea, not as a process that suppresses alterity, as Levinas calls it, but one that acknowledges it, and uses this very distance as the starting point for creating some kind of empathetic connection.

Sachsenhausen, Auschwitz, Dachau: a personal journey

I would like to begin by briefly discussing my own experiences at Sachsenhausen, Auschwitz and Dachau. In offering my personal accounts I hope to more clearly situate my arguments in relation to the theatricality of the sites. I begin with Sachsenhausen as it was the first of the camps that I visited and also the one that I found most difficult. I follow with Auschwitz, my reaction to which was quite different, shifting to a kind of undetermined ambivalence. Lastly I consider Dachau, at which my understanding shifted again, this time towards developing a new frame for understanding how to think about such sites. Within my own reflections there is a narrative development, and this progression of ideas will be mirrored in the sections that follow.
Sachsenhausen is located on the outskirts of Berlin. It was one of the first camps set up by the Nazis, largely to house political prisoners, and designed as an operational model for others. It was not a death camp, but a concentration camp, and drew in a wide constituency of prisoners. A number of Jewish prisoners passed through on their way to other camps further east, such as Auschwitz, which was a work, concentration and extermination camp. (Sachsenhausen was recently the setting for the Academy Award winning film, *The Counterfeiters*, which told the story of prisoners co-opted into counterfeiting money to fund the German war effort.) In visiting the camp, visitors may take one of the tours offered by a number of private companies, or simply navigate their own way around the site with the aid of a brochure.

The difficulty I encountered at Sachsenhausen was not so much an emotional response to the site itself, but rather a reaction to how the site was presented within the context of the tour that I took – Sandeman’s New Berlin Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp Memorial tour. My experiences left me with serious questions about whether such sites should be rehabilitated at all and what, if any, value such preservations of human tyranny might produce. My general expectations were first unsettled by the fact that, despite the pictures in the brochure featuring elderly survivor-guides, our leader for the day was a young girl from New Zealand, a traveller temporarily situated in Berlin. She had a lively demeanour that initially exuded a spirit of holiday adventure more than one of sombre reflection. As we gathered on the train platform, waiting to depart for the camp, she announced that we were going to have ‘a really fun day together.’ Quickly realizing what she has said, she retracted. ‘Well, not exactly fun. But you’re going to learn a lot of important information.’ Beyond a cringe of national embarrassment, this strange narrator of Nazi history seemed to indicate how such sites have become commodified destinations and ones which are sometimes roughly handled.

The New Berlin Tours website describes Sachsenhausen as a ‘school of brutality’ (Sandemans), and indeed the tour unfolded as a relentless catalogue of horrors, as we were lead from one place where ‘it’ happened to the next. This journey was carefully choreographed. We began by walking through the *Arbeit Macht Frei* gate, and ended at the incinerator of the pathology building. Throughout, the guide provided us with a thorough commentary on the details of various acts of cruelty inflicted upon the prisoners. We spent quite some time standing on the ruins of the
old prison block/barracks. Our guide explained in great detail a number of punishments that took place, pointing out remnants that added veracity to stories. This was the general format for the tour: our attention was drawn to an object and we were then given a flood of rehearsed information in order to explain its significance.

Midway through the tour, a minor gesture by the guide led me to reflect on how we were, at times, asked to imagine the experiences of prisoners and to place ourselves within these imaginative pictures. We were lead to a wide circular pathway, covered with different sizes of stones. We were told that one of the prisoners’ work details was to wear 20kg packs and spend all day running around the track as a way of testing the soles of German army boots. After this, we were invited to walk along the path to our next stop on the tour. Whilst not an invitation to ‘walk in the shoes’ of the other, it subtly suggested some kind of imitative value. The dramatic delivery of the story and the way in which we were invited to “experience” the path made me uncomfortable. I reflected on the sculpture contained within the Jewish Museum in Berlin, *Shalekhet (Fallen Leaves)*, by Menashe Kadishman (Kadishman). Situated in one of the deliberately created voids in Daniel Libeskind’s building, over 10,000 iron faces, mouths open, cover the floors. In order to explore the installation, one must decide whether to walk over the iron faces, which crunch underfoot as one disappears into the dark recess of the void. Whereas there, I had carefully stepped on and over the faces, with a strong self-reflexive awareness of the implications of such movement, at Sachsenhausen, I walked on the grass alongside the path instead.

There were omissions within the tour, edits which did not fit within the streamlined dramatic narrative: a collapsing old wooden villa, which the violence of time seemed to have exploded, stood as an aberration, caught between absence and preservation; an old brothel; a garden of private sculptural memorials to the deceased. These places were passed over in favour of the ‘main attractions,’ such as the gleaming, pristine pathology building’s surgical room and the reconstructed execution trench. After the trench, we were ushered into the site of every concentration camp tourist’s anticipation (and/or dread) – the gas chamber/crematorium. All that remained were the ruins that outlined a floor plan, little walls and piles of bricks and oven doors. Our guide continued her informative commentary, peppered with vivid anecdotes of horror. In the end, it seemed to me that the tour was, albeit somewhat unwittingly, a carefully detailed account of Nazi ingenuity. In the endless explanations of exactly what and how atrocious acts were carried out, it was the
enterprise of death which ultimately took centre stage, rather than the lives of those who suffered there.

A further aspect of my visit which I found somewhat unsettling was the obvious reconstruction taking place. Near the beginning of the tour we were ushered into a restored barracks in which a museum-type display was set up. There were a number of photographs and audio recordings, telling the stories of various prisoners. We were later told that these displays were to be dismantled in favour of recreating the ‘original’ conditions of the barracks. The emphasis on restoration struck me as highly ambivalent in implication: what was it that a return to the original conditions of the camp might offer? Indeed, I noticed that new concrete fence-posts had been cast and installed, awaiting only their barbed wire threading. Was it not possible that this rebuilding simply reinscribed the original violence of the site in a way that further effaced the lives of those who had suffered there? Further, how far could this curatorial strategy be pushed and to what end? At a former Soviet prison camp site in Lithuania, visitors can pay to be ‘beaten, interrogated and shouted at’ (Zuta). Is this where such a strategy could lead in time? Finally, I felt that the camp’s performance of itself, in conjunction with that of the guide, was such that there was no room for silence – for a meaningful acknowledgment of the absences that more powerfully constitute the place than the material remains (or their refabrications.) I wondered if some other strategy of remembrance was required, one that focused on the lives of those who were captive there, rather than the means by which their suffering and death was made possible.
Figure 7 (top): “Sachsenhausen.” Denis Apel. 2001. Public domain image.

Figure 8 (bottom): “Part of shoe testing track in Sachsenhausen concentration camp.” 2005. Public domain image.
My experience at Auschwitz was different. Although the site itself is much more rigorously curated, my response was less certain than that at Sachsenhausen. It is compulsory to visit Auschwitz with a group, either through a private company or with one of the multi-lingual guides who work as staff. This compulsory aspect of the visit is a way of organizing the large numbers of people who go there, as well as reasonably tightly controlling the manner in which they experience the site. As with Sachsenhausen, our journey around the site was highly choreographed, but in this instance, the guiding and displays were more thoughtfully presented and allowed more space for reflection.

The weather conditions on the day played a large part in shaping my experience, so I make note of them here. It was bitterly cold, so much so that, after our visit, a fellow tourist commented that you would not really get the ‘total’ experience if you came during the summer. The icy snow increased our sense of urgency in making quick breaks from one building to another. The weather deteriorated as the day progressed, later becoming almost unbearable; so much so that our Polish guide actually shortened the Birkenau section of the tour. I mention this, and my fellow tourist’s comment, because it seems important to acknowledge the contingencies of such visits: what was the weather like? Where did the guide come from? Did the audioguide work properly? Was the site overwhelmed with school children? Such factors play a significant role in the experience. Thus the cold at Auschwitz was not just uncomfortable, but also highly affecting in the way indicated by my fellow tourist.

My public tour was with a group of around twenty other English speakers and led by a young Polish woman. She chose which aspects of the camp we would see. The barracks within the Auschwitz section of the camp are numerous, but only some are set up as museum displays. Before entering each building our guide would give an explanation of the significance of what we were going to see as well as practical instructions for viewing, such as moving single-file and keeping to the left. She would also indicate when we could or could not take photographs – principally yes if we were outside and no if we were inside. Her general tone was brisk, though not unkind towards us. She narrated the story of the camp with authority and confidence, giving us basic and necessary information. Most narration took place before and after we observed the displays, leaving us ample time for our own reflection.
In general the museum displays combined photographs, information and objects. These objects are well known – shoes, suitcases, hair and so on. Looking at the displays I found myself confronted with an overwhelming sense of distance, however, struggling to understand what the objects might be telling me. They were anticipated in advance of visiting, and now, confronted with them, I was uncertain of how to respond and felt strangely removed. There was a small moment of rupture, however, when we entered a large room housing a display of prisoners’ suitcases. An older gentleman from our party let out a loud exclamation when he realized that a suitcase at the front of the display had belonged to a family member who had perished at the camp. It seemed a remarkable stroke of chance that, of the many many cases, hers was displayed. The guide waived the photographic ban and allowed the man to take a picture. His cry generated an affective response in me, which the objects alone had not. It so clearly evoked the person concealed, as it were, within the object.

The Auschwitz section of the tour ended with a visit to a gas chamber, the most intact of the entire Auschwitz-Birkenau complex. At this building, as with many others, there was a small queue. Before we entered our guide asked us to call to mind a small-scale model of the chamber, which we had been shown earlier. The diorama featured hundreds of little figures being shepherded through all stages of the ‘shower’ complex. These figures were heart-wrenching. Indeed, the image of that model is clearer in my mind now than that of the building itself, for once inside, it was we, the tourists, who filled the space. We shuffled quietly around the concrete structure and when I try to remember it, all that remains are the faces and figures of other tourists: old, young, some lingering, halting the queue, others moving smoothly, one foot in front of the other without pause. There was a small shrine. I wondered whose task it was to light the candles. Were blown out each evening or kept burning? As we exited, we passed by a camera crew setting up to film something. Tourists milled around like extras on a set. Like us, the camera had come to try and capture something that might be preserved for later use. It did not seem out of place.

After the Auschwitz section of the tour we were transported by bus to the altogether more desolate and broken down Birkenau. There, I was struck by the site’s absences. Where there were once so many barrack buildings, only a small few still stand, those built of brick and those of wood, which have been rebuilt. The white of both snow-covered ground and sky overhead intensified a feeling of mass erasure. We entered a wooden barrack on the left-hand side of the camp. Our guide explained
to us the living conditions within it. She informed us that the wooden barracks on the other side of the camp were exactly the same as this, and, therefore, it was not necessary to see them. The only departure from her controlled demeanor came near the end of the tour. Standing at the end of the railway tracks, she described Hitler’s determination, in the final days of the War, even when he knew it was lost, to kill as many Hungarian Jews as possible. Her emotion in telling this, unlike previous, became palpable. She exuded an intense frustration and anger, as if something of her personal feeling about the site, whether its history or her role as its narrator, came piercing through the controlled façade. As with the earlier moment of the suitcase, this human response to the site punctured something of the rehearsed presentation.

Finally, she finished with a short speech which sounded as if it has been delivered many times before. She reminded us that the perpetrators of these crimes were not madmen; they were sane human beings who made evil choices. She then said, ‘Why Auschwitz? Why did this happen here? Why?’ She paused, and then told us that we would need to answer this question for ourselves. In a moment which, in the telling, seems so banal and clichéd, I felt a wave of anguish, as if suddenly and unbearably cut loose from her stream of calm and reasoned explanations. After her speech we were given the choice of either spending another hour, without guidance, to walk around the perimeters of the Birkenau site, or making our way immediately back to the bus. In quiet agreement we trudged through the snow back to the bus. My thoughts on the way back to Krakow were soft, muted, couched with the after affect of the day’s small moments of intense feeling; undecided, uncertain.
Figures 9 (top) and 10 (bottom): Tourists at Auschwitz, Poland. Photographs by Emma Willis, November 2007.
Figures 11 (top) and 12 (bottom): Tourists at Auschwitz Birkenau, Poland. Photographs by Emma Willis, November 2007.
My visit to Dachau, situated on the outskirts of Munich, took place in the German summer. The site was ringed with the greenery of trees in full leaf and large groups of school children out-numbered other visitors. This visit was two years after the Sachsenhausen and Auschwitz tours. This time my objective was different. I was less interested in observing my own responses and more concerned with paying attention to those of others. Visitors to Dachau may either go with a private tour group or by themselves. Other than school parties, most people seemed to be traveling without guidance, but with the assistance of the site’s comprehensive audio guide. This device contains explanations of various features of the site, provides historical background, and also gives accounts from survivors in a number of different languages. There is much more information contained on the guide than one could listen to within a single visit and, therefore, choice is an important aspect of using the device. After initially listening to the first few relevant clips, I put my audio guide away, only taking it out again at the end of my visit to sit down and listen to some of the survivor accounts.

There are two main features of the memorial at Dachau: the site itself, with a mixture of original and reconstructed features; and a comprehensive and thoughtfully curated museum display, housed in one of the former main buildings. The display is highly detailed, discussing all aspects of the camp, providing factual information, survivor recollections and facsimiles of historical documents. As with the audio guides, there is almost too much information to take in. Rather one has to choose which sections of the museum to dwell on. I was particularly interested in the instances of staging that took place at the camp; times when the camp would be temporarily and partially transformed for the sake of visitors:

Today, on May 27, there were visitors in the camp, some commission again. Before their arrival the prisoners rushed wheelbarrows around the roll-call area amidst the usual shouts, swearing and the whole Dachau fuss. But shortly before the commission arrived – look there – a miracle: The wheelbarrows had disappeared, the prisoners had disappeared, the roll-call area is empty, peaceful, quiet, God-fearing and there, playing in front of the camp canteen, that is suddenly open, is the camp orchestra… *Secret journal entry of Karel Kasák* (Kasák.).

The combination of audio and visual material for visitors gives them a degree of freedom in terms of composing their own experience of the camp, much more so
than at Auschwitz. As such it generates an environment in which looking and listening are combined with talking and moving in more autonomous and interesting ways than at the previous two memorials. I noted in my journal that the space was apprehended in moving through it; that it was defined by a sense of flow – of people and of talk. In thinking of visitors as composing their own journey through the site, albeit with the guidance and suggested navigation of the audioguide, I reflected on Rancière’s ideal spectator, who composes a poem of their experience. I reflected on Ricoeur, and the way in which walking, or moving through the space, might be a configurative process, and of the multiple configurations woven by visitors. I thought back on something I had recently read by art critic, Christopher Tilley, who described ‘a walk undertaken in relation to a study of the past’ (268). My own walk loosely followed the assigned route, but was haphazard, meandering, backtracking – a walk that mostly engaged with the walking of others – following, anticipating, pausing, finding stillness, off track, on track, turning away, refusing the designated journey at times, focused on exterior spaces, flow, streams, moving water, cool tree-lined paths, focused on faces, reading emotion, listening to different kinds of talking – teaching, laughing, whispering, listening, quiet. Tilley describes walking as a temporal journey and material narrative. He evokes a ‘walk from the inside, participatory, taking one’s body into place – opening up one’s perceptual sensibilities and experience’ (269). I tried to walk in this way and, at the same time, compose a ‘poem’ of my walking. I began by taking still photographs, observing other bodies, then began to capture recorded images.

Above all, I was interested in the expressions of life at the site; those that came from people, as well as environmental expressions – the surrounding trees and streams. People seemed to be engaged in all sorts of ways; some sombre, others talkative and relaxed; some were alone, couples held hands, school groups moved in energetic clumps. In short, given both information and also a freedom as how to engage that information, a plurality emerged that had perhaps been suppressed at Auschwitz, which seemed foremost to engage a type of austere ‘witnessing’ framework. I do not mean to make it sound, like my fellow New Zealander, that the experience was or should be ‘fun,’ but rather that expressions of life seemed profoundly important in terms of reinscribing the site with a concerned presence. In Auschwitz these small moments of ‘life’ rose to the surface occasionally; at Dachau they seemed to emerge more freely. While the experience of being ‘in place’ is different for each visitor – a
school child and an elderly person will not receive the site in the same way – the way in which such differing respondents bumped up against each other seemed significant. I described this in my journal as the energy of collectively acknowledging and exploring the site. This energy, I felt, was the necessary counter to the deathly affect which I described as the dominant force at Sachsenhausen. At Dachau care and thought seemed to have been given as to precisely what was being memorialized, and the relationship that the living had to this. There was no ambivalence toward visitors, but rather an invitation to engage, to build a collective and transient human memorial of those willing not so much to remember, as to learn. At Dachau it became evident to me that witnessing does not work in this context – it presumes more than the site can provide or the visitor can enact. However, what can be described are acts of learning, sharing, talking, reflection, acknowledgment, and perhaps even resolve. The plurality of these responses suggests the throng of Brecht’s street scene. I will argue in the following sections that it is the place itself which is at the heart of these experiences, not so much as hard evidence of past crimes, but rather as a catalyst for the acts described above. The sites work suggestively and theatrically in a number of ways. This theatre is subtle and contingent, but most importantly, following Genet, concerned principally with a merging of spaces of life and death, and an acknowledgment, from the living, of the centrality of the dead in shaping our understanding of the responsibilities of the living.
Figures 13 (top) and 14 (bottom): Tourists at Dachau, Germany. Photographs by Emma Willis, July 2010.
Figures 15 (top) and 16 (bottom): Tourists at Dachau, Germany Photographs by Emma Willis, July 2010.
Theatre of the void

From my own accounts, a certain fragility is apparent at these memorial sites. Visits are highly subjective and contingent. The discussion which follows here is particularly interested in how these contingencies might be related to a theatrical paradigm. I look at the tension between two different modes of encounter. As my reflections suggest, there is no clear delineation between the two. Indeed, the most heightened charge sometimes occurs when one mode forcefully interrupts the other. For example, the moment when our guide at Auschwitz suddenly changed her rhetorical strategy from the provision of explanation to the retraction of any possibility of providing it; at that moment speech and silence collided, generating a powerful affect. While I will not dwell on the examples already discussed, they form a backdrop for the more academic conversation that follows and, from time to time, I will point back to certain examples in order to illustrate my arguments more concretely. In this section I will focus primarily on how concentration camp tourism operates at a theatrical level and consider the relationship between this theatrical functioning and ethics.

I would like to begin by elaborating on Genet's cemetery-theatre as a way of considering the significance of location. Before proceeding it is important to acknowledge the nature of the writing within which he presents such an image. The essay, “The Strange Word ‘Urb,’” within which Genet makes his argument for an intertwining of spaces of theatre and death, is less a coherent argument and more a seemingly improvised, fragmentary, and deliberately obtuse piece of writing. Nonetheless, within it he presents a series of provocatively useful images. In referring to his work I would like to make it clear that I am not attempting to follow his reasoning, but rather to respond to some of his confounding claims, which are nonetheless significant for the subject at hand.

The first question that arises from Genet is if, as he suggests, cemeteries are ideal for theatre, then what kind of theatre might tourist sites such as Auschwitz produce? Why does he so forcefully intertwine these two places? Genet would have been well aware, in 1967, of the implications of advocating a theatre that took place in the shadow of a crematorium. Indeed, in his opening paragraph he makes reference to Dachau:
[If] cremation takes some dramatic turn … the crematorium, like that of Dachau, evoking some very possible future architecturally outside of time, of the past as well as future … then it may be possible for the theatre to survive (63).

In his essay, “Double Take: Acting and Writing in Genet’s “The Strange Word ‘Urb’”’, Samuel Weber addresses Genet’s incorporation of the Holocaust into his argument: ‘Theatre of the Holocaust? Holocaust as theatre? Not entirely. Rather, the Holocaust as a grisly provocation to rethink the place of theatre in relation to the dead’ (309). In this sense, for Genet, Holocaust history is a pretext for a larger task which grows out of it. The location of theatre within the space of the dead – and he most radically suggests that this should be something like a working crematorium – is a way of carrying out the existential task of confronting death; theatre carried out in full recognition of a binding finitude to which we are all subject.

That the survival of theatre is yoked with cemeteries and crematoria suggests that theatre needs to engage mystery in the most profound sense (in a way that echoes Artaud): ‘As for the audience, only those who know themselves capable of taking a nocturnal stroll through a cemetery, in order to be confronted with a mystery, will come to the theatre’ (Genet 71). The only clue that Genet gives as to how this might be realized (as opposed to why, which he argues more fulsomely) is in his suggestion of its location. It is this aspect of Genet’s essay that I focus on. Indeed, one of the ways he suggests that theatre and cemeteries might be dynamically interrelated is in their treatment of time, how each operate, in a sense, outside of time: ‘The theatrical event being suspended, outside of historical time, on its own dramatic time – is for the sake of a vertiginous liberation’ (64). For Genet, deathly environments are a powerful means of disrupting normative temporal frames, pointing to a certain end of time. This end is not so much a finite point, but an endlessness that pervades and consumes all aspects of life. Indeed, Genet refers to the devouring or digesting quality of crematoria as being most important.

This endlessness is further signalled in a reference that Genet makes within his essay to the concept of void. He suggests that the moment of an author’s inspiration reveals this void. His or her task therefore, is to construct something ‘slyly suggesting that from this void some semblance is snatched which reveals the void’ (68). Genet uses the term ‘architecture’ to describe such writing and the relationship that he
implicitly draws between architecture and void is a significant one. Indeed, as already pointed out, in Daniel Libeskind’s Jewish Museum in Berlin, void is a central concept both architecturally and thematically:

Cutting through the form of the Jewish Museum is a Void, a straight line whose impenetrability forms the central focus around which the exhibitions are organized. In order to cross from one space of the Museum to the other, the visitors traverse sixty bridges which open into the Void space, the embodiment of absence (Libeskind).

At its most dramatic, such a void makes contemplation of the represented absence difficult, or perhaps impossible. The only thing it offers for the spectator to respond to is nothingness, albeit a highly aestheticized nothingness. It is interesting, in this sense, that Libeskind’s central void at the Jewish Museum has been filled in with Kadishman’s installation, as if the nothingness of the original design was too much to bear; silence had to be replaced with a voice. Libeskind’s interruption of the museum’s pedagogical task is too unsettling. Again, as in the previous chapter, the question of how to attend to silence returns; how might we understand the compulsive imagination of a speaking voice that tempers the existential pain of such silence? I believe that void, which is only mentioned briefly by Genet, is in fact essential to his conceptualization of a theatre amongst the graves. Most radically, and beyond the deliberately provocative imagery he invokes, void is a way of expressing the affect of what is unspeaking, unknowable, and sometimes unbearable. As a term, it functions both conceptually and practically, and I use it to look at how each site relates the conceptual void that inheres to any discourse about the Holocaust, with the literal absences that mark the sites. The void interrupts an explanatory schema, and in its absence points to what it cannot represent.

In discussing the affective qualities of voids – what Genet might term their ‘vertiginous’ aspect – it is important to address the way in which concentration camp sites impact somatically on visitors, and relatedly, how visitors actively seek out these feeling-oriented modes of engagement. In his book, Fantasies of Witnessing, cited in my Introduction, Weissman offers a useful example of this. He details the memoir of Holocaust survivor, Martin Lax, focusing on a passage that records the survivor’s return to Mauthausen with his son, Michael. It is the son who is of primary interest:
Now he had come hoping to be swallowed up by the camp, to experience what Mauthausen had been for me in 1944. He wanted to become a prisoner, to actually feel the horror that I had felt (1).

The stated intention of Lax’s son represents an identificatory extreme – a complete engulfment and becoming of the other/father – a desire to enter the void. Michael’s attempt, however, is frustrated by the transformation of the site into a tourist destination. Both father and son bemoan the way in which it had been altered to accommodate crowds of visitors: ‘[He] wondered how he might experience any of it, when the Holocaust was no longer there to be seen’ (2). What triggers a breakthrough is an episode that takes place as Michael and his father walked the steps to the Mauthausen stone quarry, also known as the Staircase of Death. Upon reaching the bottom of the stairs, and gazing down upon a pool a hundred feet below, into which prisoners were often pushed (hence the name), Michael was able to access a feeling of horror which enabled him to approach the experiences of his father. This affect was stimulated by the vertigo brought about by standing on the edge, which induced the feeling of horror he sought. In this transformational moment, there was a continuity of somatic response – automatic and positional – which grounded a fusion of roles and horizons. A clear distinction between past and present time collapsed, enabling him to feel as if he were in the historical time of his father. In this case, affect allowed the subject to be absorbed within the narrative, as if memory was transmitted from one body to another via the affective conduit of place.

This kind of extreme identification necessarily negates both alterity, in a Levinasian sense, and critical distance, in a Brechtian one. Instead, the subject loses himself with the transformational moment. Weissman’s interest, as is mine, is in the ethical boundaries that might be disturbed by a theatricalized taking over (as opposed to a Levinasian taking on) of the experience of the other. What is significant here is the way in which Weissman describes Michael’s experience as demonstrating how knowledge of the Holocaust is sometimes sought by attempting to ‘witness [it] as if one were there:’

It is a desire to know what it was like to be there, in Nazi Europe; in hiding; at the sites of mass shootings; in the ghettos; in the cattle cars; in the concentrations camps; in the death camps; in the gas chambers and crematoria. This desire can be satisfied only in fantasy, in fantasies of witnessing the Holocaust for one’s self (4).
What Weissman rather pejoratively calls ‘fantasy’ I would rather describe as imagination. The example of Michael demonstrates the way that such imagination utilizes the ‘dramatic’ setting as a way of taking on such a witness role; indeed, ‘thereness’ is central to the experience. While the example of father and son is distinct from tourists, who are often unrelated outsiders, apprehension through feeling, through an attention to a sense of place, as embodied, can be seen as equally related to tourism. Concentration camp memorials often attempt, at least partially, to immerse visitors in a sense of the place ‘as it was,’ a kind of drama of place.

In this way, memorial sites perform in order to stage their own effect. As noted in the introduction, Williams describes such theatricalized presentations as ‘performing museums:’

In the performing museum, the total physical environment itself becomes the attraction. In a process analogous to the planning of a theatre production – where play texts are selected, casts auditioned, sets designed, and lengthy rehearsals take place – museum objects are spatially arranged and decorated, placed in showcases and lit, and given explanatory panels and audio-visual augmentation before the show opens (97).

Such a performing museum can be site-specific, and, in this sense, intensely environmentally focused, or non site-specific, but rather a general curatorial paradigm. Apparent in Williams’ description of the performing museum are the two kinds of theatricality I have identified: one which is derived from an affecting sense of emplacement, and the other, which is more pedagogically oriented, albeit in a dramatized manner. This twofold theatricalization draws on an enactment of dramatic time. The remodeling of the barracks at Sachsenhausen to take them back to what they were, is an example of this. The intertwining of the two modes is an attempt to provide a ‘total’ experience.

The paradigm of the performing museum can be seen as influenced by the affective draw of sites such as Auschwitz. At the Holocaust Museum in Washington DC, for example, visitors are guided through a number of spaces, each designed to evoke different aspects of the place of the Holocaust. On entry, visitors are given a passport; they may view a replica rail boxcar; there is a display of shoes on loan from Auschwitz, displayed in the same manner as that camp’s display, and so on. This
kind of museum attempts to replicate the dramatic impact of a sited experience through the theatrical arrangement of objects. Williams notes:

[T]here is an increasing sense that the object is not so much the truth from an earlier time, as a prop in the larger dramatization of the story. Information and objects are valuable primarily in the staging of the experience. This shift should not be underestimated: in this scheme, the object’s importance diminishes – it is the interpreting visitor who becomes the museum’s focus. The experience of how it feels and what it means to “be-in-place” is the museum’s outcome rather than its by-product (99).

How sites are arranged impacts upon how powerful a sense of emplacement is evoked for visitors: how and where objects are placed for display; the use of guides as narrators; pathways that are mapped out through the space; the balancing of informative commentary with space for silent contemplation. As Williams notes, ‘The perceived authenticity of a historical site is greatly enhanced when it contains tangible proof of the event in place’ (79). This sense of being ‘in place’ is highly constructed, even as it draws on pre-existent features of the site.

As noted, such dramatization of place necessarily brings to bear a sense of dramatic time – time past – that is put in counterpoint with the present time of the memorial as tourist destination. As Michael Miles notes: ‘Any Holocaust memorial must bridge the existential gap between the here-and-now of the tourist and the event (or events) of more than half a century prior (1176). A sense of place therefore helps to bridge such gaps of time.

Location affords not only the ability to picture the traumatic episode, but also to reawaken the feeling of an event triggered by ambient textures of sound, light and smell…. It is arguably a sense of place – rather than objects or images – that gives form to our memories and provides the coordinates for the imaginative reconstruction of the “memories” of those who visit memorial sites but never knew the event first-hand (Williams 102).

William’s summation of the importance of location strongly signals the degree to which visitors are encouraged to participate through the ‘visceral, kinesthetic, haptic, and intimate qualities’ of the site (97). Objects and architectural remains serve as the basis for drawing spectators into the drama of place, within which their ability to imagine is important.
Because of the facilitation of dramatic time, a certain emphasis on witnessing comes into play. This can be seen in two ways: firstly, visitors may be framed as there to bear witness, something discussed in the previous chapter; or secondly, the site and its objects may be figured as witnesses who offer themselves as testimony; or rather, as Jill Bennett notes, as a ‘translation of testimony’ (3). In the latter sense, displayed objects create the impression of the museum as a remembering entity and in doing so create a strong point of engagement and identification for visitors:

Although the intrinsic solidity of any museum object appears to make it both dumb and still, museums often seek to grant it a dynamic life history; assigning it a dramatic role in the historical story of any event. That is, the idea that an object “witnessed” an atrocity is a rhetorical strategy that aims to humanize something that existed during the period; the object itself gains a “life” (Williams 31).

In this sense, artifacts function as historical actors, designated the role of substitute witnesses. This is exemplified in the poem by Moshe Szulsztein, cited in the Introduction, which is displayed on the wall at the Holocaust Museum in Washington DC next to the exhibit of shoes on loan from Auschwitz. In a specifically tragic sense, the shoes take on the role of messenger – angelos. Importantly, however, the shoes themselves do not speak, but rather a voice, that of Szulsztein’s poem, is put into an associative relation with them. The shoes themselves remain importantly silent. The poem, like Kadishman’s sculpture, mitigates such silence and absence. Via the poem, the objects, in a choric fashion, perform the narrative of loss on behalf of those who are no longer present to tell of it.

An ABC news story about the rebuilding process at Sachsenhausen further exemplifies the tendency to also think of architecture as witness:

On a hot summer afternoon, construction workers proceeded quietly, methodically and carefully to take apart fence posts, strengthen the wires and put them back together again – one man, one post, from start to finish.

There are ashes scattered of people who died here,’ said Leszek Godlewski, a supervisor on the reconstruction project. “These posts are in fact witnesses to the events which took place here” (Gizbert).

The role of witness bestowed upon them is clearly a dramatic gesture, in the sense that they are not even the original posts, but rather facsimiles of those originals. In this
designation of the role of witness to objects and architectural remains, a certain prosopopoeian function comes into play, an imagined speaking function which inheres from the object’s status as an authentic relic from the past. The object is understood as something that has ‘seen’ and thereby offers a sort of silent testimony, which we must interpret through an engagement of our imagination. The thinking, feeling and remembering function of object-as-actor is foregrounded through the way in which the artifacts on display foreground the body and bodily processes. Williams states, ‘The deprivation represented by bodily objects gains its power from their corporeal nature (while it might be folly to think we can “put ourselves in their shoes,” the metaphor is there)’ (29). Williams’ latter comment indicates an identificatory premise that may operate as a kind of salve to such sites’ melancholy distances; a voice that arises to mitigate unbearable silence.

It is this imagined speaking – a dramatization of the site and its objects – which stimulates the most objections from historians and Holocaust and tourism scholars. Caroline Wiedmer, for example, argues against a talismanic or dramatized approach:

Walter Benjamin, although writing in an age as yet untouched by the Holocaust, suggests the fateful name aura, for that which supposedly bestows upon the authentic relic a superiority to its reproductions…. It is all too seductive to believe in such a thing as aura, to believe that there are places where a sort of direct, privileged access to the Holocaust is possible via the very stones and mortar that housed it. But of course there is no such thing as a pure site affording access to a knowledge of the Holocaust untouched by interpretation or construction. And a historically significant site cannot necessarily speak for itself (165-66).

Her critique is particularly useful in its illustration of the way that theatre operates in response to a void, as discussed earlier, as a way of making the site speak. Wiedmer objects to the fact that such speaking is presented as an inherent affect of the site, rather than the result of representational devices designed to elicit empathetic engagement. Her position points to a certain ‘anti-theatrical bias’ apparent in critical discourses. Reflecting this, Williams notes:

We wonder whether the production of performative spaces might produce a leveling of the experience, where every experience becomes part of a predictable aesthetic scene of “negative histories.” Might a growing
willingness to make atrocities the subject of evocative visitor experiences see
the memorial museum move in the direction of a morbid theme park? (102)

These and other critiques worry that such an approach may subsume historical
particularities within a generalized schema, that it emphasizes emotional experience
over learning, and that it may transform historical sites into aesthetic and affective
destinations that diminish critical distance. In a similar manner, historian Tim Cole
expresses reservation when he describes a ‘Holocaust heritage industry,’ which ‘does
not recover the original Auschwitz but produces an “Auschwitz-land” for the present
from the Auschwitz of the past’ (110). In his argument, theatricalization of the past
drains it of meaning. ‘As we see our own reflection in the glass case and the relics
beyond, do we see “evidence” of the “Holocaust” or simply a collection of “grotesque
artifacts” of the “Holocaust?”’ (112) Such a ‘grotesque’ theatricality is further
suggested by James Young, cited in the Introduction, when he describes a ‘macabre
dance’ performed by objects such as the shoes at Auschwitz (83). Young argues that
the context of display means that the lives of those who suffered are obscured by their
deaths, and that an affective theatre replaces historical understanding.

Polish artist, Artur Źmijewski, puts the case slightly differently:

The best way to forget is to set up a Museum of the Holocaust, then people
don’t have to experience pain anymore or can experience it in an acceptable
level. This means that the Museum lives through history for us. At first sight,
it is a collection of objects, in reality, it is an entity that feels, suffers, and
remembers for us. The museum creates the impression that it is not the body
that remembers but objects (quoted in "Art Must Always Not Speak Meekly:
Artur Źmijewski in Conversation with Miklós Erhardt" 3).

In his formulation, the museum, rather than engaging us in its affect, seals the past off,
displacing us from a sense of responsibility for it. His description suggests an
identificatory premise whereby the museum becomes a body that suffers as a
spectacle for viewers. He argues that such a performance diminishes the pain of
responsibility by making that pain wholly external. It is worth putting Źmijewski’s
comments in a Polish context. In his recent essay concerning Grotowski’s
_Akropololis_, Grzegorz Niziolek discusses the particular significance of Auschwitz as a
Polish ‘space of cultural and political palimpsest, as new meanings superseded other,
erased and marginalised, ideas’ (27). He places Grotowski’s performance in the
context of a series of reinventions of the camp, each reflecting certain ideological and
political reinventions of Polish history. What Grotowski intended, he argues, was to create a kind of ‘traumatic feeling’ in the audience which would pierce through such machinations. He comments:

[Grotowski] demolishes the customary emotional reactions – ranging between sentimental sympathy, indifference and thrill-seeking – exposed so brutally by Rozewicz in “The Museum Tour.” If it is admissible to evoke here the category of catharsis, it needs to be applied above all to the area of memory, impossibly deformed, littered, trivialized and pressured by ideology. The “traumatic feeling” desired by Grotowski thus becomes an irrefutable point of reference, placed outside of the relative political points of view (28).

Whilst I will discuss Grotowski’s work in much more detail in the following chapter, Niziolek’s observation is useful here in giving a context for Żmijewski’s description of a museum that feels on our behalf, therefore protecting as it were, spectators from confronting the very trauma that Grotowski also wanted them to feel.

Against Żmijewski, however, I argue that the role of objects does not mean that spectators do not experience pain or trauma when they visit such sites. Through creating the impression of a museum which feels pain and bears witness, spectators are provided material through which to locate themselves as an attentive audience. Through association and identification they carry out their own acts of remembering. While I acknowledge the ambivalences of theatrical affect, evident in the personal accounts I offered earlier, I generally argue for its ethical potential. Curators engage theatrical devices precisely because of the inherent void that marks each of the sites. This void can be thought of in terms of latent theatricality. Indeed, it could be described as what Levinas calls the there is that shadows being (Totality and Infinity 190). It cannot be avoided and may even be described as a constitutive part of the work of public memory. Theatrical or performative practice performs a kind of substitution that makes this void palpable and at least partially apprehensible. Indeed, while the two modes I have discussed, educative and affective, are almost oppositional in their approach, they are both theatrical, each enacting a dramatization in recognition of the void. In concentration camp tourism, as indicated, it is the interplay of site, artifact and spectator, which constructs the dramaturgy of the site. If we accept that these features are not in themselves able to reveal the camp’s ‘reality,’ then we necessarily read them as functioning in another way. Instead of recreating
reality, they allow spectators a place in which to exercise their imagination of the history that took place there.

Identification and ethics

In the previous section I argued that the performing museum provides an emotional life which engages the spectator. What then might be said of the ethicality of this imaginative transposition? On the one hand it may pretend a knowledge that is in fact out of reach, suppressing the distance of the other. Alternately, it represents a strong desire to take on the fact of the suffering of the other and to recognize this as central to one’s own experience. I would like to continue to discuss the ways in which this might be thought of as an identificatory process. Advancing a Levinasian framework, I argue that the key ethical point of enquiry revolves around whether difference/alterity is effaced within such processes. Is it possible to think about identification in a way that overcomes this stumbling block of ‘becoming’ or subsuming the other? I argue that the mimetic aspect of the identificatory process need not mean a negation of the specificity or alterity of the other’s experience but can, rather, be understood as a way of using imagination to associate oneself with the suffering of others. Further, it may operate as a means of countering the original effacement of victims. What underpins an anti-theatrical stance is the idea that identification collapses the distinction between self and other. Against this, I argue, that rather than merging the experience of the self with that of the other, identification, in this context, actually allows a means of approaching the other in spite of difference. This approach recognizes the essential distance between self and other at the same time as it seeks to form an empathetic and humane relation to the other through offering an embodied attention to their experience. In Merleau-Ponty’s terms this might be described as a ‘movement towards the world’ of the other (quoted in Jaeger 135).

In discussing the notion of identification, I am attempting to re-configure the term, as it were, in order to bring it into relation with what I have argued is a potential theatrical reading of Levinas. In the Introduction to this thesis, I referred to the work of Paul Ricoeur. For Ricoeur, mimesis – storytelling – is a way of both knowing what is in the world as well as exploring one’s own relationship to that encountered world.
It is through mimesis that social fabrics are stitched together; it is a binding force. This does not mean that such binding is always ethical. Indeed, many of the stories that have bound us together have had devastating effects: the example of the vilification of Jews in Nazi Germany being the most apposite example here. The task here is to determine whether the mimetic, or theatrical, function of concentration camp tourism might bind together a concerned community. Significantly, as argued in the introduction, mimesis, in its reliance on an interplay of what is visible and invisible, actualizes something of the paradox of human suffering. As Kennedy notes, the performing actor always points to a ghostly other, or in Genet’s terms, a void. Mimesis is always dialectically charged; it both is and is not what it represents. Identificatory attention both does and does not believe in that representation. This point is important as it responds in part to the paradox that Butler points out in relation to representation:

For representation to convey the human, then, representation must not only fail, but must show its failure. There is something unrepresentable that we nevertheless seek to represent, and that paradox must be retained in the representation we give. In this sense, the human is not identified with what is represented but neither is it identified with the unrepresentable; it is, rather, that which limits the success of any representational practice (144).

This failure, of course, must be in relation to a potential or partial success – the void is filled by an object whose inadequacy to fill it is also recognized. The success of the representation practice, the way in which it might, in Rayner’s terms, usefully allow spectators to express a common concern towards a common – i.e. concerning all – catastrophe, is to do with the self-reflexivity of the mimetic process. This, I believe, is the reason behind Genet’s call for theatre in a cemetery; theatre performed in full recognition of death is a kind of ultimate self-reflexivity.

Near the end of his essay, Genet discusses the Roman funeral mime, a striking exemplar of mimesis as a response to death: ‘His role? To lead the funeral procession and mime the most important acts of the dead man’s life’ (72). Genet suggests that such a figure, by his performance, ‘makes the dead live and die again,’ through ‘devour[ing] the life and death of the dead man’ (74). Further elaborating on the scene, he suggests that upon death, the role of the mime is to enable a dramatic repetition of the life lived. Significantly, such repetition is not only for friends and enemies, but also the ‘merely curious,’ the ‘promiscuous crowd:’
Before the dead man is buried, let him be borne in his casket to the front of the stage; let his friends, his enemies, and the merely curious gather in that part of the theatre normally reserved for the public; let the funeral mime who led the procession divide and multiply into two, into several groups; let him become a theatrical troupe; let him, in the presence of the dead and the public, recreate the life and death of the deceased; after that, in the dead of night, let the casket be borne to the grave; and finally let the public depart, the spectacle is over. (Genet 73-74)

In the palpating quality of replaying living and dying – an alternating coming into being and retreat into darkness – Genet illustrates a performance of the very limit point of performance. It is in coming up against this limit, in willingly confronting it, that theatre, Genet argues, gains its power. His scenario suggests that in re-enacting a life, its very loss is even more keenly felt. This is because the performance is indelibly marked with what Levinas describes as that which is ‘otherwise than being.’

How then might such a self-reflective mimetic practice be related to Levinas? It seems important to acknowledge his own understanding of the paradox by which individuals are utterly distinct and yet inextricably bound together in responsibility for one another. Firstly, Levinas argues that, for a humane ethics, one which might regard the death of the other as equally concerning as my own, it is not necessary, possible, or desirable to know the mind of the other:

The achievement of knowledge consists of grasping the object. Its strangeness is then conquered. Its newness, the opening up of its otherness is reduced to the “same,” to what has already been seen. Already known. In the ethical relation the other man remains other to me. Despite our exchanges, he remains that which I – closed up in myself – am not (quoted in Robbins 191).

Ethical relations are, therefore, constructed in the face of irreducible otherness rather than as a means of reducing otherness. In this sense, identification instead of repressing difference, acknowledges it as its starting point. In describing this process of being with the difference of the other, Levinas uses, as already noted, the term ‘substitute:’

To substitute oneself does not amount to putting oneself in the place of the other in order to feel what he feels, it does not involve becoming the other…. Rather substitution entails bringing comfort by associating oneself with the essential weakness or finitude of the other (quoted in Robbins 228).
This framing of the concept of substitution has a strongly Brechtian quality. It is not an empathy that stems from weeping when they weep. The understanding which follows should not be, as Levinas indicates, a ‘grasping’ of the other which reduces them to sameness, but rather that of one’s own responsibility to the other. The way in which Levinas uses the term association is how I would like to refigure identification here. It is an understanding of responsibility which proceeds from the difference that marks mimesis. To give a more theatrical analogy, the process of substitution might be thought of as similar to what Suzanne Jaeger calls existentialist acting technique, whereby performers are:

[E]ncouraged to obtain experience beyond their limited worlds. This did not mean actually becoming a lawyer or killing a wife, but instead having experiences that enabled the actor to understand sympathetically the life-situation of his or her character (125-26).

Key to Jaeger’s passage above is the concept of gaining experience beyond one’s limited world, one of the underpinning motivations of all forms of tourism. This does not mean an imagined becoming of the other, but rather an associative experience that engenders empathetic response. What is identified is not a secure understanding of the other’s experience, but rather the fact of their suffering (a recognition of their ‘face’) and following that, in Levinas’ ideal, an assumption of responsibility for this, i.e., not guiltiness but an obligation to respond. Why I emphasize identification in this way is that it seems a necessary consideration in terms of Levinas’ emphasis on the face of the other (as will be explored in further chapters). Implicit in Judith Butler’s *Precarious Life* is the argument that this sort of reconfigured understanding of identification is a necessary counter to processes of dehumanization which work by promoting dis-identification: ‘the face represents that for which no identification is possible, an accomplishment of dehumanization and a condition for violence’ (145). The identificatory process might be understood as a means of locating oneself as a responsible individual in relation to what Eleanor Fuchs describes, with reference to the Holocaust, as representations of ‘the failure of the human enterprise’ (11).
In this chapter I have demonstrated the ways in which former concentration camp sites as tourist destinations are governed by certain theatrical functions. I do not make any claim for this sort of theatre-of-the-grave as inherently good or bad. Rather, I have focused on how a theatrical analysis might help us work through important representational and ethical questions. As noted in my Introduction, Levinas’ ethics are an ideal and something, which as Thompson notes, must be worked for. In my own accounts of visiting Sachsenhausen, Auschwitz and Dachau, it should be apparent that such a ‘theatre of ethics’ is certainly not a consistent effect of the encounter between spectator and site. Indeed, some of the most powerful moments of my visits were unintended, such as the man who recognized his relative’s suitcase at Auschwitz, or my observations of visitors’ ways of relating to one another as much as to the site at Dachau. What I do firmly argue for is a progress towards a self-reflexive theatricality which acknowledges both the contingencies of experience and the limits of understanding. Against writers such as Weissman, I believe that so called ‘experiential’ knowledge does have an important role to play. It should not be regarded as unhelpfully in opposition to historical knowledge. Such a position misunderstands the historic as non-physicalized intellectualism. Rather, perception is always physically and environmentally contingent. Following Merleau-Ponty, Jaeger argues:

Perception of an object is always an incomplete process, and its reality for us is given in the incomplete character of perceptual experience. One never gets to the totality of what makes the thing what it is. One’s perception is always limited by what one has not yet seen, what one no longer sees, what is absent from one’s present vision. Intellectualism mistakenly conceives perception to be completed by an act of cognition…. But perceptual experience is always incomplete, partial, somewhat ambiguous and never total (133).

The incompleteness of perception is important as it signals that meaning is resistant to exhaustion. Dramatic tension derives from the ‘not yet,’ and ‘no longer.’ The identificatory processes which take place at concentration camps are the necessary response to the dramatized absences which shape the experience of visiting. The theatrical conditions of the performing museum necessitate an audience response
which affirms the dramatic narrative. This is the apprehension of the palpable quality of the void which marks all such spaces of absence.

Displays such as the shoes, hair and so on, do, by theatrical effect, as Żmijewski claims, bear witness on our behalf. But at the same, this effect extends an invitation to us. The objects seem to present themselves for our viewing, thus creating the possibility of contemplation and unsettled empathy. Reflexively, these objects may, as they did in my experience, make visitors aware of the fact that the site and its objects have no talismanic force other than that which we are willing to bestow upon them. This, in itself, reveals the theatrical nature of the sites. They necessarily function as imaginatively driven spaces whose absences and inexplicabilities must be countered with our own willingness to engage with them. Spectators require a humanized point of entry, which is why Williams describes artifacts as enlivened within a performing museum. This in turn creates the possibility of emotive and affecting response. In the end, however, there is one thing that a concentration camp as performing museum lacks: bodies. At every turn, the absence of bodies turns the performance back on itself, drawing spectators into a necessarily speculative space.

The performing museum can be understood as a means of compensating for this lack of bodies. Through presentational strategies, it encourages an imagination of the victims, and a kind of substitution, where the multitudinous bodies of the living tourists, in themselves, point to the ever-absent dead and to the void which has engulfed them.

It is for this very reason that prosopopoeia, or personification, continually rises up to counter the absences which charge memorial sites. Such a designation of voice has an ethical aspect to it, serving to counter the manner in which former prisoners were commonly reduced to the status of objects. Displayed remnants such as human hair are grotesque demonstrations of historical acts of anti-personification. Indeed, in *The Remnants of Auschwitz*, Agamben notes that: ‘we know from witnesses that under no circumstances were they [bodies of the dead] to be called “corpses”… but rather simply *Figuren*, figures, dolls’ (50-51). Countering this tendency, the prosopopoeian and innately theatrical function of memorial sites means that objects ‘can somehow be imagined as self-generating and speaking through [themselves] on behalf of the place where [they are] inserted and encountered’ (Hunt 229). This is a kind of anti-anti-personification – a reinstatement of the human voice as a retrospective response to its original taking away. It is the recognition, in Levinas’ sense, of the faces of history.
At the same time, the distance between the imagined voice and the historical one is palpable and creates a strongly melancholic affect, which is the most striking feature of such sites. It is a distance which may not be overcome, but only observed.
Chapter three: Memorial bodies and ethical audiences – ‘the dead are born from the dream of the living’

Introduction

This chapter, as a close companion to the previous one, is concerned with theatre works that represent concentration camp history and expands upon my discussion of the ethics of theatrical personifications of history. I argue that the dehumanization accomplished by the designation of prisoners’ bodies as *figuren* is significantly responded to within the performance examples discussed. In particular, I have two points of focus: the *body* as a memorial site; and the ethical implications of audience members’ participation. To examine these, I take two works as key examples: Grotowski’s *Akropolis* and Akko Theatre’s *Arbeit Macht Frei vom Toitland Europe*. As further exemplars, I will also more briefly refer to: Charlotte Delbo’s account of staging Molière’s *The Hypochondriac* whilst interned at Raisko, a satellite camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau; and a recent adaptation of Peter Weiss’ *The Investigation*, performed at the Nuremberg Stadium. The general aim of this chapter is to contribute to an understanding of how *theatricality* emerges in response to calamity by way of more deeply examining explicitly theatrical examples.

Each of the works discussed is connected by their use of the performer’s body as the key site of memorialization or, as Freddie Rokem puts it, as a ‘site of historical inscription’ (["On the Fantastic" 50). As anti-naturalist works, the examples chosen provide a useful contrast with the desire for “authenticity” at concentration camp sites. In opposition to Lennon and Foley’s concern with the inauthenticities of Auschwitz – its stylization – Claude Schumacher, for example, suggests, that theatre can *only* effectively perform the Holocaust when it abandons any attempt to provide a historical facsimile. A focus on the body as a memorial vessel is particularly relevant to Holocaust drama in the sense that assaults on the body were central to the progressive dehumanization of prisoners. Key aspects of camp experiences reiterated in survivor accounts include sleep deprivation and fatigue, disease (notably dysentery), hunger, thirst, cold and the constant threat of violence. The extreme visceral assault meant that ‘in the concentration and extermination camps, the body was gradually reduced to excrement…. This relentless excremental assault deprived individuals of
their humanity while reducing the body to an object of disgust and self loathing’
(Plunka 75). In this extreme state bodies were stripped of any individualizing features –
their hair shorn and dressed in identical uniforms – and worked and starved into
states of almost identical deprivation, gradually moving towards death – the
muselmann. In Holocaust Drama: The Theatre of Atrocity, Gene Plunka argues that
this assault was particularly significant for Jews, as it was inflicted not just within the
camps, but more broadly in terms of Anti-Jewish propaganda. The marking out of the
Jewish body as negatively distinct was part of a larger strategy that determined an
ideal body – Aryan – against which other bodies were measured. For example, a
propaganda poster from the 1930s featured two handsome young men, shirtless but
otherwise attired in Army uniform, and was captioned, “We Build Body and Soul”
(Bytwerk). Jews were conversely depicted as grotesque and also, as Plunka points out,
as diseased: ‘After the passage of the Nuremberg laws, Jews were viewed as impure
bodies threatening the health of the Volk’ (72). The body of the actor, therefore, as a
proxy for those who suffered in the camps, may be understood, as argued in the last
chapter, as an anti anti-personification who contests the reduction of prisoners’ bodies
to sites of disease, muselmanner or figuren.

The ways in which audiences are positioned in relation to such depictions is an
important point of focus in terms of mapping out a theatrical-ethical terrain. I would
like to introduce Artaud’s desire to ‘do away with the stage and the auditorium’ so
that the audience would be included ‘within the scene of the action’ and in ‘direct
contact’ with the actors as a guiding image that helps with such a cartographic project
(Artaud 103). As a central tenet of his Theatre of Cruelty, Artaud’s exhortation,
which was grounded in spatial practice, provides a point of analysis that is concrete in
its stipulation whilst more generally concerned with the philosophical potential of
such dissolution. Erica Fischer-Lichte similarly concerns herself with the ethics of the
suspension or reversal of boundaries in a way that, while she does not acknowledge it,
seems to draw heavily on Artaud’s formulation. Proposing an analytical model she
suggests three conditions that might enable a potentially transformative experience:
firstly, a reversal of the subject-object relation of the performance event through the
participation of the spectator; secondly, by way of constituting a sense of community
between actors and audience, and within the audience; thirdly, by instances of contact
made between audience and actors (Fischer-Lichte 40). Together, Fischer-Lichte and
Artaud’s criteria provide a useful aesthetic and ethical framework for considering the
In postulating such a performative aesthetics Fischer-Lichte is most interested in its transformative potential, which she argues emerges in relation to the degree that spectators are called to participate. This emphasis on the transformation of the spectator/participant, like Artaud’s desire to affect the very circulation of blood around the body of the audience member, is central to this chapter. It underpins why theatre of the Holocaust may be more than simply a reiteration of events, or, as Sontag puts it, a way of ‘reinforcing witless stereotypes, confirming distance and creating fascination’ (Under the Sign of Saturn 139). Such transformation is not cathartic, in the sense of purging the audience of negative emotions, or restorative in a narrative sense. Rather, it relies, as Fischer-Lichte argues, on a transformation of the subject-object relationship. That is, to the degree that a certain light is thrown back onto the spectators, as was seen in Maria Kizito, a sense of responsibility for the other is generated. Fischer-Lichte illustrates this point strikingly with her discussion of Abramovich’s Lips of Thomas, as discussed in the Introduction, wherein the audience was called to take responsibility for the suffering of the performer by ending the performance.

Holocaust theatre, outside of the scope of Fischer-Lichte’s discussion, makes any kind of participatory activity highly ambivalent, however. What might be the implications of asking the audience to enter into, and participate within, a theatricalized concentration camp environment? Whereas Fischer-Lichte sees performative transformation in almost rapturous terms – it may lead, in her words, to a ‘reenchantment of the world’ (181) – such an ascendant sublime is highly problematic in this context. Therefore while I take Fischer-Lichte’s proposition as a way of analyzing certain aspects of the work discussed, I ultimately attempt to frame rather differently what she describes as a participatory transformational aesthetic. While each of the theatre works discussed attempt to call the audience to participate in certain ways, such engagement is highly ambivalent as participation is the very problem that each of the works addresses, both historically and aesthetically.

This problem is an important one to address for, as Grehan points out, for Levinas, the idea of aesthetic participation was troubling in its ‘intoxicating’ (quoted in Grehan 36) or ‘beguiling’ attributes (quoted in Eaglestone 262). Eaglestone argues that Levinas’ suspicion of such participation arose in response to the fusion of
aesthetics and politics within the Nazi regime (262). Within such a paradigm, art functioned not to awaken the individual but rather to destroy any sense of ethical obligation through subsuming him or her within a larger communal identity. For Levinas such a move suppressed the compassionate action required to counter political evil. Here one becomes aware of a conflict between Artaud’s desire to dissolve distinction and Brecht’s insistence on its maintenance. (This particular dialectic is interestingly played out within Akropolis.) In response to Levinas’ concerns I would like to stipulate that the kind of participation that I am particularly interested in is that which is characterized by rupture and dissonance in a way that problematizes the nature of its own invitation. This kind of ambivalent participation, which Grehan focuses on, has a Levinasian aspect in that it is the willingness and ability of the spectator to respond in some way that becomes most important.

Turning the Holocaust into theatre

An aesthetic of fracture, rupture and dissonance, finds expression in Lehmann’s description of the postdramatic. Theatre, like other artforms, has had to respond to Adorno’s provocation (which is in a certain accord with Levinas’ own scepticism about art) that poetry after Auschwitz was ‘barbaric’ (34). The aesthetic characteristics that Lehmann puts forth can be understood as in part responsive to the very representational challenges that Adorno signals. Each of the qualities that Lehmann identifies as defining the postdramatic signals an acknowledgment of the difficulties of representation presented by the horrors of the twentieth century, especially the sense in which such performances ‘resist interpretation’ (Lehmann 25 my emphasis). The manner in which interpretation is problematized reflects not just an aesthetic concern but also, as Adorno suggests, an historical and philosophical one. I have previously outlined the basic framework of devices that postdramatic theatre adopts, so here I would like to focus on its anti-Aristotelian character, primarily the rejection of a unified plot as the drama’s foundation. Given Adorno’s anti-poetic edict I argue that the manner in which a postdramatic aesthetic challenges Aristotelian poetics is particularly important.
A number of scholars of Holocaust drama present arguments that challenge conventional dramaturgies and I would like to briefly survey some of those comments here. Michael Taub, in his introduction to *Israeli Holocaust Drama*, cites Lawrence Langer to challenge tragic effect. He argues that non-realism is the only appropriate ethical response as it ‘has the power to subvert the “pleasure”’ that would be gained from the normative narrative process of suspension of disbelief, identification, resolution and catharsis’ (quoted in Taub 3). In the context of Holocaust theatre the issue of dramatic resolution – as the outcome of a beginning, middle and end structure – is clearly problematic in that any narrative resolution which gave the audience cathartic satisfaction would necessarily reduce the unimaginable scope of the catastrophe. In her collection of unconventional Holocaust plays, Elinor Fuchs similarly challenges the primacy of conventional dramaturgy. She argues against works that ‘showed catastrophic events as the private experience of individuals or families,’ and for a move away from ‘received structures,’ and beyond ‘individual characters.’ What is more effective, she argues, are works that show the Holocaust as a ‘collective catastrophe,’ and that are ultimately about ‘the life and death of the community’ (2).

Claude Schumacher also argues specifically for a non-realist representation:

My answer is that theatre – theatre which has true integrity and highest artistic standards – does not try to create an illusion of reality, and it is precisely in the absence of mimetic trompe-l’oeil that the real strength of theatrical performance lies. True theatre affords the spectator a heightened experience ‘liberated from the lie of being the truth’ (4).

The effect of such a drama should be a play that ‘disturbs, offers no comfort, advances no solution, it is a play that leaves the reader or spectator perplexed, wanting to know more although convinced that no knowledge can ever cure him of his perplexity’ (8). Freddie Rokem similarly states (as cited previously) that Holocaust theatre should, ‘make it possible for the “naïve” listener to understand, and at the same time to show that he or she probably never really will’ (“On the Fantastic” 41). The positions of Schumacher and Rokem are distinctly anti-tragic in the sense that (also cited previously) Aristotle specified that the tragic plot: ‘should not show […] decent men undergoing a change from good fortune to misfortune; for this is neither terrifying not pitiable, but shocking’ (16). Such shock lies as such theatre’s lack of narrative
resolution – its anti-cathartic effect, as well as its disturbing content. Vivian Patraka, in her work on theatre of the Holocaust, emphasizes such a use of shock by way of proposing an ‘aesthetics of atrocity’ as an anti-poetic solution:

An aesthetics of atrocity would remove this pleasure in seeing expectations fulfilled by the impending death of another. It would represent horrific, non-formulaic scenarios that challenge our frames of knowing and disallow distance from the persons whose bodies are injured. It would displace suspense and cause spectators to view a historically inevitable outcome with loathing and dread (89).

The ‘aesthetics of atrocity’ she describes is anti-tragic, not just in its critique of ‘suspense’ and ‘formulaic scenarios,’ but in its very emphasis on dread which finds no resolution.

Each of the critics cited above argues for unconventional dramaturgies as a way of responding to the issue of representing the Holocaust. Through decentering and fragmenting the text, heightening theatrical effect and emphasizing an ambivalent placement of the audience – stunned silence, shock, limited understanding – each suggests a resistance to interpretation. Such strategies arise precisely because of the unrepresentable aspect of the Holocaust. Lehmann himself describes an ‘aesthetic of startling.’ He states:

Contrary to the suspicion of aestheticism, such an aesthetic of startling in the theatre would be another name for an aesthetic of responsibility. The performance addresses itself fundamentally to my involvement: my personal responsibility to realize the mental synthesis of the event; my attention having to remain open to what does not become an object of my understanding; my sense of participation is what is happening around me; my awareness of the problematic act of spectating itself (143).

This passage is central for the chapter in the sense that it points to an understanding of ethical responsibility that is grounded in resistance to interpretation. Such resistance allows a Levinasian reading in its image of remaining ‘open to what does not become an object of my understanding.’ This particular phrase strongly resonates with Levinas’ injunction: ‘In the ethical relation the other man remains other to me. Despite our exchanges, he remains that which I – closed up in myself – am not’ (quoted in Robbins 191). Responsibility arises from participating despite, or rather because of, the alterity of the other. In this way, Lehmann’s particular vision of the
postdramatic could be described also as a *theatre of alterity*. Within such a theatre, spectators’ involvement (or incorporation) within the performance is always ambivalent in the sense that the status of *being* a spectator remains unresolved. The destabilization of the semiotic certainty of the audience thus becomes the starting point for constructing a theatrical ethics that might respond to the catastrophic.

*Charlotte Delbo’s staging of The Hypochondriac*

If postdramatic theatre is in part responsive to the challenge to representation that arose in the aftermath of the concentration camps, then, as Delbo’s example will illustrate, dramatic theatre was an effective means of responding in its midst. Whereas works such as *Akropolis* and to a lesser degree, *Arbeit*, attempted to re-enter the world of the camps, Delbo’s staging, in 1943, of Molière’s *The Hypochondriac* within the barracks in which she was imprisoned was a means of escape from what I call the ‘post-human’ environment in which camp prisoners found themselves. Theatre in this instance was integrative rather than fracturing, rationalizing rather than derationalizing, Aristotelian in structure rather than fragmentary and above all, reliant on illusion. While the play itself is in no way experimental, and the production of it did not attempt to treat it in any way other than as faithful a rendition as possible, Delbo’s account of this instance of theatre strikingly illustrates the very transformative potential that Fischer-Lichte argues for. The performance could perhaps be described as a ‘reenchantment of the world’ under the direst of circumstances. In prefacing my main case studies with this account I hope to show that theatre in each instance effectively counters the depersonification of prisoners discussed previously. Thus I hope to make clear that this thesis does not insist on a particular kind of theatre, but rather on a particular kind of theatrical responsiveness which is able to adapt itself to the given circumstances.

The performance of *The Hypochondriac* took place in a satellite camp, Raisko, where inmates were assigned work in a scientific agricultural laboratory. The conditions at Raisko, whilst cruel, were an improvement on those which Delbo describes in her account of prior internment at Auschwitz. At the latter camp, she writes: ‘You cannot imagine how heartrending those broken voices were, deadened by
the swamps and by weakness, repeating words which no longer evoked any image’ (3). Upon such a brink of life and death, theatre was impossible. When the group of women were transferred from Auschwitz to Raisko, however, she states: ‘no sooner are they reborn than they think of the theatre’ (3). The ‘thinking of the theatre’ initially consisted of the women reciting parts of plays to each other while they were working. After a time they decided that they wanted to stage a performance. Delbo says little of why they chose The Hypochondriac other than the fact that it could be remembered. The comedy tells the story of Argan, a chronic hypochondriac, and the plot essentially revolves around his engagement of his daughter to a doctor in order that he may continue to receive free medical care, despite his daughter’s love for another. The play lampoons the medical fraternity as well as those who fall under its spell. Medicine is characterized as the practice of charlatans and in opposition to good sense – Argan’s illnesses are not so much feigned as they are imagined with the assistance of doctors. In the end Argan is brought to his senses through the cunning trickery of his Maid, Toinette, and brother-in-law, Béraude. Love and sense prevail. While Delbo does not comment on the ironies of staging a work about false pain, this aspect of the play nonetheless gives a peculiar charge to her account. The very confusions in the play between real and false, illness and health, love and cruelty speak of the relationship between the play and the context of its staging. Where Argan disappears into a world of imagined maladies, Delbo’s women escape into a restorative world of theatre.

Much of Delbo’s account is concerned with preparations and rehearsal. Firstly, a fellow prisoner, Claudette, transcribed the women’s memory of the play. Once this was done, rehearsals began. The process of preparing the production was slow and consumed what little free time the women had - ‘Sundays free and one hour at night’ (4).

All those who could, helped. Sometimes, one line was the victory of a day’s work… They took place after work, after supper – if one can call two slices of bread and a pat of margarine supper – at the hour when we felt the complete weight of our fatigue – in a freezing and somber wooden hut….

Every evening, tapping our feet and rubbing our arms – it was December – we rehearsed. In the darkness a correct intonation had a strange resonance (4).
Delbo’s account makes it apparent that the work of the production – ‘we had plunged into the world of make-believe’ (5) – was itself therapeutic. The resonance of the ‘correct intonation,’ suggests a certain transformative spark, one which created a small fissure within the darkened environment through which some light might appear. Such a spark also lead to a partial suspension of the reality of the camp. Describing the day of the performance, Delbo writes: ‘From the morning on, we were furiously busy and forgot, for the first time, the problem of soup, chores and bread’ (5). The activity was a significant interruption and intervention in the oppressive routine of camp life. Further, Delbo’s account makes clear the importance of the company of players, a collective body whose resistance to Nazism subversively ‘reconstructed’ the community of the barracks.

The production generated a marvellous transformation of the women’s few clothes and belongings into theatrical effects:

How Cecile succeeded in making doublets and cassocks out of undershirts, pantaloons from nightgowns, and pajamas for the men is almost unbelievable. The striped uniforms proved themselves untransformable. Fortunately, to select grains for our plants we used tulle sifters. The tulle became jabots, cuffs, ruffles, knots, scarves and bows… A yellowish-green powder – I don’t know what it was composed of, perhaps an insecticide – served as makeup for the doctors. The cry resounded in the dormitory: “Everyone whose back apron is clean, lend it to us! Immediately please, the wardrobe mistress is waiting!” With six aprons, Cecile draped the doctor, whose head she dressed with a cone-shaped piece of cardboard blackened with ink, around which she had fastened wood shavings with taut candle wicks (5).

The literal transformation of the environment and its objects, not withstanding the striped uniforms, is pivotally important. The very tools of the women’s subjugation – tulle sifters, aprons and so on – were co-opted as creative means. Delbo goes on to describe how, similarly using existing materials, they made a raised stage, complete with a curtain, prompter’s box and prompt. The barracks was transformed into a theatre, itself a liminal transformative space.

In the sense that Rokem argues that theatre may be able to provide a ‘dialectical antidote’ to the Holocaust (Performing History 192), Molière’s play provided such relief. Delbo’s account shows that it was as much, and probably more, the activity of making the work and the sense of community instilled therein that was as important as the particularity of the text itself. That said, the ironies of staging
such a comedy are significant in terms of the transformational aspect of the performance. The comedy mocks the institutionalized control of bodies in favour of heralding the restorative power of love, laughter, music and dance. As Berk states in his essay, “The Therapy of Art in *Le Malade Imaginaire*”:

In contrast to the professional artifices of the medical faculty, Molière sets not merely the world of natural kindness and spontaneous love, but the world of *comédie*, no less an art than medicine (40).

He further notes that Molière reduces medicine to rhetoric that cannot cure, whilst the imagination has restorative power (42). Indeed, within the play, Molière’s own theatre is suggested by Béralde as a prescription for Argan’s suffering: ‘I’d love to open your eyes, even so. Look, there’s a comedy by Molière on at the moment. That would explain better than I can’ (Molière 75).

Reflecting on the performance, Delbo wrote:

> It’s magnificent because, for two hours, during which the chimneys never stopped emitting the smoke of human flesh, for two hours we believed in all of this. We believed it more than we believed in our one and only belief of that time – freedom – for which we would have to fight for five hundred more days (6).

The performance became a vehicle for the temporary transformation of all involved, whether onstage or off. Delbo’s example is significant in reminding us of the importance of relief – a therapeutic (and theatrical) effect. James Thompson, whose applied theatre practice has involved working in places such as Rwanda and Sri Lanka, points out that relief is sometimes the most notable contribution that theatre might make to participants’ daily existence. He describes this as a kind of beauty:

> Beauty is most intense when it is experienced in a place of deprivation […] beauty that reveals, and perhaps fulfils, a need. Far from being valueless, beauty in being positioned within (or against) a site of suffering can be partly involved in heightening our awareness of it. Beauty is not irrelevant to a troubled social context but can be part of its critique (151).

Thompson further describes beauty as ‘a call to what is absent’ (153). In the case of Delbo’s Molière, the performance calls to a past existence and one which is similarly hoped for in the future. The *comédie* represents a world in which wisdom triumphs.
over foolishness and where the common sense of ordinary people wins out over institutional power (represented in The Hypochondriac by the medical fraternity). The aesthetic fracturing of the evil environment allowed for the kind of compassionate action that Levinas calls for. The women perform not just for their own sake but on behalf of those around them. It is the manner in which the performance affirms the humanity of all those involved, as well as the sense of responsibility engendered through its preparation and rehearsal, that allows us to interpret it as an intensely ethical instance of theatrical participation. The illusory nature of the mimetic spectacle does not undermine its ethical value, but rather heightens it.

As an example of the temporary dissolution of the conditions of a painful environment, Delbo’s account is striking. It powerfully illustrates theatre’s ability to respond to what is absent. In this case the response was an application of dramatic theatre, with all of its humanistic values, in a post-human context. The two works that follow apply what could be described postdramatic aesthetic in order to reconstruct an image of the human in the aftermath of the camps. In both cases theatre is used to respond to the absent “other.” In a crisis situation, such as Auschwitz, theatre can be understood as an ethically responsive restatement of the human. In the unfolding aftermath of such a crisis, that very same coherence may be deliberately destabilized as a way of generating something of the affect of the crisis environment so that Auschwitz might bear upon it. In providing Delbo’s examples I hope to make clear that, as already stated, it is not so much a particular kind of theatre that this thesis is interested in but rather the condition of theatricality itself as a dynamic and adaptive force. It is precisely the dialectic between fragmentation and coherence, and theatre’s ability to contain this, which is at the centre of the enquiry.

**Akropolis and ethical memory: the role of the audience**

*Akropolis* is a striking example of a response to the Holocaust, which, unlike Molière, is all fragmentation, dissolution and loss. Where I have suggested Delbo’s performance of The Hypochondriac might be described as a desperate theatrical ‘re-enactment’ of a dire environment, Peter Brook called *Akropolis* a ‘black mass’ that
actually summoned forth a kind of evil presence (in McTaggert). Whereas Delbo’s text appeals precisely because of its insistence on an irrepressible humanism, within his evocation of the concentration camp, Grotowski made any such insistence highly problematic. However the distinction between the two usefully illustrates that theatre’s ethical aspect lies in its responsive character, rather than a set of aesthetic conditions. In examining Akropolis I will ask how such a theatrical generation of evil might be read in relation to Levinas’ ethics in terms of the face of the other, whose availability the performance deeply problematizes.

Whilst Grotowski is recognized by Lehmann as an important postdramatic artist, Akropolis (co-directed by Grotowski and Josef Szajna) is largely overlooked in edited collections of plays and commentaries about Holocaust theatre. It is scarcely mentioned in Skloot’s The Theatre of the Holocaust, Fuchs’ Plays of the Holocaust, Schumacher’s Staging the Holocaust, Plunka’s Holocaust Drama or Patraka’s Spectacular Suffering: Theatre, Fascism and the Holocaust. The fact that the work has been so well discussed in terms of its theatrical innovation has perhaps overshadowed its content – it has been historically positioned as a work whose primary importance was in shaping contemporary theatre practice. Further, in using the Polish drama, Akropolis, written by Stanislaw Wyspiański in 1904, as the basis for the piece, Grotowski foregrounded Polish identity and the ways in which Auschwitz might upon bear it. As such, he did not portray Auschwitz as a singularly Jewish experience.

Wyspiański’s text brings to bear certain Christian iconography, for example, and in this sense it is not a work that exclusively represents the Shoah. Because of its theatrical innovation, however, Akropolis does present a significant opportunity for examining how an experimental paradigm – such as that suggested by Schumacher and others – might respond to the challenge of ‘staging the Holocaust.’ Eugenio Barba, who was present during the creation of the work, described four qualities that made it ground-breaking: ‘[T]he relationship between stage and auditorium; the relationship between the director and the text; the function of the actor; and the transgressive possibilities of the theatre craft’ (38). Barba’s analysis of the work gives some concrete measures for pinning down how something like Patraka’s ‘aesthetics of atrocity’ or Schumacher’s ‘stunned silence’ might be realized through experimental practice. Through my discussion I will variously, though not in a taxonomical way, comment on each of these areas.
Grotowski’s development of *Akropolis* proceeded in five stages between 1962 and 1967. The widely available recording was made in the United States in 1966, during the fourth stage of the work, though not released until 1968. Because of its availability, the recorded version of the US performance has become the main version for discussion and is the one that I will refer to. Wyspiański’s earlier play, which Grotowski himself adapted, takes place in the burial vault of the cathedral at Wawel castle in Krakow, where a poet imagines figures from the church’s tapestries, which variously depict Classical Greek, Jewish, Christian and Polish stories, come to life. The play was an examination of Polish history and identity, innovative in both form and content. There is no published version of either Wyspiański’s text nor Grotowski’s adaptation of it in English, so I am grateful to Magda Romanska’s helpful recent article, “Between History and Memory,” which discusses Wyspiański’s play in some detail and also helps to explain Grotowski’s performance of it. Indeed, in many ways Wyspiański was an experimental forerunner to Grotowski, his own work drawing mixed and sometimes perplexed responses. Romanska notes:

> The responses can be best summarized by Witold Noskowski, who many years later wrote in his review of the 1932 production in Poznań: “The question of what *Akropolis* means is not as important as what *Akropolis* is. To answer this question though, you need to use your imagination and empathy, not your reason.” From the start, *Akropolis* was a cultural enigma, one that even Poles had to absorb on a subconscious, subnational level (226).

The play was further variously described as ‘a poem rather than a drama,’ lacking ‘dramatic form,’ and unstageable (contemporary criticism in Romanska 226). While making radical changes in terms of the setting of the play, Grotowski’s reworking of it seems to have carried forward into a contemporary context what was of concern for Wyspiański, both thematically and theatrically, at the time of writing it in 1904. Indeed, whilst written at the turn of the century the play was dramaturgically innovative to the degree that it was not until 26 years after its publication that it was performed in full.

The original play is, as Romanska describes it, ‘particularly dense and inaccessible’ (223). This is important in that its elliptical aspect and resistance to interpretation seem to have contributed to its appeal in providing the foundation for a staging of the unrepresentable. Grotowski’s fragmentation of the original play text redoubled its inherent difficulty and this effect was of course magnified for any
audience members who were non-Polish speakers (though Harold Clurman wrote that: ‘It has been said that a knowledge of Polish does not make the lines readily intelligible’ (quoted in Romanska 223).) Grotowski’s use of language was deliberately obscure, both in content and delivery, in a way that reinforced the unavailability of the prisoners’ experiences. The strangeness of Akropolis, the sense in which it seems beyond the assimilable, still endures. Indeed, in a recent article, Nizoilek described the production as: ‘An entity so inevitable, so impossible to question, so aesthetically complete, so rigourously composed, that the production does not bear intellectual analysis or rational reflection’ (26).

Romanska notes that the play, like Wyspiański’s others, combined ‘Polish national themes with ancient and classical elements and modernist forms’ (226). The cathedral of Wawel castle in Cracow contains the tombs of many great Polish figures, especially Kings and Queens, and was often referred to as a ‘Polish necropolis’ (227). In naming the work Akropolis, Wyspiański drew a line between the Greek icon and the Polish version of it; Romanska notes that both are ‘conduits for history, memory and identity’ (227). In locating the work in the castle’s cathedral specifically, Wyspiański also emphasized a sense of religious mystery, something that Grotowski drew upon, in a deeply ironized way, within his own version of the drama. Structurally, Wyspiański’s play is divided into four disconnected acts that function like plays within the broader play, grounded in the castle setting on the evening of Easter Saturday in the liminal hours between midnight and 4am. Within that setting is a key figure, a poet, through whose imagination the four acts, each taken from one of the tapestries in the cathedral, come to life. In Act 1, Wyspiański depicts a number of significant Polish figures, including generals and archbishops, as well as certain angels. Romanska describes this section of the work as focused on ‘national themes’ (228). Act 2 shows the Trojan myth of Hector and Andromache, Act 3 the Jewish story of Jacob and Esau, while Act 4 depicts, ‘King David of Israel, who in this version becomes a Polish prophet’ (228). The final act also features Christ Salvatore, a saint known for his healing ability. At the end of the play, while the castle collapses, Salvatore rises up, riding a chariot driven by white horses. Salvation comes by way of the destruction of the necropolis.

Wyspiański’s play employed a montage approach, bringing together seemingly disparate images and stories as a way of evoking the fabric of Polish
national character. Each of the characters taken from the tapestries spoke to certain aspects of what Wyspiański understood this character to contain. Romanska notes:

Like Hector, Jacob and Esau are both tragic characters. Each is fully aware of the fundamental absurdity of his predicament: one is betrayed, the other is forced to betray. Józef Rachwał writes: “Life, for Wyspiański, is eternally ambivalent, and thus, an eternal struggle in which man never comes out as the winner. . . . For this reason, the temporal triumph is itself tragic because it contains the element of inevitable defeat” (231).

Romanska and Rachwał’s comments indicate the synergy that Grotowski recognized between the original play and its transposition to the setting of Auschwitz.

With an awareness of the basic structure of Wyspiański’s original text, one can see that Grotowski used much of the central dramatic material whilst altering the context in which it was performed. Aside from two small additions to the prologue – a review comment from 1932 and a fragment of a letter that Wyspiański wrote commenting on how happy he was with the play – Grotowski did not, according to Flaszen, rewrite or add anything to Wyspiański’s text. Rather he heavily cut the text, emphasized particular aspects of it, made certain rearrangements and heavily repeated some phrases. Niziolek points out that Grotowski importantly emphasized the ‘biblical theme of the patriarch Jacob’ by reversing Acts 2 and 3, meaning that: ‘Jacob, who receives a blessing for himself and for his tribe, becomes Priam, mourning the annihilation of his nation’ (Niziolek 29). In emphasizing the story of Auschwitz, the protagonist was no longer a poet searching for meaning, but rather a nameless group of prisoners at Auschwitz. In this sense Grotowski transformed the original text into a choric play. Of the adaptation he commented:

I reworked [Akropolis] to analyze not only the great myths of the past but the biblical and historical traditions as well. It dramatized the past from the point of view of heroic values. Since World War II we have noticed that the great lofty ideas of Western civilization remain abstract. We mouth heroic values, but real life proves to be different. We must confront the great values of the past and ask some questions. Do these values remain abstract, or do they really exist for us? To discover the answer we must look at the most bitter and ultimate trial: Auschwitz. Auschwitz is the darkest reality of our contemporary history. Auschwitz is the trial of humankind (quoted in Romanska 235-6).
Grotowski’s comments regarding heroism are important in terms of the tragic paradigm discussed earlier. Through aesthetic reinvention, Akropolis responded to the philosophical and representational challenges presented by the Holocaust via a dismantling of heroic values.

Ludwik Flaszen, Grotowski’s dramaturge, commented that both Wyspiański and Grotowski wanted to ‘represent the sum total of a civilization and test its values on the touchstone of contemporary experience’ (64):

The struggle of Jacob and the angel and the backbreaking labor of the inmates, Paris’ and Helen’s love duet and the derisive screams of the prisoners, the resurrection of Christ and the ovens – a civilization of contrast and corruption (65).

By using the same characters – Hector, Helen, Jacob and so on – Grotowski interwove the earlier exploration by Wyspiański with a contemporary one that even more deeply problematized the play’s existential and political concerns. Niziolek comments, however, that the ‘idea to substitute Auschwitz for Wawel goes beyond the intentions articulated by … Flaszen. It deals … with the disturbance of meaning within the original text and the re-evaluation of the myths invoked by Wyspiański’ (27). More profoundly, he argues, it dealt with the very precise negotiation of national identity in relation to Auschwitz and the sense in which, through the history of its various incarnations, it became (as cited earlier) ‘the space of cultural and political palimpsest, as new meanings superseded other erased and marginalized ideas’ (27). Amongst these ideas, which would have been contemporary to those of Grotowski’s adaptation, was that of the camp as a tourist destination. Niziolek cites a short story by Tadeusz Różewicz, “The Museum Tour,” to illustrate the kinds of social problems that the camp seemed to draw to light. Niziolek describes Różewicz’s evocation of the tourist experience as being like a ‘national peep-show:’

The groups of visitors crowding the camp are looking for thrills, asking each other eagerly ‘where is the hair’, recommending the documentary film to one another … uttering conventional and sentimental expressions of sympathy…. Despite the guide’s efforts, the visit to Auschwitz provides no knowledge (27).

Niziolek’s referencing of this aspect of the camp is important for this thesis, in that it indicates not just the problems of such spectatorship, as have been discussed, but the very kind of spectatorship that Grotowski reacted against with his production.
Whereas the tourists above offer ‘sentimental expressions of sympathy,’ in *Akropolis*, as Niziolek notes, Grotowski wanted spectators to feel ‘emotional shock’ – to be traumatized’ (26).

Before discussing the production itself, I would like to note one other major influence on it, which was the writing of one of Różewicz’s contemporary’s, Tadeusz Borowski. Fragments of his writing were used in posters for *Akropolis*, as well as in the production’s program. Borowski was an Auschwitz survivor and wrote of his experience in a collection of short stories entitled, *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*, before committing suicide (by gas) in 1951. What was notable about his writing was its detached tone, which imbued it with a palpable ambivalence. Romanska notes:

> There is none of Elie Wiesel’s moral outrage or Primo Levi’s philosophical outrage in his writing. He described daily life in Auschwitz in a casual, deadpan tone, embedding himself completely in its reality: there are no heroes here. The line between victim and perpetrators blurs, and survival means acceptance and normalization of the horror. No one is without guilt, and Borowski implicated himself as much as anyone else (240).

The problem of heroism, as Grotowski signaled, was addressed in Borowski’s work. Such was the influence of his writing that Romanska argues that: ‘Grotowski did not stage Wyspiański’s *Akropolis* as such; he staged it within Borowski’s story’ (239).

The world the writer conjured in his stories became the setting; Grotowski’s Auschwitz was very much Borowski’s, marked by ambivalence, detachment and a lack of moral certainty. Indeed, the collection’s titular story revolves around the survival of certain camp members at the expense of others, in particular by what could be salvaged from the belongings of those who, on arrival, were sent directly to the gas chambers. A character called Henri comments: ‘They can’t run out of people or we’ll starve to death in this blasted camp. All of us live on what they bring’ (Borowski 31). Such an image of despair is in stark contrast with Levinas’ insistence on ‘giving to the other the bread from one’s mouth’ (quoted in Eaglestone 257). The production of *Akropolis* implicitly asked whether such an aspiration was ever humanly possible and, in a way counter to Levinas, seemed to suggest not. In the coupling together of Wyspiański’s text with Borowski’s evocation of Auschwitz, Grotowski created a textual foundation upon which he built his own image of a damned and ruined civilization.
Of the performance there are two main aspects that I will focus on which are important to an ethical reading of the work: firstly, the presentation of the actors’ bodies, particularly their faces; and secondly, the integration of the audience within the performing environment. The work was staged in a relatively small black-box studio type space. The audience who, by my visual estimate, numbered between 60 and 70, were seated on all four sides. Two of these sides (facing) were arranged in three levels with an aisle running down the centre. On all four sides seating was divided into small sections of only two or three seats. The arrangement of the audience around the room meant that they were very close to the performers, within touching distance. The relative integration of the seating with the playing space meant that action could take place in front of, behind or beside audience members. Additionally, audience members were largely lit throughout the piece and as such become an important part of the visual landscape of the work. This set up of the space, close to an in-the-round performance, meant that the central playing area was an important point of focus. Here I offer Flaszen’s useful description of it:

In the middle of the room stands a huge box. Metallic junk is heaped on top of it: stovepipes of various lengths and widths, a wheelbarrow, a bathtub, nails, hammers. Everything is old, rusty, and looks as if it had been picked up from a junkyard. The reality of the props is rust and metal. From them, as the action progresses, the actors will build an absurd civilization of gas chambers, advertised by stovepipes which will decorate the room as actors hang them from strings or nail them to the floor. (65-66)

The ‘junkyard’ conveyed an image of the scraps of history as much as it suggested the industrialization of internment and killing.

Out of this space the performance began with a prologue delivered by the actor who provided the ‘infernal’ music for the piece, played on a fiddle. As noted, this prologue, in addition to using Wyspiański’s text, included two other fragments which expanded the context of the work in a metatheatrical manner. The review of Wyspiański’s text read: ‘This drama, the fantastic and symbolic dimension of which is unprecedented, reflects an image of evolving humanity, its fighting and shepherding aspects, that nonetheless remains dominated by the power of song’ (Parvi in Romanska 241). This text signalled the themes of the work (human evolution was obviously darkly ironized in this context) as well as drawing attention to the fact of the performance itself – the manner in which it was an attempt, by way of theatre, to
respond to Auschwitz. The prologue was followed by the main entry of the actors, who marched rhythmically around the space, their wooden shoes sounding a loud and ominous beat. Such percussive composition accompanied all the sections in which the prisoners were seen at work. This activity of work, which took place in the Borowskian evocation of the camp, was the main throughline of the play. Grotowski described this action as follows:

The prisoners worked all the time. They took metal pipes that were piled in the center of the room and built something. At the start, the room was empty except for the pile of pipes and the spectators were disseminated through all the space. By the end of the production the entire room was filled by the metal. . . . We organized it all into the rhythm of work in the extermination camp, with certain breaks in the rhythm where the characters refer themselves to the traditions of their youth, the dreams of their people (quoted in Romanska 239).

The imaginative interruptions of the main action temporarily obscured the obscene work of the prisoners building their own crematorium oven.

Significantly, Grotowski did not attempt to represent perpetrators of violence, instead focusing on the effect of violence on prisoners. The prisoners were not given any particular identifiable character, however, Grotowski had each adopt a ‘mask.’ This was an expression for each performer that was held throughout the performance and which gave them a grotesque and alienating quality. The frozen faces, combined with the repetitious rhythms sounded by the wooden shoes, the robotic work carried out and a highly regulated use of the voice, emphasized the destruction of the prisoners’ humanity. Such a stripping away of humanizing identificatory qualities from the body was theatrically complemented by the presence of a life-size dummy. The dummy, which was headless, was made of pale fabric, with soft floppy limbs. It was carried in by the performers following the prologue and hung up like a shirt on a line. At various points in the performance, actors’ bodies were treated in the same manner – Grotowski emphasized the precariousness of the prisoners’ bodies using actions of reaching, gasping, hanging, pushing and calling out. The alienating nature of the prisoners’ bodies, coupled with the strangeness of their behaviour, effectively depicted human beings who had undergone a radical physical, psychological and spiritual transformation.
Grotowski’s masking of the face was central, I suggest, to the theatrical ethics of the work. The mask represented the *muselmann*, the one whose experiences, carried into death, cannot be testified to. Barba confirms such an intention, commenting that the masks ‘evoked that of the “muslims,” as the prisoners in Auschwitz were called when they reached the last stage of survival’ (56). Grotowski attempted to both represent the unrepresentable – to give the non-representational object a form via that actor – and, at the same time, show that ‘despite our exchanges, he [the other] remains that which I – closed up in myself – am not’ (Levinas in Robbins 191). The work constantly pivoted around such dialectical tension: the audience was integrated into the performance space yet, as Grotowski noted, totally irrelevant to the actors; the prisoners sought refuge within the realm of theatrical imagination yet this was completely incapable of offering them any salvation. In this sense, theatre was a prescription that offered no remedy. Yet, at the same time, Grotowski seems to suggest that it is through the theatre, most significantly through the actor, that a meaningful confrontation with the past might take place. It was precisely because of this dialectic that the performance demanded ethical attention – indeed, Flaszen described it as a call to the ‘ethical memory of the spectator’ (65). The performance insisted that this call be accepted not because of common understanding but precisely because understanding was impossible.

Whilst the particularity of the other’s suffering remains unknown to us, what we can hold in common is our *commitment* to the other, based on our own understanding of what it means to suffer. This may be thought of as a different kind of common understanding. It is in this sense, that throughout the thesis, I have attempted to reframe identification within an ethical context, not as an obscuring of the alterity of the other but rather as a recognition of it – as a potential instance of Levinas’ substitution. Butler similarly positions identification:

> The one with whom I identify is not me, and “not being me” is the condition of the identification… This difference internal to identification is crucial … The critical image, if we can speak this way, works this difference in the same way as the Levinasian image; it must not only fail to capture its referent, but show this failing (146).

In making a recognizably human face unavailable, Grotowski potently demonstrated the failure of a tragic poetic. In all of the ways that the work alienated the spectator –
language, discord, noise, a vision of the human grotesque – it drew attention to such catastrophic failure: to what happens when the face of the other is definitively annihilated and when no identification takes place.

The disfiguring, so to speak, of the human face, was emphasized through the nature of the prisoners’ interactions with one another. In a way that reflected Borowski’s evocation of camp life, the prisoners were not simple victims – they taunted one another, competed, fought. These qualities contributed to disallowing any kind of sentimental attachment to the characters. Further, in foregrounding the construction of the crematorium oven, Grotowski uncomfortably depicted the prisoners as helplessly complicit in their own extermination. Such dramatic action struck at the very heart of the complexities of Auschwitz: the manner in which prisoners were forced to turn upon one another, the fact the survival was often only won at the expense of another. Flaszen notes that ‘the inmates are the protagonists and, in the name of a higher unwritten law, they are their own torturers’ (65).

Grotowski also stated that ‘we did not show victims but the rules of the game; in order to not be a victim one must accept that the other is sacrificed’ (quoted in Wolford and Schechner 51). Akropolis demonstrated that the horror of the camps was not simply that prisoners had violence inflicted upon them, but rather were drawn into an environment of total violence.

It was only in the fantastic imaginative sequences that punctuated the work that there was any escape from this violence or outlet for emotional expression. These sequences showed a transformation of sorts. The prisoners drew on theatre itself as an attempt to generate some psychic relief. In the acting out of human emotions, even those of distress or anguish, a spark of recognizable life returned to the prisoners. What marked their attempt as different from Delbo’s, however, was their utter failure. Transcendence was presented in only the most ironized of fashions. When Rachel, an object of desire, was depicted as a piece of pipe, the image suggested that the prisoners could no longer distinguish between men and metal. The sensuality attached to the stories of longing for Helen and for Rachel was dark and futile. The sense in which temporary transformation was both futile and a form of relief reflected the dialectical ambivalence that marked the work in general. The prisoners plunged (to use Delbo’s word) into a liminal state of make-believe, yet the same kind of ritualistic enactment led them, in the end, into the oven of their own construction. Whereas Christ Salvatore, the saint who can heal, rose from the rubble of the collapsed Wawel
castle in Wypiański’s *Akropolis*, suggesting the possibility of redemption, Grotowski’s prisoners’ supplications found no reply. Of the ending, Grotowski stated:

> In Auschwitz the savior never came for those who were killed. . . . The final procession was the march to the crematorium. The prisoners took a corpse and they began to sing: “Here is our Savior.” All the procession disappears into the hole during the song of triumph (quoted in Romanska 242).

In the end, myths of the past were made obscene, useless, and perhaps even barbaric in the sense meant by Adorno and intimated by Artaud. Human culture became a caricature of itself, just as the faces of the actors had been sculpted into grotesque forms. Civilization failed.

What more might then be said of the audience within such an equation? The manner in which they were called to participate was not physical – they did not need to intervene – but rather, as Flaszen states, ethical. This call was made in the first instance through their integration into the representational landscape. Watching the film recording of the work, the drawing together of actors and audience is very clear: the faces of spectators are lit and present. And, as the performance was enacted with viewers on all sides, individual audience members would have been very much aware of each other. Thus, a kind of contact was established between actors and audience through the scenographic design.

In their comments on the work, Flaszen and Grotowski variously describe a life/death dialectic between the audience and the actors. Flaszen states:

> The actors represent those who have been initiated in the ultimate experience, they are the dead; the spectators represent those who are outside of the circle of initiates, they remain in the stream of everyday life, they are the living. This separation, combined with the proximity of the spectators, contributes to the impression that the dead are born from the dream of the living (65).

Grotowski turns the perspective somewhat and, from the actors’ point of view, describes the *audience* as ghosts:

> The spectators sat throughout the room. They were treated as people of another world, either as ghosts, which only got in the way, or as air. The actors spoke through them. The personal situation of the spectators was totally different from that of the characters. The spectators functioned both as spectators and within the context of the play. They are in the middle and at the
same time they are totally irrelevant, incomprehensible to the actors – as the living cannot understand the dead (quoted in Wolford and Schechner 52).

Both Grotowski and Flaszen describe a both/and quality to the performance: the audience were both near and distant, living and dead, necessary witnesses and totally irrelevant. Indeed, at the beginning of the performance, one of the actors regards the audience and says, ‘Look at the shadows.’ The instruction was ambiguous: the shadows might be either the actors, as the shadows of the dead, or the audience. Such ambiguity is ethically important in terms of confronting what the muselmann or figuren represents; Shoshana Felman notes that the dehumanized figuren: ‘all at once, cannot be seen and can be seen through’ (300). Niziolek describes Grotowski’s depiction of the muselmanner as showing them at, ‘the end of experience, beyond speech and consciousness, impossible to express; someone who cannot be looked at, more fearsome than a corpse’ (28). It is the very fearsomeness of these figures which provides the emotional shock, or trauma, for the audience. In the direction of his actors, Grotowski called upon the audience to see the muselmanner perform, whilst at the same time withholding access to the interiority of the characters. Such withholding powerfully dramatized what Plunka describes as an emptying out of thought that took place at a certain level of deprivation: ‘Life evolved into survival of the body, free from the hindrances of intellect or culture’ (75).

While some, such as Romanska, have characterized Grotowski’s designation of the audience as that of witnesses, I believe this runs counter to the very ethical fabric of the work. As I have described it, witnessing is not possible. More interestingly, however, audience members may be understood to testify to what they perceive as the ethical and representational limits presented by the work, for the play is as much about how representation might take place, as it is about what it represents. As Elizbieta Kalemba-Kasprzak notes: ‘Grotowski’s production communicates—on different levels—the crisis of the twentieth century, while announcing the inevitable crisis of representation that is to dominate all future theatrical endeavors’ (quoted in Romanska 243). Indeed, as pointed out earlier, Grotowski draws attention to the work as a theatrical effort with his inclusion of extra-textual material in the prologue: the ‘fantastic’ and ‘symbolic’ drama ‘reflects an image.’ In placing the audience within the theatrical image he asks them to reflect not just on the drama, but also on their own responsibility as its recipients. As Grotowski commented, ‘Auschwitz is a world
which functions inside us’ (quoted in Wolford and Schechner 51). The question, ‘why Auschwitz?’ therefore, required audience members to turn inside themselves to look for an answer.

Grotowski’s comment – that Auschwitz functions ‘inside us’ – is a central one. It suggests that evil is not an external force that bears down upon us, but a latent potential that resides within human culture. It is not so much that Nazi evil is beyond comprehension, as it is that such understanding may only be accessed by an experience of it, which encounters a social taboo. (The recent exhibition in Berlin, “Hitler and the German People” (2010) approached a similar taboo, as reflected in the controversy surrounding it (German Historical Museum)). It seems that Akropolis pushed such inhibitions to their very brink. Grotowski sought to expose such evil not by demonstrating its enactment but rather its effect. In doing so he presented an image of pain that threatened to decimate the very understanding of the human. By calling forth, in the sense meant by Brook, the effect (and affect) of evil, the work called the audience to consider how they each might respond to an effect of the human condition that, unbridled, knows no end other than its own total annihilation.

In his essay, “Useless Suffering,” Levinas suggests that the evil of the Holocaust definitively overturned any intellectual or explanatory framework that might make knowledge of such pain and suffering bearable. What must fill the vacuum left by the absence of explanatory frameworks is compassionate responsibility through which one accepts the pain of the other as one’s own pain:

The radical difference between the suffering in the other, where it is unforgivable to me, solicits me and calls me, and suffering in me, my own experience of suffering, whose constitutional or congenital uselessness can take on meaning, the only one of which is suffering is capable, in becoming a suffering for the suffering (inexorable thought it may be) of someone else (quoted in Morgan 82-83).

In turning away from the pain of the other, one’s own pain becomes abject; however in turning toward the other, such pain takes on meaning. It is for this reason that the visibility of the suffering of the other is vital. As Felman notes: ‘The essence of the Nazi scheme is to make itself – and to make the Jews – essentially invisible’ (300). Butler, in a more contemporary sense, similarly argues that the world does not suffer from an over-abundance of images of suffering, but rather from a lack of meaningful confrontation with the real scale of the suffering of others:
If the media will not run those pictures, and if those lives remain unnameable and ungrievable, if they do not appear in their precariousness and their destruction, we will not be moved. We will not return to a sense of ethical outrage that is, distinctively, for an Other, in the name of an Other. We cannot, under contemporary conditions of representation, hear the agonized cry or be compelled or commanded by the face (150).

Thus theatre is vitally important in providing such images of suffering as a means of drawing forth compassionate response. This compassion depends on a different kind of ethical identification, one which foregrounds alterity. It is for this reason that I have emphasized postdramatic works, with their insistence on resistance to interpretation. As Morgan notes: ‘By realizing that we no longer can or should be tempted by explanations or rely upon them, our responsibility emerges from the shadows and becomes vividly manifest’ (84). I argue that Akropolis is an example of just such a powerful emergence precisely because it calls evil into being, thus asking us to bear responsibility for the pain it inflicts.

I believe that Levinas’ essential position, that the only hope for a development of the human lies in the assumption of compassionate responsibility by individuals, is closely in accord with Grotowski’s own intent. His later rejection of the institution of theatre in favour of his paratheatrical work demonstrated his powerful commitment to the face-to-face encounter as the basis of any transformational ethic. During this time he attempted to abolish altogether the distinction between audience and performers, focusing instead on inclusive events that attempted to transform the participants through their encounter with others and with the environment. In an interview given during this period, Grotowski was asked a question about what he thought the role of the audience should be. His reply reveals an ethos that is apparent in Akropolis, but which also encountered a certain limit there. As cited earlier, he asks:

What part does the audience play? Why worry about what the audience’s part ought to be? And what does it really mean “the audience”? We are doing something, and there are others, who want to meet us; this is not the audience, they are concrete human beings; some are opening their doors, others come to the meeting, there is something that will happen between us. This is more important than having an idea about “the audience” and its role. What is it that we are to do and what people do we want to meet? And what is that something that will happen to us and among us? These are the questions that
we ask ourselves over and over again, every time; and if so – the place of those who have come to us will emerge of itself (124).

It was his response to this limit, perhaps, that led to his aesthetic and philosophical shift away from the last vestiges of the poetics of the theatrical form some years after *Akropolis*. Thus we may speak not just of postdramatic theatre, but of a *post-theatre* whose prime point is the ethical exchange between self and other. Or rather, perhaps we can best speak of this ethics always resting on the brink: of life and death, actor and spectator, of theatre and what comes after.

*Arbeit Macht Frei vom Toitland Europa*

In 1991 Israeli theatre company, Acco Theatre, in a festival in the town where the group is based, premiered a work called *Arbeit Macht Frei vom Toitland Europa*. It was subsequently restaged and toured internationally. The work challenged practices of remembrance and politics of identity in such a striking manner that it has been the subject of a number of published essays. In the absence of a video record of the work, I draw on the accounts of Freddie Rokem, Heike Roms, Gad Kaynar and Rebecca Rovit, with particular reliance on Rokem’s detailed account. *Arbeit* was a five-hour long promenade piece that moved its small audience of twenty people through a series of locations, one of which was always a Holocaust museum or memorial of some kind (though in Germany this took place at the Wannsee Villa, where the Final Solution was mapped out). The central character, Selma, initially introduced as a Holocaust survivor, led the audience through a number of different dramatic scenarios, which variously commented on the life in the concentration camps, practices of remembrance, Israeli domestic life in the shadow of the Holocaust and contemporary Israeli/Palestinian conflict. The production focused not on excavating the past but rather on understanding how the past is given meaning in the present. An account of the production is a useful addition to this thesis’ concern with the concept of witness. *Arbeit* deconstructs the role of witness, a role integral to the Israeli national psyche, and in doing so the work politicizes the issue of identification in a way that helps to reinforce my claim for its reconceptualization within a theatrical ethics.
While Grotowski’s work was primarily aesthetically focused, though politically and ethically suggestive, Acco’s work is explicitly concerned with a theatrical intertwining of aesthetics, politics and social concerns. Its company mandate makes clear this explicitly political raison-d’être:

The Acco Theater Center (ATC) blazes innovative paths in the realm of social theater, striving to forge strong alliances between Arab and Jewish artists, offering alternative paradigms and encouraging open and fruitful expression within our larger society. Twining the artistic and the social through active community programming and the creation of a unique theatrical language, ATC offers more than Theater: it offers an Example. What others see as a fantasy, is for us, reality (Acco-Theatre).

The company is currently a registered NGO whose social programmes are an important feature of its work.

Within Acco’s work, experimental practice is a tool for social intervention. This interventional aspect of the company is explicitly described on their website as a response to what they perceive as a ‘need for catharsis’:

Decades of an ethos of martyrdom within Israeli and Palestinian culture have led to unprecedented desensitization. On the Israeli side, a disturbing new trend has arisen – people have begun to turn away from each other and into themselves, more and more becoming apathetic to the suffering of others.

The atmosphere of withdrawal pervading Israel today only indicates that, more than ever, people in Israeli society need a therapeutic space in which to digest issues within and without, a space for collective mourning and personal reflection.

Theater has a particularly important role to play in this process, stimulating individual and collective catharsis by bringing issues repressed on a daily level to the surface, catalyzing an internal reaction, making way for emotional breakthroughs, challenging assumptions on a wide scale, helping us to reconnect individually, collectively, emotionally, sexually, cerebrally (Acco-Theatre).

Given the context of Delbo’s performance of *The Hypochondriac*, Acco’s statement of purpose usefully returns us to the idea of theatre as a form of response and relief. This ethos might be characterized as Levinasian in its desire to turn people toward, rather than away from, one another. In this sense, the company importantly seeks to reformulate identificatory frameworks away from those that emphasize difference and towards those that privilege a sense of shared humanity. Just as Akropolis attempted
the daunting challenge of representing the unrepresentable, so too does Acco take
upon itself the seemingly intractable conflict between Israel and Palestine. In general,
the company’s work might be thought of as exemplifying the general proposals for
compassionate responsibility that Levinas advocates. What is of central interest here,
as noted, are the theatrical means that they use to do so.

Premiering roughly 25 years – a generation – after Akropolis, Arbeit focused
less on calling into being the horrors of the camps and more on the ethical dimensions
of how they might be remembered. It shifted memorial emphasis away from objects
and formalized ceremony toward the performing body, which the audience was drawn
into intimate relationship with. The concept of meeting is central to the work’s
enactment and intent. The particular radicality of the performance lay in such a
connection between Holocaust suffering and that of contemporary Palestine. In doing
so, the work suggested, like Levinas (whose writing encompassed events such as
Cambodia, Hiroshima and Stalinism), that Jewish suffering during the Holocaust,
whilst paradigmatic of a contemporary ethical failure, was not its sole example
(Levinas in Morgan 84). Such a positioning has been described by Gad Kaynar as
deliberately profane. This profanity, which he argued was a common thread between
Acco and other contemporary Israeli practitioners, attempted to:

Revive a genuine experiential, traumatic, critical and actuality-linked
consciousness of the catastrophe, as well as of its enraging present-day
repercussions and manifestations, in the minds of the second and third
generations of Israeli spectators who are weary of the stock commemorative
rites and their manipulative aspects (55).

In the case of Arbeit, such an ethos even extended to the programme, which Kaynar
described as a, ‘profane kitsch assemblage of the most trite iconography of Nazi evil,
Zionist redemption and Jewish victimology’ (53). Through the use of experimental
theatre practice, Arbeit, with its focus on how Holocaust history is represented,
challenged orthodoxies of remembrance. Significantly, for this chapter, it made the
audience central within the enquiry.

For the premiere season of the work, which took place in the city of Acco,
audience members were firstly positioned as tourists of a sort. After meeting at the
theatre company’s building, they were bused to a local Holocaust museum. There
they were met by actor, Semadar Yaron-Ma’ayan, who played the part of Selma.
Selma took the audience on a tour of the museum, during which she laid down certain thematic and narrative questions that were developed later in the performance. She performed as a generous and enthusiastic guide, interspersing commentary on the museum with her own anecdotal experience. This initial framing of the audience was significant in multiple regards. As tourists they were active, mobile, and a central focus of attention. In the context of the museum, they were positioned as learners and Selma as the educator. However, the theatricality of the scenario was ambiguous. Heike Roms and others have pointed out that in the first instance some audience members were confused as to whether Selma was a real survivor or an actor. The work let this ambiguity remain until later in the performance. Accordingly Roms notes that ‘it may indeed be difficult to distinguish between a genuine commemorative ceremony and its theatrical re-enactment when thus placed within the context of an authentic memorial site’ (50). Since the context of the tour was uncertain, the audience was unsettled in a way that signaled the work that would be required of them. The use of the museum setting was also a way of foregrounding the conventions of remembrance that the performance would later go on to deconstruct. This deconstruction is particularly significant in the context of the rest of the thesis, especially in the sense that Żmijewiski argues against Holocaust museums as deferring the pain that spectators might otherwise feel: ‘the museum creates the impression that it is not the body that remembers, but objects’ (quoted in "Art Must Always Not Speak Meekly"). The living body as antithetical to the museum became an important recurring point throughout the work.

Part way through the museum visit, a Palestinian man, Haled, was introduced. While Yaron-Ma’ayan acted the role of a survivor, Haled played himself. After his introduction he took over from Selma the task of telling the story of Jewish extermination. In his account, Rokem points out the tension for a Jewish audience in having a young Palestinian man narrating an account of Jewish suffering:

[The] production constantly questions what it means to be a survivor and a victim, contesting in different ways the exclusivity of the historical victims of the Shoah: here an actress can play a survivor and a Palestinian can be a victim…. [The] difference between the “real” survivor and an actress playing a survivor lies at the very heart of Arbeit Macht Frei vom Toitland Europa, and the production privileges the latter (Performing History 61).
The use of the fake survivor and the Palestinian narrator perhaps indicate what Kaynar describes as the work’s profane aspect. The introduction of Haled immediately placed the issue of Holocaust remembrance within a contemporary political context. On the company’s website, Yaron-Ma’ayan describes the significance of such identificatory unsettlement:

Audiences are also puzzled on a more basic level, often asking “Are you a Jew or an Arab?” Significantly, captive as we two societies are to preconceptions based on fears and false information received since birth, our Arab and Jewish audiences often see that their conventions, their assumptions, concerning their own people’s characteristics versus the “others” are inaccurate (quoted for Acco Theatre).

The presence of Haled, which continued throughout the performance, was important in terms of challenging Israeli self-identity, particularly as related to the legacy of the Holocaust. The museum tour ended when the audience was shown a statue of a Muselmann, an image that would be returned to later on where a human figure would offer a striking contrast to the lifeless marble.

Following the Holocaust museum section of the work, the audience returned to the theatre by bus where they were led through a series of darkened rooms in which they variously saw: Selma trying to wipe the tattoo off her arm; a film made by the company featuring a parody of ‘the official Shoah day ceremony in an Israeli school;’ and another video showing the actress playing Selma having a number tattooed on her arm (Rokem Performing History 69). These installations presented the audience with a different kind of museum, one in which remembrance was problematic. The images were variously comic, political, painful and confronting. The tattooing of Yaron-Ma’ayan in particular is striking. All sorts of questions arise from it: Why would someone want to have this done? Is this an affront to those who actually endured Auschwitz? Could such an inscription bestow a special kind of knowledge? Could this be thought of as a sacred commemorative act? Does it simply reinscribe Nazi violence? And perhaps more pragmatically – did she really have it done? Is it permanent? A real tattoo challenges what Féral describes as the ‘law of reversibility’ that governs theatrical action – after the performance the actor returns to their pre-performance state (104). Rokem provides some useful background:
The number on her arm is in fact the death date of her father, who escaped from Europe before the war, but many members of his family were killed by the Nazis…. This is no doubt also a theatrical sign, not just temporary theatrical makeup, but a permanent inscription…. By making this tattoo on her arm the actress Semadar Yaron-Ma’ayan is in a way undermining what has been considered a kind of ultimate form of testimony of the Shoah, appropriating the tattooed numbers as her own (Performing History 69).

Yaron-Ma’ayan contests the exclusivity of the symbol and in doing so questions its power. The work further complicates the questions that arise from the tattoo through the tableau in which we see the character of Selma, futilely struggling to wash off the same inscription. The dialectic expressed via the action shows, on the one hand, a fetishization of the tattoo by the non-witness, and, on the other, its indelibility for the survivor.

Such a dialectic, with its unsettling ambivalence, was captured in a short film made by Żmijewski, 80064, which features Auschwitz survivor, Józef Tarnawa. I make a short digression here to describe the work as it helps to unpack the significance of Acco’s image. The title of the video refers to the number tattooed on Tarnawa’s arm during his internment in the camp. The video focuses on the tattoo, the history it reveals and Żmijewski’s persuasion of Tarnawa to have the faded object restored. The video is uneasy watching as Żmijewski works hard to persuade the elderly man to go through with the renovation. Tarnawa is baffled as to why Żmijewski wants him to do it. He worries how the process of restoration will alter the tattoo’s meaning and value:

Tarnawa: It won’t be the same number … It will be restored.
Żmijewski: The number won’t become inauthentic. It will be more authentic.
Tarnawa: It won’t be original.

Tarnawa’s fear is that the process of recreating the tattoo will destroy its historical specificity. He worries about the ‘cleaning’ of his own history, and the loss of an identity constructed around the faded etching. As the tattooist explains to him how he will need to care for the updated number, he further worries about the consequences of the new tattoo, ‘Why are you imposing this burden on me that I need to take care of it?’ Żmijewski’s conjecture that the act of restoration will actually enhance the value of the tattoo reveals the ideological schism that gives the work its unsettling power. Two forces are pitted against each other: one which values the ‘original’ as having an
intrinsic value which cannot be extracted or reproduced; and the other which denies
the original any sacred status. What Żmijewski’s work reveals, however, and what
disturbs the viewer, are contemporary circumstances and forces that both demand the
reproduction and festishize the object. It literalizes the notion of a painful history and
implicates the spectator, through the act of watching, within this history. As Tarnawa
comments, ‘I never expected something like this to happen to me again.’

In Arbeit, the tattooing of the actor who plays Selma creates the image of a
kind of tapping-into-the-body in order that it might release some historical
understanding. Unlike the example of 80064, however, it is not the survivor’s body
that is etched into, but an outsider who willingly inscribes on herself the suffering that
the tattoo represents. For Eaglestone, such suffering is fundamentally the disavowal
of personal identity – the sense in which prisoners were reduced to the status of
figuren: ‘the tattoo marked the change in status from human to less than human’ (329).
Thus Selma’s action can be understood as both a search for identity and a
recuperation of the identities (perhaps specific to her family) previously effaced.

Unlike 80064, the pain, psychic and physical, is not re-inflicted on the original
victim. In his film, Żmijewski causes a repetition of the original forced submission of
the prisoner to the dehumanizing mark. The artist in no way takes the pain upon
himself, but instead makes Tarnawa its double bearer. Notably, there is no cathartic
effect. Żmijewski’s stated expectations that ‘the gates of memory would open’ and
that there would be ‘an eruption of remembrances’ were not met (If It Happened Only
Once 24). In the case of Arbeit, however, the act of re-tattooing the number takes on
Levinasian proportions in the sense of giving one’s bread for another; here,
symbolically, Yaron-Ma’ayan gives her skin. Yet it is an ambivalent offering that
threatens to consign both her and the audience to the same repetitious cycle that
Żmijewski’s work enacts. Such ambivalence, in Grehan’s terms, unsettles the
audience, charging them with need to examine, for themselves, the force of the object
and the end to which it was then and is now used.

Before finally entering Selma’s home, where the action remained for some
time, spectators were led through a corridor with windows in which actors appeared
and asked the audience for their own ‘experiences of the Shoah.’ The thoughts and
recollections provided by audience members were noted down. Rokem comments: ‘I
was now asked to open up experiences which were private. In a way each of us was
asked to become a witness, not just a spectator’ (Performing History 70). The
interlude was important in terms of firmly positioning audience members as participants in the work. Each spectator’s own ‘text’ was inscribed within the work, including them within the community of remembrance (or sphere of concern.) In his comment, Rokem makes a distinction between spectator and witness, suggesting that the incorporation of the audience’s own experiences into the work shifted them from one to the other. A shift from subject to object also took place within this interaction, as it was the experiences of the audience that became central. Finally, the exchange reiterated the question, raised by the character of Selma already, as to just who might lay claim to the title of witness. In breaking apart of the concept of witness, the work designates the audience not so much as able to bear testimony, but as important participants and co-authors in a working through of past in order that they might also take hold of the present.

The setting for Selma’s home, where she lived with her husband, son and Haled (as a kind of servant) was a small dark space, ‘its barbed wire and low ceiling gives the feeling of a barrack in a concentration camp’ (Rokem Performing History 64). Inside the cramped room the audience was seated on uncomfortable wooden benches. Such a setting evoked not just the past, as Rokem points out, but also suggested a certain contemporary ‘prison’ of memory. The action that followed affirmed this. While the accounts I have relied on do not discuss this section of the work in detail, it has been performed as a stand-alone excerpt which Acco’s website gives a useful description of:

Her [Selma’s] son, a full-grown man, deranged yet innocent, peers at her, crawls about the piano legs, answers her commands, does her bidding. She talks at him, tires of him, decides to lull him to sleep, tells him a bed-time story of the camps…. forces him to play out her story, the German story, the whole story….. and exhausts him, leaves him sobbing, runs him dry, till he curls up, whimpering, to sleep. But there will be another day, and more to say, this we know. There is more, there is always more, and we know that -- as she tortures her child as she was tortured -- the story will repeat itself (Acco-Theatre).

The account suggests a kind of melodramatic grotesque that demands a reconsideration of how such stories are told. Through the use of the child the performance depicted a certain paralyzing fear that the telling imposes upon its listener. Yet equally, the listening child is determined to hear the full account, even if this desire can never be completely fulfilled. The scenario functions at the levels of
horror story, intimate confession, and biting satirical critique. Indeed, Acco’s own description of the work notes that, ‘twisted remembrance can lead to the re-enactment and perpetuation of oppression in the lives of innocents in the future’ (Acco-Theatre).

After Selma’s story, the ceiling opened up and a table was lowered down. The audience were then invited to participate in a ‘Friday night Sabbath meal’ (Rokem Performing History 70). During the meal an improvised conversation was held between the actors and the audience. After the meal the table was lifted up only to return a short time later and with Selma lying naked on it, replicating the position of the statue of the muselmann shown earlier. From this position she pulled a piece of bread from her vagina, answering the question she had posed earlier at the museum, ‘I would give a fortune to know where this Muselmanchik hides his bread’ (Rokem Performing History 64). The image of Yaron-Ma’ayan, literally stripped of the vestiges of Selma, was a sharp turn away from what Rokem’s and Roms’ descriptions suggest was a lively, sometimes melodramatic, and comic meal sequence. While the image suggested a kind of historical flashback, telling us something of Selma’s past, it was equally an image of the actor’s own struggle to locate the truth of the past. Like other images in the work, this one resisted easy interpretation. Yet at the same time, in its intimacy and proximity to the audience, it demanded consideration. Seated at the table, and having shared the meal, the audience could not turn away.

Indeed, this was a spectacle served up, as it were, for the audience. Perhaps most significant in this image was the fact that the Muselmann became not just an idea, a politicized figure, but a real human body. This returns us to Rokem’s earlier conjecture, that the production privileged the actor-as-survivor. This has important implications for how the work positioned identification. Most significantly Arbeit argued the necessity of critically engaged, or self-reflexive, identificatory processes. It attempted to engender this through unsettling a number of identity-based assumptions related to Israel, Palestine, survivors and so on. Drawing from Eaglestone I suggest that the company’s work expressed a sort of ‘postmodern humanism.’ Closely tying such a moniker to a recalibrated understanding of identification, Eaglestone argues that it should ‘continually monitor itself, with a terrifying and shuddering regard for its own fragility and potential hypocrisy’ (338). By transgressing certain boundaries related to representations of survivors, as well as conventional rituals of remembrance, the production asked the audience to engage in just such a critical reflective process.
After the table bearing Selma rose back up into the ceiling, Haled entered, invited the audience to have coffee with him, and shared some of his experiences. Neither Rokem, Rovit or Roms give any details of this, yet the provision of a Palestinian personal narrative, and one which presumably engaged with the social and political realities of such a life, and after Yaron-Ma’ayan’s exposure, was significant, especially in that while Ma’ayan performed the role of *muselmann*, within the performance it was Haled who was the ‘muslim,’ – the fearful one (as Niziolek commented.) Following this, the ceiling opened in various places and the audience were invited to enter up into the space above. Objects from Shoah history and contemporary Israel were presented on the wall while performers enacted ‘different human installations, each of which presents a total “acting-out” of different Shoah trauma’ (Rokem *Performing History* 74). The museum-like environment that the work finally delivered the audience to was one dominated by performing bodies rather than objects. Haled was also present, naked, dancing on a pedestal, with a bottle opener around his neck. He invited the audience to use it to open beer, an invitation steeped in ambivalence. The performance concluded with Selma, still naked, taking Haled in a ‘pieta-like configuration’ (Rokem *Performing History* 75). ‘At this point Selma had been transformed from the suffering *muselmann* into the mother-figure who wept over her suffering son, the young Palestinian man’ (Rokem *Performing History* 75). This final image suggested a different kind of pain than that depicted in ‘stock commemorative rights.’ In closing, a replica *Arbeit Macht Frei* sign was lit up by coloured lamps.

What made Acco’s production significant was that, in addition to invoking the past, it focused on the invocatory process itself: from questioning survivor testimony as the benchmark of historical truth, to foregrounding the role of the body in revealing the secrets of the past, to the substitution that Haled performed in taking on the role of ‘victim,’ thus unsettling part of the Shoah narrative. Importantly, the audience was included within this investigation. Throughout *Arbeit*, the audience’s relationship with the performers was, as Rebecca Rovit describes it, ‘collaborative’ (Rovit 171). In moving through the space with the actors, sharing their table, the audience members were drawn into an intimate relationship in which they were asked to actively enter into their world as co-participants. In doing so the performance powerfully asked not just how we might take on, or work through, the pain of the past, but also, via Haled, what responsibility we might have for more contemporary pain.
Most significantly, I have argued, within the production ethics, politics and aesthetics were intertwined via the identificatory process. For, as Eaglestone notes, ‘What is at stake in the mimetic process is identification, which is what makes up the political’ (326). In deconstructing certain figures and ideas the work attempted to, in a Levinasian sense, reveal the face of the other. It is in this sense that Haled was so significant. In this way, the work demonstrated the very necessity of identification to the ethical – ‘Identification names part of what it is to be human’ (Eaglestone 325) – and at the same time showed that theatre is particularly suited to such an identificatory challenge.

**Conclusion**

I would like to conclude this chapter by way of an image that featured in a production of Peter Weiss’ *The Investigation* that I recently attended, directed by Kathrin Mädler and performed by the Staatstheatre: Schauspiel Nuremburg at the Nuremberg Stadium, 2010. In her adaptation of the play, Mädler made radical changes to the basic premise of the staging and dramaturgy. Firstly, rather than the ‘neutral’ zone of staged courtroom, she located the performance within the Nuremberg Stadium, where the audience were led through a series of five different locations. Secondly, she transformed the mode of delivery of the text. Rather than the cast of thirty required by the original script, Mädler employed a small chorus of five men. She also heavily cut the lengthy text. Explaining these choices, Mädler stated that it was made in response to Primo Levi’s assertion that there can be no complete witnesses to Auschwitz – only those who died experienced the full force of Nazi cruelty. Because, therefore, it is impossible to know the suffering of those in the camps, Mädler stated that she didn’t want the actors to ‘play’ victims and perpetrators in an identificatory manner, as is set out in Weiss’ script; thus her small chorus, who collectively shared roles between them, preventing any particular actor being associated with any particular role. Mädler’s direction shifted the actors between recounting, as if relating what they had heard, and role-playing, in which they dramatized the accounts that Weiss provides via courtroom testimony. Mädler emphasized that the chorus of men should be thought of as voices of the past, messengers of a sort who cannot be redeemed from their memories, but not witnesses.
Because of the theatricalization of the script and promenade structure, the audience was generally drawn to reflect on their own function as listeners. One particular dramatic gesture stood out for me in this regard. In the second space that the audience entered, there was an apple on one of the chairs. This apple stayed there for a while until one of the actors picked it up and began polishing it against his jacket. Another actor related an horrific incident in which the apple was central:

A motor van drove up outside  
with a load of children  
I saw it through the window of the office  
A young boy jumped down  
He held out an apple in his hand  
Out came Boger through the door  
The boy stood there with his apple  
Boger went to the child  
and picked him up by the feet  
and dashed his head against the barracks wall  
Then he picked up the apple  
and called out to me and said  
Wipe this off the wall  
And later as I sat at an interrogation  
I saw  
him eating the apple (Weiss 64).

Shortly after this, at the end of the section before moving on to the next location, the actor holding the apple handed it to one of the audience members while the rest looked on. The gesture was an ambivalent one – indeed, the apple was a kind of poisoned chalice. The moment powerfully demonstrated the ethical aspect contained within the theatrical medium. In one sense, the prop was nothing more than a piece of fruit. Yet, by way of the shared contract between actors and audience, it became a symbolic object that had meaning migrated onto it. In this way it strikingly illustrated the fact that theatricality makes our responsiveness available as a fact in the world – we may choose to accept the apple. By way of an imaginative substitution the ethical presents itself as a fact that might be responded to. The apple is also, of course, a biblical symbol of man’s failure, of his weakness in the face of temptation, which loads the gesture of giving it to the audience with a double meaning, complexifying it, and making any acceptance of the apple highly ambivalent. Indeed, it is a gesture that presents a series of questions that the spectator must answer, or at least contemplate, for themselves.
I would like to leave the image of the apple being placed in the hand of the audience member as the final one for the chapter as I believe it elegantly illustrates the ethical question of responsibility. However, as Levinas himself notes, there is often no simple answer to such a question. Indeed, of the death of the other he states: ‘first one says, “I do not know.”’ These are the first words that come, and which are fitting.’ (quoted in Robbins 121). He further suggests that the first response might be the statement of, ‘here I am’ (127). The latter response is the most significant here. Through asking the audience to participate in the performances described, the works foreground such statements of presence. It is worth noting briefly the theological context that Levinas’s statement of presence is informed by, that of God’s call to Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac. Claire Katz, in her discussion of Levinas, acknowledges this context, stating: ‘The “here I am” [me voici], hineni, in Hebrew, implies a sensitivity, a total awareness, or an openness to respond. In a sense, Abraham’s words imply that the response actually precedes the utterance of the phrase. To utter “here I am” is already to be ready to respond’ (Katz). Whilst the theological aspects of Levinas’ philosophy are of central importance to it, they are beyond the bounds of this thesis. However, I acknowledge them here as they usefully illustrate a tension that runs through his own work as well as in the examples of Holocaust theatre discussed in this chapter: that is, the difficult and problematic aspects of replying, ‘here I am.’ Whilst Levinas, drawing on the story of Abraham, argues that our unquestioning allegiance should be to the other (subtly suggesting that alterity is an expression of the divine) the story itself presents an almost insurmountable challenge – that of the willingness of Abraham to sacrifice his son (as an image of himself.) It is for this very reason that this thesis, as Grehan and Thompson’s work has recently done, seeks to take the kind of radical compassion that marks Levinas ethics and explore it in a theatrical context that is pragmatic as well as philosophical, giving more flexibility to its central proposals. What I hope that this chapter has contributed to the overall discussion of the thesis is the way that theatre ‘calls into being what is absent’ as a way of allowing an acknowledgment of human suffering not simply as a historical fact but a continuing contemporary crisis. Out of such acknowledgment, an ethical claim is placed upon the spectator that demands their response. What must we do with the bitter fruit that such theatre bears forth?

Theatre’s particularity, as I have argued, is its uniquely responsive character. It is not so much determined by a set of pragmatic or aesthetic conditions, as it is by
the way in which it makes what is unrepresentable, or inexplicable, ‘palpable,’ as Alan Read suggests (quoted in Grehan 24). The postdramatic resistance to interpretation is a key example of such a practice. What the theatre examples in this chapter powerfully illustrate, and in a way that resonates with Żmijewski’s argument of the previous chapter, is that other human bodies, rather than evidentiary objects, are able to make a powerful ethical claim upon spectators. At this point of conclusion it is useful to return to Grotowski once more, in particular the beliefs that underpinned his paratheatrical period. At the core of his thinking at this time was an insistence on unmediated encounters between self and other. Such encounters were a means of awakening in participants their fundamental interdependence. He wrote:

I can also say to myself: I am water, pure, which flows, living water; and then the source is he, she, not I: he whom I am going forward to meet, before whom I do not defend myself. Only if he is the source, I can be the living water (115).

Grotowski’s statement finds great concord with Leinvas in the sense that the latter wrote that: ‘the self cannot survive by itself alone, cannot find meaning within its own being-in-the-world’ (quoted in Butler 132). Ethics requires a point of contact; it takes place within a community. Indeed, as Phillip Cole notes, ‘the phrase “ethical community” is tautological, in that communities are ethical by definition. Without … relations of reciprocity, we have no community’ (89). This contact, according to both Levinas and Grotowski, need not be physical however. Just as Levinas suggested that the face of the other might be manifest in ways other than literally, Grotowski noted that the self and other need not necessarily physically meet:

Every essential experience of our life is being realized through the fact that there is someone with us. And it does not matter whether that other person is present now, at this moment, or was present once, or will only be; that person either is actually, tangibly there, or exists as a need actualizing itself – “he,” that other who is coming, is emerging from the shadows, is pervading our life – in us embodied, our flesh and blood (120).

The emergence that Grotowski describes might well be thought of as what Levinas terms the call of the other. What is most significant is the need for contact. Butler similarly suggests, as has been cited previously, that: ‘we come to exist, as it were, in the moment of being addressed’ (130). Theatre provides such a point of address.
So far in this chapter I have argued that theatricality has an important role to play in enabling a realization of Levinas’ ethical proposal. Both theatre particularly and theatricality as a kind of perceptive function call into being what is absent in a way that allows an acknowledgment of the suffering of the other as a concern for us. In the case of Rwanda and the concentration camps discussed, it was objects, sometimes even human remains, which were the prime point of the theatrical gaze. Such objects functioned in a prosopopoeian manner, appearing as if to speak. Such an imagined speaking, I argued, indicates a theatrical ethics that seeks to restate the lost voice. In looking at theatrical performances in this chapter, I have asked how theatre’s inherently participatory character – it requires an audience in order to proceed – reinforces the ethical claim that Levinas describes as issuing from the face of the other. In the case of theatre, the moment of address is much more literally realized than in the situations previously discussed. At the same time, the chapter has touched on the limitations of such theatrical encounter between actor and spectator. Grotowski in particular provides a useful set of questions around how far an ethics of encounter might be realized within theatre as we generally understand it. Artaud and Fischer-Lichte have also made their contributions to this chapter in their various suggestions of a dissolution or reversal of the usual audience/actor relationship. In Fischer-Lichte’s case, which she most convincingly demonstrates through her discussion of Abramovich’s *Lips of Thomas*, a theatrical ethics may only be fully realized when audience members are literally called to take responsibility for the performer. She describes this as an ideal transformative shift. Each of these arguments suggests the necessity of community and connection. They reiterate the kind of coming-into-being that happens only by way of the address of the other. At the same time, Lehmann’s postdramatic aesthetics place a kind of wedge between the performance and audience in the sense that he emphasizes postdramatic works’ resistance to interpretation. Whereas in his paratheatrical vision Grotowski seeks understanding, Lehmann’s work suggests that this is ultimately unrealizable. What we might finally say of *Arbeit*, therefore, is that it suggests that such work – seeking understanding – must be an ongoing commitment and that this commitment must be constantly renewed through its reinvention. Within such reinvention, critically reflexive practices of identification play a pivotal role, and create a strong link between the aesthetic and the political.
The question, then, in the remaining chapters of the thesis, centers around the possibility of what might be described as sincere contact or points of encounter at tourist sites. Where a theatrical ethics perhaps fails most in a tourist situation is in its lack of inauguration of community between its participants. In this overlooked area, however, I argue lies the greatest potential for an ethical, or transformative, experience.
Chapter four: Representation and the question of the other

Introduction:

In this chapter I consider a series of different presentations of the face of the other in the context of Vietnamese ‘War tourism.’ I focus on three sites: the War Remnants Museum in Ho Chi Minh City, the Hoa Lo Prison in Hanoi, and the Cu Chi Tunnels. Across each of the examples, I ask whether representational practices that depict such faces might in any way be thought of, in theatrical terms, as ethical. The case of Vietnam War tourism is so full of kitsch, so politicized and so marked by cultural difference that it usefully challenges a simple application of Levinas. In this way, many of the examples provide a certain zero point, against which the case for the ethical might be built. The chapter does not argue for these tourist instances as ethical substitutions, but rather explores what their failures as such might tell us. These failure are not total, however. I argue that within the faltering quality that marks each of the sites, some small glimmers of the ethical emerge, demonstrating the possibility, despite Levinas’ skepticism, of the call of the other, expressed theatrically (in the sense that Weber argues theatricality as a medium), issuing from within aesthetic representation.

Whilst my examples are not strictly dramatic, I continue to engage an analytical framework that is theatrically informed. The museums and guided tours do, as with the Rwandan and concentration camps examples discussed, incorporate certain dramatic elements. These include: the use of sculptures, mannequins and staged tableau; the incorporation of affectively shocking material; the use of narrative by tour guides; and interactive attractions, such as the Cu Chi tunnels:

The tunnel tour – dubbed “Vietnam’s answer to Disneyland” and “Disney and Fellini do Nam” by visitors – is organized to have tourists make believe they are heroic VCs; they crawl in the tunnels, eat “VC food” and join the VC-dolls for photos. Some tours include the opportunity to dress up in VC pajamas and for target practice with M-16s and AK-47s for US $1 per bullet. Those who are successful are awarded with medals or VC scarves (Alneng 474).
Significantly, theatricality is engaged, as discussed in previous chapters, to call into being what is absent. This is particularly necessary in a country where very little visible evidence of the War (to the untrained tourist eye) remains. Indeed, when I took a tour of the DMZ it consisted of busing to a series of sites where no evidence remained of what took place there.

In addressing the ethical limits that representation of a theatrical character might encounter, it is useful to return to Ricoeur’s conception of mimesis as discussed in the introduction to this thesis. To recap, he proposes that mimesis is made up of three aspects: prefiguration, configuration and transfiguration. Prefiguration is a shared repertory, or ‘pre-understanding,’ from which the configurative object is drawn, so to speak. For sensible configuration to take place, it needs to be based on what is already common. Indeed, Ricoeur argues, ‘the condition of action and suffering, far from being ineffable, is always already understood’ (141). What has been challenged in this thesis (and elsewhere) is the possibility of a ‘shared repertory’ in all instances. What happens when the magnitude of the suffering is such that it exceeds such a repertory, or when cultural boundaries challenge the notion of a shared ‘pre-understanding’? Does mimesis, in the sense meant by Ricoeur (and Aristotle), in these instances both ethically and aesthetically fail? In looking at examples of tourism in Vietnam, I am concerned primarily, as noted, with such instances of failure. I consider the pressure placed upon mimesis in an environment characterized by a lack of shared understanding.

Examples such as the Cu Chi tunnels demonstrate the emphasis on affective experience as a way of attempting to reconfigure tourists’ prefigurative repertory. This particular aspect of tourism in Vietnam is theatrical in character and leads us interestingly to Levinas’ discussions of sensibility and its relationship to representation and ethics. In his essay, “Sensibility and the Face,” he implicitly suggests that it is via an affective sensibility, which is somehow cut loose from the objectifying nature of vision and touch, that alterity might be perceived. He draws a distinction between conventional enjoyment (derived from processes of representation and objectification) and sensibility (or sensation). Conventional enjoyment results from the subject-object relationship of perception generally; the sense of a ‘grasp’ whose intention is satisfied. Sensibility, on the other hand, ‘is not a fumbling objectification,’ but rather an ‘enjoyment “anterior” to the crystallization of consciousness, I and non-I into subject and object’ (Totality and Infinity 188). Such
enjoyment is ‘endowed with a dynamism other than that of perception’ (187). In pointing to this dynamism, which could also be understood as alterity, Levinas urges a mode of engagement other than conventional enjoyment, calling for: ‘a dimension of transcendence’ that ‘leads us to a relation totally different from experience in the sensible sense of the term’ (193). It is precisely this type of experience, almost uncharacterizable, that has been the subject of this study, in particular the relationship that theatricality might have to making such experience available.

In developing the argument of “Sensibility and the Face,” Levinas focuses particularly on vision and touch as objectifying forms of perception. By way of explanation he uses the example of the relationship of vision, object and light. He states: ‘The eye does not see the light, but the object in the light. Vision is therefore a relation with a “something” established in relationship to what is not a “something”’ (189). He describes light as driving out shadows and emptying space. It is useful to think of theatre/theatricality as such an illumination that renders the absent object visible, allowing the process of objectification to take place. Levinas further characterizes the functions of light or touch as revealing a certain void; light ‘makes space arise specifically as a void’ (189). By way of vision or touch, the subject traverses this void in order to grasp the object that has arisen from it. Theatre and dark tourism could equally be thought of as such traversal activity.

What is particularly interesting about Levinas’ characterization of the void is his emphasis of its substantive qualities: while on the one hand it is a nothingness, on the other, it is a something:

If the void that light produces is the space from which it drives out darkness it is not equivalent to nothingness, even in the absence of any particular object, 

*there is* this void itself” (190).

That is, even as a negation of substance, the void still possesses a palpable quality; indeed, its very palpability is precisely *because of* its empty character. Levinas describes this empty plenitude as ‘*there is.*’ (As noted earlier, whilst the theological aspect of Levinas’ writing is not of concern here, one must note that such ‘there is-ness’ seems informed by it in the sense of a divine presence.) As has been argued already, such a *there is-ness* marks dark tourist sites. On the one hand, this very palpability is part of the affective draw. On the other, as I have argued, confronting such a void is often too much to bear; as with Libeskind’s Museum, such voids are
often filled in. Indeed, Levinas himself argues (drawing upon Pascal): ‘The silence of infinite spaces is terrifying. The invasion of the there is does not correspond to any representation’ (190). Just as Levinas argues that vision or touch are forms of ‘forgetting the horror’ because they produce an object, so too might theatre be understood as such a forgetting in the sense that Peter Brook describes theatre as a filling of the ‘empty space’ (9). In the face of the terror of there is, theatre is called to provide an object that makes the void bearable.

Levinas characterizes such filling in of empty space as a modality of enjoyment that relies upon a separation that might be overcome: ‘Vision opens upon a perspective, upon a horizon, and describes a traversable distance, invites the hand to movement and contact, and ensures them’ (191). Because of its binding to a horizon, he further argues that vision itself is not ‘transcendence,’ rather:

It ascribes a signification by the relation it makes possible…. Light conditions the relationship between data; it makes possible the signification of objects that border one another. It does not enable one to approach them face to face (191).

For this reason, the face of the other should not be understood as a perceivable object of vision (or touch) per se: ‘Vision is a forgetting of the there is because of the essential satisfaction, the agreeableness of sensibility, enjoyment, contentment with the finite without concern for the infinite’ (191). In this way the relationship between vision and object (representation) is characterized as ethically insufficient. On the other hand:

Total alterity, in which a being does not refer to enjoyment and presents itself out of itself, does not shine forth in the form by which things are given to us, for beneath form things conceal themselves (192).

That is, it is not the physical face as such, but what is concealed within, beneath or beyond the face that signifies alterity. What this means for the argument of this thesis is that, following Levinas, a type of theatre or tourist encounter is required (if it is to be ethical) that does not rely on (visual) representations whose outcomes are graspable objects in the sense of reducible to conventional understanding. It is also worth noting that such a description calls to mind Longinus’ sublime, as referred to in
the Introduction, as a force that, in essence, shocks us out of a purely subjective point of view.

What is most significant for the chapter at hand, however, is the sense in which theatre’s characteristic of ‘calling forth what is absent,’ or providing an object for contemplation, might thwart ethical relations as stipulated by Levinas. At the end of “Sensibility and the Face,” he briefly turns his attention to the subject of art. He describes the function of art as endowing ‘things with something like a façade – that by which objects are not only seen, but are as objects on exhibition’ (192). Their pleasure therefore comes from their eminently graspable character. On the other hand:

The darkness of matter would denote the state of being that precisely has no facade…. By the façade the thing which keeps its secret is exposed, enclosed in its monumental essence and in its myth, in which it gleams like a splendour but does not deliver itself. It captivates by its grace as if by magic but does not reveal itself (192-93).

Art, therefore, is ultimately characterized as an unyielding force whose monumental aspect (particularly relevant to many of the sites discussed) withholds the very type of experience of both, as Levinas terms it, transcendence, and, as a constituent of this, horror. In its argument for a theatrical ethic, this thesis of course contests such an understanding of art. I shall shortly draw upon Beckett’s short play, Catastrophe, in order to make this point more forcefully.

Implicit in Levinas’ argument, or perhaps arising in response to it, is the question of how art might formulate itself around an open and non-objectifying sensibility. Levinas does not entirely dismiss such a possibility. Indeed, at the beginning of the essay he states that:

We can speak of enjoyment or sensation… when one has seen or heard much, and the object revealed by the experience is steeped in the enjoyment – or suffering of pure sensation, in which one has bathed and lived as in qualities without support (187-88).

The support that Levinas refers to here, the release from which produces something approaching the ethical, might be understood in the sense of the ‘objective correlatives’ that T.S. Eliot describes (49). It is only when such representational supports are removed that the face of the other might be apprehended. Levinas argues
that such removal ‘cuts across sensibility… it cuts across the vision of forms and can be stated neither in terms of contemplation nor in terms of practice. It is the face; its revelation is speech’ (Totality and Infinity 193). The revelatory speech is not one’s own, but that which arises from the other. Such speech, like the face itself, should not be understood literally but as an expression of the ‘there is’ of the other. Levinas concludes: ‘The relation with the other alone introduces a dimension of transcendence, and leads us to a relation totally different from experience in the sensible sense of the term, relative and egoist’ (193). We might surmise, therefore, that artistic practice that responds to Levinas’ ethics should be non-sensible in character, in the manner meant above.

But how might such non-sensible practice be realized? The question is important in that it grapples with how Levinas’ ethics might find a form from within which to be enacted. In The Pleasure of the Play, States addresses the relationship between ethics and theatrical mimesis insofar as theatre often concerns itself with representations of suffering. His account is particularly useful in its focus on an ontological reading of the pleasure (sensibility) generated by the representative act, and provides a varying perspective on theatre’s objectivising character. States points out that whilst, on the one hand, mimesis may, after Aristotle, have an educative function (Ricoeur emphasizes this as its cohering quality), on the other, it can be understood as a form of non-cognitive pleasure. He argues:

Pleasure… arises from a dimension of actuality in which the self and other are joined and exchange natures, thus offering a momentary solution to the enigma of our ontological isolation from the things of the world (20).

The pleasure of mimesis, of imitation, rather than arising from an understanding of what is in the world is instead produced by a realization – and temporary mediation through joining and exchange – of the affective disjunction of being in the world. This occurs because mimesis is always bound by a logic where it both is and is not its own subject. Thus, while Levinas might be sceptical, I argue that mimesis can be understood as pointing to the ‘otherwise than being’ that is being’s shadow. States continues:

Mental images must be brought outside to this unspecifiable nonplace [theatre] between the self and the empirical world, where they are given duration and
States argues that the process of objectivization is a necessary one that counters the horror that Levinas describes. Mimesis is a condition of being and a necessary response to engaging with a world that it external to us. Most significantly, however, what Levinas argues exists only outside of representation, States suggests may actually be latent within it.

States elaborates on this position through a discussion of Samuel Beckett’s *Catastrophe*. The short play concerns a Director and his Assistant sculpting, as it were, the figure of a Performer in order to create the final catastrophic image of an unnamed and undescribed play. The Performer is an abject figure, not just in the context of his role, but also by way of his treatment by the Director. He/she stands passively on a plinth while the Director and Assistant variously modify his/her body position. They never speak directly to the Performer, only about him/her, and the Performer never speaks. After some deliberation the Director settles upon an image in which the Performer is positioned with head bowed, ‘whitened cranium,’ ‘clawlike’ hands, bared neck, legs and shins, all with exposed skin ‘whitened’ (Beckett 297-300). The Assistant lastly offers a suggestion that the Performer raises his/her head slightly at the very end of the performance. The Director accepts and declares that the play will be a great hit.

Quite obviously the action of the short play critiques the sense in which theatrical representation is a façade. It also suggests the staged other as an abject figure over whom the aesthetic responsibility exerted is of a negative type. Yet Beckett’s ending of the play problematizes such a simplified critique of theatrical mimesis. Once satisfied with his creation, the Director shouts:

D: Stop! [Pause] Now … let ‘em have it. [Fade-out of general light. Pause. Fade out of light on body. Light on head alone. Long pause.] Terrific! He’ll have them on their feet. I can hear it from here. [Pause. Distant storm of applause. P raises his head, fixes the audience. The applause falters, dies. Long Pause. Fade-out of light on the face.] (301)
Significantly, the audience, upon seeing the *face* of the performer, falter in their applause – the revelation breaks the mimetic contract. The pleasure of what States describes as when the ‘self and other [spectator and actor] are joined and exchange natures,’ is broken by way of the actor’s direct gaze, which challenges the audience’s applause of theatrical pain. Yet, this is not a unique challenge. Certain performances discourage applause by way of removing the curtain call. When I attended *The Investigation* in Nuremberg, for example, applause was implicitly understood as inappropriate. *Catastrophe* is about more than the failure of mimesis, however. In dramatizing a limit point, Beckett asks (without answering) how we should feel about the relationship between worldly and theatrical catastrophe. The fact that the play was dedicated to Vaclav Havel during the time of his imprisonment attests to this intention.

States similarly argues that the main drama of the play lies in the relationship between what he describes as the ‘world-negating’ quality of theatre – the manner in which it is only a virtual object – and the *insistences* of the world: ‘the look that fixes us must be taken as a mischievous gesture through which Beckett writes us into the play’ (210). Mimesis, in revealing its own artifice, is the very means by which the ethical gesture, or question, is staged. In this instant, States argues, theatre comes ‘face to face with its double, the thing it can never be, which Lear called the thing itself’ (213). By this account, mimesis is not so much a configuration, as Ricoeur argues, but rather a pulling apart of the comfortable binary of spectator and spectacle. Beckett’s play demonstrates that mimesis generates a certain pleasure through its objectivising function. At the same time, by way of its very failure or limitations, it reveals the thing, or rather no-thing, which is otherwise than being. What I would like to argue, is that ‘the thing itself,’ which States identifies by way of Lear, can be thought of as the other, as alterity; in pretending being, theatre necessarily points to what is otherwise than being. The question for this chapter is whether or not the representational efforts discussed, which have a theatrical dimension to them in their substitutive quality, achieve this.
Towards an ethics of faltering:
The War Remnants Museum, Hoa Lo Prison and Cu Chi Tunnels

How, then, to proceed with this line of enquiry as related to Vietnamese war tourism? Whilst Levinas provides an ethical framework to work through, it is necessary to place this, along with discussions of theatricality, in a political context. Indeed, the politicization of tourism demonstrates the still contested aspect of historicizations of the war. Despite the fact that, for Western tourists, Vietnam-the-country is largely known through Vietnam-the-war, such evidences are largely absent (in as much as a tourist might recognize them.) Post-war Vietnamese moved quickly to rebuild with little sentimental attachment to the detritus left behind by the last in a long series of foreign oppressions, which between the American, French and Chinese had been going on for around a thousand years. In the light of such evidentiary absences, war tourism in Vietnam relies heavily on museums, reconstructed historical sites, and the role of guides in evoking what can no longer be seen. Each of these modes is, to a greater or lesser extent, a form of dramatizing the nation’s recent past.

While at sites such as the Rwandan memorials or European concentration camps, accounts of atrocities are generally agreed upon, in the case of Vietnam, Western cultural sentiment still spans a broad spectrum of positions. Victor Alneng and Scott Laderman’s accounts of tourism in Vietnam, which I draw upon in this chapter, each point out that whilst some tourists, as a result of their visit, are ‘converted’ to the Vietnamese perspective on the war, others remain unconvinced by hearing the story of the ‘enemy.’ In this sense, dramatic conflict is embedded within the continuing rhetorical conflict. Tourism facilitates a strong articulation of the Vietnamese historical account. Keith Hollinshead argues that, particularly for postcolonial societies, tourism is central to the programme of developing an internationally recognized, self-determined identity:

The emerging postcolonial fictionality of nationhood will produce – partly through the vocalizations of what we might call “Declarative Tourism” – new local citizens and new political subjects. Tourism as a discursive event will help yield a new politics of style. Certain old coherencies about people, about places and about pasts will increasingly become suspect as new communities are imagined into being and called onto the international stage (33).
Defining declarative tourism more closely, Hollinshead describes it as a ‘fantasmic projection [that] promises … a whole new creative spectrum of options via tourism as “a” or “the” enabling speech act’ (36). As will be shown in the following examples, Vietnam certainly takes of hold of tourism as stage upon which to put its own version of history.

In order to lay a foundation for examining this relationship between ethics, identity politics and theatricality I would like to preface the discussion of tourism in Vietnam with a brief discussion of the role of theatre during the War. As an example of drama as an objectifying practice, it is particularly illustrative of the ethical-representational problematic, the stages upon which these dramas took place being similar in character to that described by Hollinshead. In 1969 TDR (The Drama Review) published an article simply entitled, “Vietnam.” It strikingly illustrates the intertwining of theatre and identificatory politics through documents that describe the use of theatre by both American and North Vietnamese forces as part of the War effort. In the North, the National Liberation Front and Viet Cong made extensive use of theatre as part of their propaganda campaigns. Small drama groups would travel from village to village performing songs and skits which emphasized traditional Vietnamese culture and the importance of opposing American action. The American army, realizing the significance and success of these theatrical troupes, devised their own drama programme. The American dramatic groups were called Van Tac Vu Cultural/Drama teams (VTV). Each team consisted of four men and two women. The teams, operating in competition with one another, were scored on their performances. They had a wide reach and would perform in up to twenty villages and hamlets during a month, to thousands of audience members. Performances included a number of different kinds of material including traditional and modern songs, magic tricks, dances and short plays (often comedies).

A US army memo published by TDR gives examples of material supplied by VTV teams to be performed in response to the ‘VC Tet Attack.’ These materials included two modern songs, “Resentful Spring,” and “I feel So Sad” (for children), a traditional song adapted to the contemporary political context, and a skit. This skit, “The Path of Life,” was a 25-minute dramatic performance:

Plot involves a young VC cadre who participated in the Saigon attacks and was wounded in the process. He manages to escape, after witnessing much
destruction wrought against the people. He makes his way back to his fiancee's home outside of Saigon. She tries to hide his identity. In the conversations between father, daughter, mother and VC the basic conflicts become clear. The boy joined the VC following the destruction of his home by GVN artillery and the actions of a corrupt indemnification official. But as the conversations develop, many things become clear. He discerns the extreme cynicism of the VC hierarchy in sending people to die and in killing many innocent people. He realizes that his own house was destroyed in the process of fighting against this cynicism. He finds out that the corrupt official has ended up in jail. His mind turns completely against the VC cause and he makes arrangements to surrender to GVN forces. Even the father, who was an uncommitted neutralist in the beginning of the skit, becomes strongly anti-VC as the conflicts resolve themselves (TDR 148).

Through small civilian gatherings, and across a grass-roots network, drama was used to fight the ideological and psychological war of political allegiances. These performances attempted to strengthen the power of what Ricoeur terms the prefigurative repertory through its insistent dramatic configuration.

In the same issue TDR also published journalist Cathy Wilkerson’s account of an anti-American, National Liberation Front performance:

One dance we saw depicted a group of village women and an old man who were hiding a young man from conscription into the Saigon army. The women wiled and reprimanded the American soldiers who appeared in pressed camouflage uniforms as they marched in highly stylized, rigid form onto the stage. The American soldiers reacted to the women by trying to do the twist with them – hips swinging with weighted awkwardness. As the soldiers attempted to shift into more seductive approaches, the Vietnamese women struck back.

The soldiers then tried to capture the old man, apparently threatening to do away with him unless he revealed the whereabouts of the young man. Again the women attacked the soldiers and rescued the old man. As the soldiers continued to be frustrated in their attempts they became more threatening and violent. Finally they uncovered the hiding young man.

In the ensuing struggle, in which the heavy weapons of the Americans are drawn – the villagers having no weapons – the women continue to battle with the soldiers. Finally they trick the soldiers out of their weapons through a series of rapid and complex movements. Without their weapons, the American soldiers cringe in fear. They express an awareness of the strength of the women. They are then sent scurrying away, while the villagers celebrate their triumph (152).
The American other is diametrically opposed to Levinas’ characterization precisely because of their objectification. The stylization of the American soldiers’ movements is illustrative of such a de-personalizing strategy. Wilkerson described mixed emotions in watching the performances:

The atmosphere was strange for us. It was moving to be for the first time in a large crowd of people who explicitly shared a common opposition to American imperialism and aggression in Vietnam. At the same time, it was important to me to remind myself that the individual soldiers in the dances were symbolic of the American intervention as a whole. That when we joined in the applause at the defeat of the soldiers, it was not to celebrate the fate of the particular soldier, but the successful resistance to U.S. military power. The more we learned of specific details about the way the Americans conduct their war, especially the way the G.I.s are treated by the U.S. command, the incredibly ugly and self-defeating situations they are forced into, the more I felt in closer alliance with the G.I.s on the bottom of the dirty little war… (153).

Wilkerson’s unease reflects that distance and division that the performance emphasized, and her ambivalent position within such a demonstration – she was both American and against her country’s activities.

In their conflicting configurations, both accounts equally demonstrate the absolute objectification of the other’s face in a way that divests the gazing subject of responsibility – the kind of dis-identification that Butler fears. In these dramatic examples (there is no ‘resistance to interpretation’ here), theatre facilitates an anti-ethics. The other is made utterly graspable through the shallowness of their depiction (or façade). Their rendering has no affective weight (in the sense meant by Levinas.) As noted already, in these examples the other is de-personified – or dis-identified. They do not speak, but rather are spoken for, over or through. Their face, in a Levinasian sense, is occluded. They are, as Rancière notes, ‘bodies that are an object of speech without themselves having a chance to speak’ (96). Indeed, a speaking for or through the other, rather than yielding to their call, is a quality that marks many of the tourist examples. In the examples that follow I examine the ethical tension that arises from contests of speech. For the Western tourist is other to the Vietnamese local as much as locals are other to tourists. The discursive struggle is therefore also ethical, and one which engages sensibility and affect within its overall project. What the example of theatre during the War helps demonstrate is the anti-ethical
engagement of sensibility and affect in the discursive struggle between competing configurations of national identity and of ideological imperative.

It is important to note that such ideological conflict has been strongly embedded within Western, particularly American, cultural representations and that this repertory of images is already familiar to tourists when they arrive in Vietnam. From the anti-war films of the seventies, _The Deer Hunter_ (dir. Michael Cimino 1978), _Coming Home_ (dir. Hal Ashby 1978), _Apocalypse Now_ (dir. Francis Ford Coppola 1979), to eighties block busters such as _Rambo: First Blood Part II_ (dir. George P. Cosmatos 1985), _Platoon_ (dir. Oliver Stone 1986) and _Good Morning Vietnam_ (dir. Barry Levinson 1987), to popular television series _China Beach_ (1988-1991) and _Tour of Duty_ (1987-1990), to films of the last decade including _We Were Soldiers_ (dir. Randall Wallace 2002) and _Tigerland_ (dir. Joel Schumacher 2000), the Western public has largely learnt about/dealt with/worked through the history of Vietnam (told from an American perspective) via the screen. Such images frame tourists’ expectations and tourist operators subsequently respond by serving these expectations. Scott Laderman notes that from the 1990s onwards, when Vietnam was opened up for wide spread tourism, travelers:

> [A] rrived carrying not just backpacks and cameras but guidebooks and ideological suppositions. They were not seeing Vietnam for the first time; they had seen “Vietnam” already. It had been on the big screen dozens of times (Laderman 9).

This Western repertory contributes to a certain tension: on the one hand American expectations are reflected back in a kitsch economy that will literally sell them back US zippo lighters and war medals (fakes); but on the other, Americans (and others who fought with them) are vilified within the Government-sanctioned narratives of the war. The proliferation of Western prefigurative images serves as the grounds for Vietnamese authorities pushing their own version of history in as strong a manner as possible – the gruesome images at the War Remnants Museum, for example, where ideological conflict continues over interpretations of the historical record. The fact that Western travelers refer to the Vietnam War and the Vietnamese the American War further indicates this conflict. However, if tourists come looking for evidence of the Vietnam War, what they find, for the most part, is that of the American one.
War Remnants Museum and Hoa Lo Prison – challenging the complacency of vision

As noted already, museums and tourist sites provide a declarative arena within which the Vietnamese government is able to state their version of the country’s complex history. Generally tourist audiences are cast in a de-facto secondary witnessing role inasmuch as attendance requires observance of Vietnamese social ‘catastrophe.’ This is explicitly demonstrated at the War Remnants Museum, most notably through a series of exhibits featuring shocking and gruesome imagery. The museum is ironically housed in the former US Information Service building, enacting a reversal or inversion of the information previously provided. It offers a counter-narrative to American versions of the War and in this sense attempts to reconfigure American perceptions it. Laderman notes:

The institution provided a space in which foreigners often remarked about being exposed for the first time to a narrative of war with which they were previously unfamiliar, a narrative that, in its most basic focus, placed Vietnamese rather than American experiences at its centre (152).

While the focus is generally on American military action, the support of other nations, such as Australia and New Zealand, broadens the catchment of those implicated in the damage done by the War.

Displays are divided into a number of sections, each housed in different galleries. The first three, titled “Historical Truths”, “Requiem”, and “Vestiges of War,” are located in a building that stands in front of the main structure. In effect they act as a preparatory lesson before entering the larger galleries, providing a Vietnam-centred history of the War, giving a historical context that covers international involvement both in terms of the military and the media. Inside, an exhibition called, “Aftermaths,” shifts the focus of the Museum’s narrative to the effects of the War on the country’s civilian population. “Aftermaths” shows gruesome images of damaged bodies: some mortally wounded by bombs, guns or mines, others disfigured by the chemical warfare waged by the American-led forces. There are pictures of children born in the aftermath of the war, disfigured and disabled by the legacy of toxic weapons.
The demands of the “Aftermaths” section are rigorous and significantly challenge the viewer’s ability to look. The *Lonely Planet* guidebook notes:

There are few museums in the world that drive home so well the point that war is horribly brutal and that many of its victims are civilians. Even those who supported the war would have a difficult time not being horrified by the photos of children mangled by US bombing and napalming. There are also scenes of torture – it takes a strong stomach to look at these (340-41; Ray, Dragicevic and Louis).

The faces shown are brutalized and disfigured (as is often the rest of the body). The affect of the images could certainly be understood as one in which the nakedness and destitution (as Levinas describes it) of the other makes a claim upon us. As with Beckett’s audience, there is no easy way of responding. Visitors are caught between looking, and in doing so, acknowledging, and looking away. In such hesitation and decision perhaps lies the most powerful ethical component of such imagery. In turning toward the images, the identification that visitors are required to make is that of the wounded face of the other as worthy of human dignity and respect. In this sense, via the representing object – the photograph – visitors are asked to *de-objectify* (or re-personify) the Vietnamese other. While Levinas problematizes the relationship between vision and ethics, I refer back to his statement regarding ‘sensation when one has seen or heard much’ such that an objectifying gaze is unsettled. It seems that the potential for such destabilization exists within the confronting images of the “Aftermaths” section of the Museum. While the availability of the face of the other is ensnared in certain political and rhetorical calculations, an ethical claim is made upon visitors nonetheless. This most significantly takes place in the very visceral challenge of meeting the face of the other. Despite the monumentalization of images within the context of the Museum, the challenge that they make to the complacency of vision necessarily raises ethical concerns, even if clumsily done.

Laderman’s discussion of the Museum’s visitors’ books attests to the effect of this challenge. The books contain comments from a broad spectrum of visitors, including comments from former soldiers, their family members and young travelers. While entries reflected varying responses, the majority, he noted, expressed sympathy and regret for American action; many offered apology:
I want to express the sorrow I feel for the horrors presented in this museum. On behalf of my prayer community in Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A., I want to apologize for the violence committed here in Vietnam (quoted in Laderman 167-68).

Another commented:

My wife and I come here representing the U.S. and our fathers who fought in the war. We wish to ask for your forgiveness for the crimes committed against the Vietnamese people (quoted in Laderman 174).

The books indicate the affective power of the museum. They make visible visitors’ desire to respond to what they have seen. They also provide a space within which tourists’ motivating concerns for visiting the site might be expressed. These public responses materially demonstrate an expansion of the sphere of concern.

Not all responses are so sympathetic, however. Alneng notes that some American tourists choose to reject the images as Vietnamese propaganda:

Claiming she enjoyed her visit to the museum, a backpacker laughingly dismissed a picture of some GIs showing off some decapitated Vietnamese with the comment: “It’s funny really, this government propaganda, I mean, the Americans never did things like that” (476).

In the case above, the heavy-handed reconfigurative approach failed. Alneng’s example demonstrates that the dramatic (in the colloquial sense) identificatory politics played out at the Museum alienates some visitors, leading them to perceive it as a political display whose claims are questionable. Such ambivalence is common in online comments:

The displays inside that leave you questioning what really went on during the Vietnam War. Although the name of the museum has been changed from that of the Museum of American War Crimes, the Americans were the main perpetrators of the horrors you will see inside this museum. The museum has a large number of photos detailing atrocities from the effects of Agent Orange and other chemical defoliant sprays, the use of napalm and phosphorus bombs…. Very graphic which just leaves you questioning “why”? (VirtualTourist "War Remnants Museum")

A museum dedicated to war artifacts. Formerly called the “War Crimes Museum.” Its name was changed to the more politically correct “War Remnants Museum.” It basically tells a one sided story of the war from the
communists' perspective. The message is communist good, America bad (VirtualTourist "War Remnants Museum").

It is precisely the lack of a common repertory that undermines the story the Museum tells. Within such a skeptical gaze, the face of the other remains distant and ‘inscrutable.’ Although the Museum strives to make known the suffering incurred by Vietnam during the War, at the same time, an attitude of (not unjustifiable) ambivalence is directed towards it audience. While exterior evidences are made available, access to the interiority of the ‘catastrophe’ remains difficult.

The Hoa Lo Prison, however, is characterized by a certain openness which makes its own dialectic tension more complex and interesting. While the material at the War Remnants Museum is dramatic in the sense of being shocking, highly affective and a generally staged argument for a different perspective on the War, the dramatic quality of Hoa Lo is much more explicitly theatrical. This theatricality is activated through representational effects, treatment of the space, and positioning of the audience. The site-specific memorial is located in what remains of the original prison, a large French Colonial structure built in the late nineteenth century. The French used the prison for many years as a Vietnamese detention centre. It was later used by the Vietnamese to imprison captured Americans. Its colloquial name – the Hanoi Hilton – reflects the Western understanding of it as a site of American suffering. Notably, former US Presidential nominee, John McCain, was imprisoned there. Laderman notes that guidebooks generally favour this Western understanding:

[The American] fascination with Hoa Lo is not with the harrowing Vietnamese experience under the French. Most of the guidebook authors’ attention was devoted, rather, to the relatively brief Vietnamese imprisonment of Americans. The effacement of Vietnamese history by a narrative of American suffering thus appears to be nearly complete (2-3).

In a way that counters such effacement, the presentation of the prison prominently foregrounds it as a site of Vietnamese suffering.

Upon entry to Hoa Lo visitors are supplied with a floor plan while further signage assists them in their journey around the space. The building itself is the key exhibit and the museum mixes reconstructed and original features in order to give the space an affective coherence. Portions of the exterior are clearly designed to give the impression of originality and there is an attempt to blend these reconstructive features
with the older sections – painting effects give the impression of the original scale and shape of parts of the site. The most prominent feature of the museum is the installation of sculpted figures, which fill many of the rooms. What is particularly striking about them, in contrast to a similar use of sculptural forms at other sites, is their evocative and poetic quality.

One first encounters the sculptures in a long hall, lined with beds on either side, to which the prisoners are shackled. The bodies are elaborately staged, suggesting relationships, circumstances and so on. The bodies are painted pale shades of grey, creating the effect of a room full of ghosts. The faces are strikingly sculpted, each with a different expression. Walking through the museum, one comes across different instances of the figures, sometimes in groups, sometimes alone. Their total effect is a dramaturgy of instances, through which tourists must travel as if audience to an austere promenade performance.

How then might these ‘other’ faces be thought of? Firstly, they are an aesthetic response to the past that usurps the primacy of ‘authentic’ evidence. In this sense they are suggestive rather than illustrative. They do not represent specific people, rather they evoke something of the quality of the experience suffered generally. The tableaux are not given lengthy explanation and visitors are left to infer their own narratives from them. Thus, there is a degree of openness in their presentation. Secondly, they point to a certain representational paradox. While on the one hand they significantly replace the kind of disembodied objects that Young is so skeptical of at Auschwitz – footless shoes, shorn hair and so on – on the other, they themselves are literal objectifications of the other. Again the question arises as to whether the faces offered by these sculptures might elicit an ethical response in the spectator. More problematically, do the figures contest a certain taboo, as might be expected if a similar display was staged at somewhere like Auschwitz, in their very representation of the unrepresentable? It is true that the subject-to-objectified-other relation remains, but precisely because the other is made object, this relationship is heightened in the very manner expressed by Beckett’s whitened figure, positioned on a plinth, who I imagine not altogether unlike the figures of Hoa Lo. If, as States argues, Catastrophe demonstrates the moment when theatre comes face to face with what it can never be, then in this case, the sculptural representations can be understood as pointing to their own emptiness.
In general, the sculptures at Hoa Lo provide a useful contrast with the War Remnants Museum in their aestheticization of the face, which is in their sharp contrast with the latter’s confronting images of real disfigurement. The figures demonstrate the potential ethical power of the aestheticized face and its arresting effect. Such faces are objects that present themselves as an enticement to look or to grasp, as Levinas describes. Yet ultimately the void through which such a gaze or grasp must travel is untraversable in its entirety; the object remains, even in its proximity, just beyond the horizon of total comprehensibility. This suggests that representation and perception possess an open as well as closed aspect. It is the tension between the two that causes spectators to falter. It is in this moment of faltering that an ethical connection to the other might be made. While neither museum entirely overcomes the sense of face of the other as distant, the instances in which such a limit is marked (or dramatized) suggests the possibility of alterity, as mimesis’ ethical shadow, making itself felt.

Cu Chi: the guide as other

In looking at Cu Chi, based on the tour I took there in 2008, I will focus on the figure of the tour guide, specifically a government employed one (as all Vietnamese guides are). If the face of the other has been thus far considered via objects, tour guides offer an opportunity to consider how such otherness is understood by way of personal encounter. Additionally, the manner in which the person is objectified brings us back to the example of theatre during the War. I argue that the government-employed guide is a persuasive performer in a manner not dissimilar to those accounts. Whilst I do not argue for my tour as a drama as such, the manner in which guides are called upon to perform is worthy of comment. Indeed, it is the competence of delivery that often determines the success of the tour. E. Fine and J. Speer, in their analysis of guides, argue that it is foremost the performance of the guide that animates the site: ‘This hypothesis stems from a rhetorical and dramatistic perspective, which views tour sites as dramatic settings, complete with audience and actors’ (75). In this dramatic analogy the guide is an actor, a multifaceted role that includes a number of what Christopher Holloway describes as ‘sub-roles’:
Typical sub-roles will include types such as “information-giver” and “fount of knowledge,” “teacher or instructor,” “motivator or ambassador for one’s country,” “entertainer or catalyst for the group,” “confidant, shepherd and ministering angel,” and “group leader and disciplinarian” (385-86).

In a continuation of the dramatic parallel, Philip Pearce describes a stage upon which the guide performs:

The physical spaces in which tourist-guide interactions take place can be seen as a kind of symbolic text. Adopting this kind of hermeneutic analogy, the environmental setting can be interpreted as a configuration of elements (functional items, spaces, barriers and props) which are arranged so that one may read the goals, rules, potential roles, and expectations for social interaction in that setting (138-40).

Pearce’s observation of the configurative aspect of the site’s presentation, and the role the guide has in explicating this, is significant. As an intermediary, the guide, especially a local guide, helps to counter the lack of a shared prefigurative repertory.

The elaborative aspect of the guide’s role, their ability to weave a narrative that draws together disparate aspects of the site, heightens the importance of the guide’s performance: ‘Interpretation and not the mere dissemination of information, is the distinguishing communicative function of the trained tourist guide’ (Cohen 15). In this sense, emotional engagement is an important part of the overall performance. Holloway notes:

Guides … wish to ensure that their passengers enjoy an experience that is more than routine, and they may use their dramaturgical skills to de-routinize the excursion. This they may do by using acting skills to involve the audience emotionally, or they may invite members of the group to share some deeply felt personal perspective of the site (388-89).

My guide at Cu Chi was such an adept performer. Weaving together his personal narrative and the site’s history, he cleverly created an emotionally charged experience.

What is most significant in the theatrical analogy is the question of whether such a staged performance by the guide – and here I narrow my focus to local guides – might enable a face to face encounter that is ethical in the sense meant by Levinas. On the one hand, such staging might be read pejoratively, in the sense that Dean MacCannell discusses cultural tourism (which one can argue that Cu Chi is an
example of) as ‘staged authenticity’ (595). MacCannell argues that tourists are motivated by the desire to get ‘behind the scenes’ in order to catch a glimpse of the authentic. This desire is always thwarted, however, by instances of staged authenticity, stylized productions that only pretend to offer an insider’s perspective. In terms of tourism based on cultural difference, MacCannell specifically identifies the stage – meant both literally (e.g. song and dance culture shows) and as a general descriptor of the cultural tourism sphere – as a space of dissimulation. This deception, he argues, is economically motivated:

Such performances seem to combine modern elements of self-interested rational planning and economic calculation with primitive costumes, weapons, music, ritual objects and practice that once existed beyond the reach of economic rationality…. The “primitivistic” performance contains the image of the primitive as a dead form. The alleged combination of modern and primitive elements is an abuse of the dead to promote the pretense of complexity as a cover for some rather simple-minded dealings based mainly on principles of accounting (quoted in Taylor 11-12).

MacCannell attacks such performances precisely because of their mimetic façade, which is seen as an unethical barrier.

Against this perspective however, tourism scholar John Taylor suggests that ethics might arise from within such performances. He argues for a move beyond object oriented ‘authenticity,’ as the paradigm through which the ethical aspect of cultural tourism is measured, to sincerity, which is focused on the nature of the encounter between tourist and other. Unlike authenticity, sincerity is not a pre-existent quality that inheres within the object, rather, it is generated through the process of the activity itself. Encounter constitutes the foundation for an ethical or sincere relationship. Taylor states:

The notion of sincerity, rather than being a “superlie”, as MacCannell would have it, implies an interactive sharing of experience between participants within a given tourism encounter…. In doing so they may undermine … essentialization and communicate important local values (16).

In discussing my tour at Cu Chi I am interested in the tension between MacCannell and Taylor’s positions, and whether sincerity is possible within such a staged environment.
The tour I participated in, organized through my guesthouse, was with around twenty other tourists of a variety of ages and nationalities. The guide was a government employee who had been taking groups to the tunnels for a number of years. The tour began when we entered the minivan and concluded around four hours later as we returned to the city. Particularly striking about our guide was his ability as a skilled orator, master storyteller, and, one suspects, wonderful actor. His ongoing narrative accompaniment to the tour elevated it from an informational outing, accompanied by opportunities for hands-on learning, to a personalized and affective historical drama. He consistently reminded us that, because of his inside knowledge, he would be able to tell us the real story, not the ‘bullshit story in the Lonely Planet,’ which was all ‘lies.’ Drawing us into an atmosphere of confidence, he told us that the Government itself would not sanction his insider account, which was often a critical one.

During the hour-long bus journey, the guide recounted his personal experience of the War and later consequences. He had fought on the wrong side, he began by declaring. Prior to the war his father had been a diplomat and had forged strong relationships with the Americans. In his teens the guide moved to America, where he trained with the US army. He then spent seven years as a soldier, mostly fighting in and around Saigon during the War. After the American withdrawal he decided not to return to the States and stayed on to continue fighting against the Viet Cong. When the Southern Vietnamese government collapsed a year later he was arrested by the new communist government and put into a re-education prison for four and a half years. He never saw his family again. His status as ‘Puppet Officer of the American Army’ meant that, according to him, he was forever black-listed from professional occupations in Vietnam. He explained that he had spent the last eighteen years working as a tour guide because it was the only official job that the government would allow him. Now he was fifty-nine, he said, and would retire next year.

The guide’s story was skillfully told within the broader context of Vietnamese history. After eighteen years of telling it he had mastered the interweaving of personal and national, managing to cover a time span from the French occupation to former Australian Prime Minister John Howard’s relatively recent visit. His constant narration throughout the tour framed and structured our experience. On the journey up, while I found his story profoundly moving, I was intrigued by the fact that he seemed so affected by recounting it, often to the point of appearing tearful.
Occasionally moments of sharp bitterness would pierce through the ‘fascinating yarn’ tone of his delivery, such as the declaration that his major mistake was that he had not known which side would win the War. The War ruined his life, he declared. When talking about his experiences in prison he expressed ambivalence, voicing regret that he had misunderstood the communists’ intentions, whilst railing against the unfairness of what their victory had meant for him personally. All the while though he stood by a love of his country and its people, particularly his ‘100 % Vietnamese wife.’ His narration was consistently marked by ambiguity, ambivalence and contradiction.

On arrival at the tunnels, his guidance shifted into a more conventional mode. He explained the significance of the various displays to us, still all the while dropping in his own “authentic” memories and insider knowledge. After visiting the different models and reconstructions, we stopped at a rest area before proceeding to the main attraction of the visit, the tunnels themselves. As we approached the benches the sound of gunfire became more and more insistent. He explained to us that there was a firing range set up. We could pay per one US dollar per bullet to fire an AK47, one of the guns favoured by the Viet Cong. A number of tourists availed themselves of this opportunity.

The guide sat down and had a beer as we passed our rest break. After, as we walked towards the tunnels, he stopped suddenly and declared that we must ‘forget everything I said on the bus. I was wrong.’ He seemed overcome with shame at having been on the wrong side. He declared the correctness and sincerity of the Vietnamese people’s struggle for their own independence. He lamented his ignorance, and that he was ‘bought off’ for ‘American money.’ The group listened quietly and attentively.

The crawl through the tunnels provided the climax to the visit, and, as with the rifle range, the guide absented himself from the experience. In detail, he explained what to expect once inside: the spaces were small and narrow, often only just enough to squeeze through, with three different levels, largely unlit. It took visitors around ten minutes to move from beginning to end. Because of the narrow way – ‘Vietnamese size’ – and the constant stream of parties moving through, it would not be possible, once inside, to turn back. Being wary of small spaces I heeded the guide’s warning and placed myself at the back of the line. I made it only a few steps in, however, before the smell of damp earth sent me back to the entry. I took my place on a bench along with the guide, a British woman with bad knees and an
American whose size, it was estimated, would prohibit her from squeezing through the smallest of spaces (a fact publicly confirmed by her husband when he emerged at the other end). My failure to enter the tunnels afforded me the opportunity to observe members of the party as they emerged. All were hot and sweating, some tired, others relieved, the claustrophobes charged with adrenaline. The crawl is (by all accounts) an affective experience that engenders sympathy in tourists by way of its visceral qualities. One visitor, writing on a virtual tourist notice board commented: ‘Only a 100 metre crawling from one entrance to an exit will be enough to appreciate the Vietnamese resistance where they used to stay weeks inside these claustrophobic tunnels’ (VirtualTourist "Virtual Tourist Cu Chi"). After the tunnel crawl the party returned to the minibus.

The bus ride back to the city was largely passed in silence, during which I reflected on the guide’s earlier expressions of anguish. The government’s long assignment to him of the job of guide plunged him into a kind of purgatory, forever condemned to come face-to-face with his misdoings and regrets. Forced to tell, day after day, the story of his victors – those against whom he fought for so long, and those whose story he now had to recount – forever marked him as outcast. Indeed, he was a man who had to accept the daily humiliation of admitting having been on the side of the ignorant and morally bankrupt. And worst of all, he had betrayed the people of his nation, the people he professed to love so well. Once we neared the city, he recommenced his commentary in order to complete the story. As we wound through the city roads he returned to the subject of his impending retirement. He wanted to finish his dairies and publish them (he had already had one book of his experiences published in the UK, he said). He was looking forward to being looked after by his two ‘good sons.’ Finally, and once again, he lamented the awfulness of his job and the frustration of his life’s ambitions by the mistakes of his youth. Stepping off the bus we each pressed tips into his palm as he shook our hand.
Figure 21 (top): guide at Cu Chi Tunnels, Vietnam. Figure 22 (bottom): Boy shoots gun at Cu Chi Tunnels, Vietnam. Photographs by Emma Willis, December 2008.
Figures 23 (top) and 24 (bottom): Tourists at Cu Chi, Vietnam. Photographs by Emma Willis, December 2008.
The guide’s grafting of his personal story onto the history lesson elevated the tour above a mechanized run-of-the-mill tourist enterprise. His narrative not only engaged our attention emotionally, but also added complexity to what was otherwise a didactic display. By adding together personal details, insider knowledge not otherwise signposted, and an authoritative understanding of the site and its history, he created a broadly encompassing story. However, moved as I was by our guide’s account I could not shake doubts, not just about the content of the marvelous tale but also, considering he had been telling it for eighteen years, the emotional force with which it was told. The suspicion that my tour guide gave a wonderfully staged performance seemed confirmed when reading Victor Alneng’s account of his tour guide at Cu Chi. His account started remarkably similarly:

As the tour bus makes its early morning departure from Pham Ngú Lao, Anh, the guide, opens with a plea: “Don’t believe anything you see or hear in Vietnam, because 90 percent of everything is government propaganda.” According to Anh, the communists would never tolerate his account of Vietnam (473). The declaration that the ‘communists would never tolerate his account of Vietnam’ was a skillful rhetorical move which, just as with my own guide, positioned him as a confidant, an insider willing to put himself at risk in order to reveal hidden truths to the tourists. Alneng’s description differs later from my own guide’s story, however, suggesting that rather than the unlikely coincidence that it was the same guide, the approach of both was a common strategy:

As an ex-soldier of the ARVN (South Vietnamese army), he spent two years in a re-education camp and didn’t speak English for 18 years. His sister fled to America while he stayed behind working as a farmer and taking care of their father. He views the USA as a place where anyone can be successful. The Vietnamese people are described in positive terms while the government is portrayed less favourably. The narrative is mixed with jokes. On most tours Anh follows a rehearsed procedure, but occasionally he would tell more about his personal experiences, among other things how he flew over Hamburger Hill one day after the notorious battle there ended (473-74).

My guide described almost five years in a re-education camp, a similar separation from his family, whom he never saw again, and included some time spent in the United States before the War was in full swing. He similarly reinforced his love of the Vietnamese people, while lamenting his suffering at the hand of the government.
The positioning of the guides in both my own and Alneng’s experience provides an interesting dramatic tension. As he notes ‘the Cu Chi tunnels highlight the heroism of the Viet Cong’ (475). In this sense, the guides cast themselves as antagonistic players, adding a level of tension and complexity to the narrative. This ambivalence is supplemented by the fact that tourists enact Viet Cong experience – shooting their guns, crawling through the tunnels. The contradictions of the tourist/guide experience seem to mirror the ambiguities of the War itself, in which the distinction between friend and enemy, victor and defeated, right and wrong, was often uncertain. I return to the question of whether an ethical encounter with the face of the other might take place in a context such as Cu Chi. Within my own tour, the face of the guide remained distant, despite his disclosures, ambivalently positioned within the touristic environment. In many ways difference and dis-identification were reinscribed rather than overcome. At Cu Chi, Western tourists are positioned sympathetically towards their former ‘enemy,’ however, such an enemy is utterly objectified. While Levinas’ writing places importance on the affective quality of the meeting between self and other – sensibility and enjoyment – the kind of theatre that takes place at Cu Chi is quite at odds with such an affective ethics. Despite this, I acknowledge a power in the faltering quality of the guide. To return again to States’ discussion of Beckett’s *Catastrophe*:

We watch a man being complacently, as a matter of business, stripped of his humanity, made into *a thing* before our eyes for our pleasure and instruction, whatever that may mean. But then Beckett overturns his catastrophe – overturns the overturning – and poses the real question: *are we to applaud his play?* What are we applauding if we do? (207)

Certainly this seems the very question to ask of Cu Chi, and as with *Catastrophe*, there is no simple answer. Did we applaud, as we slipped tips into the guide’s hand, a wonderful performance of abjection? What would this say of us if we did? What else might we have done? The guide’s face, in a Levinasian sense, remained hidden, yet in the moments of faltering, hesitation and reversal it seems that a whisper of Beckett’s question made itself felt.
Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter I suggested that mimesis as a form of knowing what was in the world, as described by Ricoeur, may come up against certain limitations in situations such as Vietnam where there is a lack of a shared prefigurative repertory. The insistences of sites such as The War Remnants Museum and Cu Chi illustrate that the Vietnamese effort to configure a Vietnamese account of War is certainly a ‘declarative’ one. Tourism is an important political-discursive event in this sense. In the most basic sense, War tourism in Vietnam is an attempt to argue the other side of the story. To do this, sites draw on various affective strategies that target both the intellect and sensibility of the spectator through the presentation of the Vietnamese face. But to what degree does this face remain inaccessible? Is the lack of a shared pre-understanding ever wholly overcome? The ambivalence of my guide’s narration suggests that such a gaze never quite reaches its subject and perhaps exemplifies the ‘fumbling objectification’ that Levinas argues against.

These qualities suggested the incompletion of narrative, and, in Ricoeur’s sense, mimesis’ failure to successfully bind its audience together. Yet, within this failure is something important. To reiterate a citation already provided from Butler:

For representation to convey the human, then, representation must not only fail, but must show its failure. There is something unrepresentable that we nevertheless seek to represent, and that paradox must be retained in the representation we give. In this sense, the human is not identified with what is represented but neither is it identified with the unrepresentable; it is, rather, that which limits the success of any representational practice (144).

This point is central to the application of Levinas to a discussion of aesthetic representation, artistic activity, and the relationship they have to tourist practices. The failure of the tourist examples discussed might be described as that of failing to show their own failure. Yet at certain moments such ethical failure did reveal itself: in the contradictions of the guide’s delivery, in the tension between looking and looking away at the War Remnants Museum, and in the melancholic distance of the sculpted faces of Hoa Lo. Such failures, I argue, express a movement toward the ethical, even if it is not fully realized.

I finally return to my own failure, that of entering the tunnels, both at Cu Chi and later at a similar site in the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone.) This failure leaves a
certain aporia in this chapter, but one that I hope is significant. These tunnels, originally constructed during French occupation and extended during the subsequent War with American forces, are just a small part of an enormous underground network which haunted my visit. A number of major buildings in Ho Chi Minh City that I visited, including the former Imperial Palace and the Ho Chi Minh City Museum, had entrance ways to this network. Standing in front of such an entrance at the City Museum, I was struck by the palpable affect of this gateway to the underground network. In their subterranean aspect, they were, for me, very much a literalization of Levinas’ description of that which is beyond (or as he describes, ‘beneath,’) form. In this way I understand them as a powerful metaphor or image of alterity, and, concurrently, of the terror of the void without object that he describes. For if tourism could be described as a configurative operation whose objects beckon us to traverse the void in a kind of grasping gesture that might lead us to meaning, the tunnels are the void without object, expressing a palpability of emptiness. Levinas’ statement that ‘the silence of infinite spaces is terrifying’ seems to accord with my own inability to enter the tunnels, both at Cu Chi, and later at another tunnel site in the DMZ (I acknowledge that others had no such trouble). Whilst the tunnels are frighteningly finite in their smallness, they nonetheless seem to have an endlessness to them as if once ensconced there one might never emerge. Of the terror of ‘infinite’ spaces, Levinas continues to say, as already cited, that ‘the invasion of the there is does not correspond to any representation.’ Such a there is cannot be mimetically configured as a representation. Its existence can be signaled, however, by drawing attention to its inscription within mimesis as precisely its alterior other. If alterity comes from beneath form, where things conceal themselves, then the moment in Catastrophe where the Performer lifts his head and engages the gaze of the audience is a dramatization of this. The tourist examples discussed largely engage the mimetic as a way of filling in Levinas’ alterior void with objects that quell its insistences. Arising from within such engagement, however, are glimmers of a powerfully stated ethical claim that asks the spectator to consider their subjectivity as shaped by their response to the other’s suffering. I describe this as a kind of faltering in the face of representations that are unable to admit their own failure or limitation. I will continue to explore how such a claim might be more robustly made within representation in the following chapter’s analysis of Cambodia’s Tuol Museum of Genocide and aesthetic responses to it.

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Figure 25 (top): Tunnel entrance at Cu Chi, Vietnam. Figure 26 (bottom): Tunnel entry at Vinh Moc, Vietnam. Photographs by Emma Willis, December 2008.
Chapter five: archives, performance and ‘the evil of oblivion’

Introduction:

Whereas the previous chapter was largely concerned with the theatricality of tourism, here I take the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide in Cambodia and look at theatrical responses to its ethical claims. Tuol Sleng, formerly a Khmer Rouge prison called “S21,” is best known for its photographic display. On arrival, every prisoner had their photograph taken. Archivists have salvaged over 6000 of these images (though a greater number have been lost). The pictures are strikingly displayed in the Museum. Of all the examples discussed in this thesis, the Tuol Sleng photographs, in their focus on the face, most strikingly invite an application of Levinas’ ethics. As he states: ‘The face looks at me and calls to me. It lays claim to me. What does it ask? Not to leave it alone. An answer: here I am’ (quoted in Robbins 127). I examine this ethical claim by way of two works. Firstly, Catherine Filloux’s one-act play, Photographs from S-21, which imagines two of the photographs’ subjects come to life after a day of being looked at by visitors. By dramatizing the famous images, Filloux explores the limitations of the photographic object as a ‘voice’ of the past. Secondly, I consider Rithy Panh’s documentary, S21: Khmer Rouge Killing Machine. The film brings face-to-face former Tuol Sleng workers (known as Party cadres) – guards, torturers and a photographer – with two former victims, Vann Nath and Chum Mey. The central conflict of the documentary revolves around the vexed question of who should take responsibility for what took place at the prison. In discussing these two works, I am most interested in the ethical fragility that they demonstrate and the difficulties (almost irresolvable) inherent in trying to stage an encounter with the face of the other.

In his book, Documentation, Disappearance, and the Representation of Live Performance, Matthew Reason explores the relationship between performance and its subsequent archival representation. He describes a dialectic of presence and absence which inheres within discourses to do with representations of performance: archival records are seen as weak copies of the ephemeral original. Drawing from a comment by Ben Johnson regarding the short-lived profit of the performance event, Reason notes:
The underlying motivation for the documentation of live performance, therefore, is always the same: unable to hold performance continually in the present, it must be translated into some more enduring if less splendid form— it must be represented. And [Ben] Johnson [...] continues adding that his work in publication intends to “redeem” his work in performance from the common “evil” of “oblivion” (22).

However, he argues, both original and copy are inextricably bound to one another: ‘Just as knowledge of loss is only possible through the act of memory, so equally (and to paraphrase Phelan) does disappearance become possible through documentation’ (20). He thus suggests a much more complex relationship between the original, and the subsequent objects through which the original is later encountered, stating:

If performance neither disappears, nor fully resides in its documentations, then it seems appropriate to think of the continued cultural manifestation of performance as located somewhere in the space and time between. This is a space of extra-performance existence and non-existence: consisting of traces, fragments, memories, forgetting, half truths and half lives; consisting of representations that contain something of the thing itself, but which are not the thing itself (232).

Where Reason’s work is helpful is in its emphasis on the destabilization of a binarized relationship between original performance event and later representation. In every engagement with the archive, he argues, the performance is re-imagined, reconstructed, and newly understood. Just as I have argued against a pyramid-like model of witnessing, so too here do I point to Reason’s work in order to argue that performative responses to the historical in fact constitute it as an ongoing concern in the present that has ethical effect. Panh and Filloux’s works are especially interesting, however, not simply because they offer a performative response to the genocide, but because they problematize such representative response at the same time as they offer it.

In focusing on two examples that use performance to provide a response to Tuol Sleng, I am, as noted earlier, interested in whether the affect of such performances might be understood in ethical terms. I argue that in contexts such as Tuol Sleng the fundamental alterity of the other’s experience requires a semiotic framework of some kind. In considering the photographs on the one hand, and performative responses on the other, I do not argue for the ethical efficacy of one over
the other. Rather I suggest that the relationship between the original and its representation should be thought of as a continuum of reinvention that does not preclude the ethical. I argue that Panh’s documentary and Filloux’s play, through their focus on the very alterior tension that Reason identifies, offer audiences a means of facing a painful past.

**Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek**

Before discussing Panh and Filloux’s work I would like give an overview of Tuol Sleng, and neighboring Choeung Ek, and to place them in a historical context. In 1975, following a civil struggle that had its roots in the Vietnamese-American conflict, the communist Khmer Rouge party seized power in Cambodia, dramatically invading the capital city of Phnom Penh and overthrowing Lon Nol’s government, which itself had seized power from King Sihanouk in a coup in 1970. (Hélène Cixous’ epic play *Sihanouk* interestingly examines the period leading up to this point). Upon taking the city the Khmer Rouge declared a new government, Democratic Kampuchea. This regime ruled until 1979 when it was overthrown by Vietnamese forces. During their relatively brief period of governance, the Khmer Rouge set about implementing a radical program of social transformation. The ideological underpinning of the party’s plan was a derivation of Marxism, which fundamentally divided the nation into two categories: Old People, the uneducated peasant workers; and New People, who included city dwellers, the educated or educators, artists and intellectuals. Pol Pot and other leaders declared that their government was for the Old People. All property was nationalized, currency was abandoned and agrarian work camps became the central focus for social reorganization. New People were immediately targets of suspicion and the Khmer Rouge is perhaps now best known for its bloody programmatic execution and torture of these citizens. Robert Turnbull, for example, in an article about the state of performing arts in Cambodia after the Khmer Rouge, estimates that 80 to 90 percent of the country’s performing artists died during that five-year period ("A Burned-out Theatre: The State of Cambodia's Performing Arts" 133). The total number of citizens who died during the Democratic Kampuchea time is unknown, but estimates commonly cite the figure of two million, around half of whom died of overwork or starvation. Tuol Sleng was the most notorious and bloody
prison in the country and at the very centre of the Khmer Rouge attempt to radically and violently reshape Cambodian society.

In 1979 the Khmer Rouge was driven out of Phnom Penh, and out of power, by the invading Vietnamese force, which set up a new government, The People’s Republic of Kampuchea. In 1993 the period of the Vietnamese instituted government ended, with a United Nations-facilitated election process. It was only in 2009 that major trials of those who perpetrated crimes during the Democratic Kampuchea regime began (ongoing at the time of writing). Like Rwanda, the scope of civil conflict, the sense in which neighbor betrayed neighbor, means that former perpetrators and victims still live side by side. Further, because of a lack of judicial address, any clear distinction between those who suffered and those who inflicted suffering is unclear. Karen Coates notes:

Cambodia is perhaps doubly cursed because there is no certain line between guilty and innocent. The Khmer Rouge [was] Cambodian. Many soldiers were conscripted, many robbed of their childhoods. Guards and gatekeepers, survivors and their children, the whole of society suffers – including former Khmer Rouge…. And in later years when the Khmer Rouge split into several factions, many soldiers themselves were tortured and brutalized (145).

Unlike Rwanda, however, there have been few restorative or reconciliation processes instituted to deal with this, and the current trials are the first major public discussion of what occurred during the Khmer Rouge period.

An exception to the relative invisibility, for the outsider, of the country’s traumatic past, however, has been the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide. The museum, and nearby Choeung Ek Genocidal Centre (commonly known as the Killing Fields), function as public spaces for confronting and remembering the past. Together the sites tell the story of Khmer Rouge ideology and methods – Tuol Sleng – and the final result of this – Choeung Ek. A brochure for Choeung Ek suggests that visitors should visit Choeung Ek genocidal center after visiting Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide (S-21) since their relationship to one another is ‘symbiotic’ (JC Royal).

The Tuol Sleng site, which had been a school before it was a prison, was originally turned into a museum by Vietnamese occupying forces in 1979 with assistance from ‘East German experts’ (Maguire 84). The major curatorial strategy was to leave the prison as it was, though some obviously aestheticized details were added, such as a map of Cambodia made of skulls (since removed) and a display of
prisoners’ clothes. Maguire argues that this was the result of German influence, mirroring an application of similar aesthetic strategies to former concentration camp sites, exemplified in displays such as the clothing (84). In the first instance the Museum was not opened to the public, but used by the occupying Vietnamese to demonstrate to certain targeted visitors the scope of Khmer Rouge atrocities. In the 1980s it opened to the public and drew in a largely Cambodian constituency, including a number of expatriates returning to Cambodia. Visitors from other socialist countries followed, and finally, particular after the elections, Western and Asian tourists (Williams 142). Though government-managed, the Museum has a close relationship with the politically independent organization called the Documentation Centre of Cambodia, which works actively to archive evidence of the genocide, to interview victims and perpetrators, and to widely publish and distribute findings.

As a museum, Tuol Sleng provides an abundance of material proofs, from the building itself to selected archival evidence, including the notable photographs of the prisoners, which offer a kind of silent testimony. Prominent signage emphasizes an atmosphere of mindful contemplation: visitors are requested to: ‘Please be concentrated physically and spiritually in order to pay respect to the souls of the victims who died unjustly at the place.’ Throughout the site other signs indicate a ban on smiling or laughing. Such instruction of visitors suggests that the ‘souls who died’ are understood to have an affect that requires observance. The Museum is divided into four parts housed in each of the four main buildings. Visitors may take a guided visit or walk through the museum by themselves. Brochures and explanatory labeling help explain the exhibits. In the first of the three-storied buildings are a series of rooms, each containing an empty bed accompanied by a photograph that shows the room as it was when the Vietnamese liberated the prison in 1979. The pictures are disturbing, often revealing evidence of bloody torture. The second of the four buildings fills its rooms with photographs of the prisoners of Tuol Sleng. The photographs are the most affective element of the museum. As emanations of the past they endow the site with a haunted quality by evoking its ghosts, or, in Cambodian terms, kmauit - restless spirits. Building three displays a number of small cells, which were constructed inside what had been classrooms. In building four there are further artifacts including a display case containing the chair that prisoners were seated in while photographed, and pictures of prison staff. There is also an exhibition of
paintings by one of the few survivors of Tuol Sleng, Vann Nath, which represent life there during his incarceration. When I visited there were two further temporary exhibitions: one by photographer Stefan Jensen called *Ghosts of Tuol Sleng* (Jensen), and an educative exhibition, which explained in more detail Khmer Rouge ideology and the reality of life under the regime.

Jensen’s work followed after the display of the main photos in building two. His exhibition was of photographs of the Tuol Sleng photographs. Through replicating the tourist practice of taking pictures of pictures, Jensen attempted to capture something of their affective excess: ‘Photographing the reflection of the image instead of the image itself a ghostlike feeling passes through the pictures.’ The effect was an eerie one. Describing his intention he stated:

*Ghosts of Tuol Sleng* is an attempt to shed new light on the victims of the Khmer Rouge genocide, by presenting them in a different way from the usual mugshot that everyone who visits Tuol Sleng will be familiar with. By photographing the individual pictures in a different light and conditions and with visitors to the museum interacting, my aim is to neutralize the victims (Jensen).

Jensen’s recreation of the images was an attempt to liberate them from a viewing context that he suggested entrapped them in a violent spectatorial relationship, and it is in this sense that he engages the term ‘neutralize.’ The work of his exhibition, was, he stated, an attempt to negate the reiterative function of the ‘mug-shot’ and recuperate the individuality and humanity of the subjects through transforming those mug-shots into portraits. Interestingly Jensen did this through attempting to capture what Reason describes as the space between past object and its archival representation. The ambivalent relationship of the artist to the space is significant and similarly present in Filloux’s play. My own response to Tuol Sleng was also marked by such mixed feeling: a double movement of responding to and recoiling from the affect of the pictures. In reviewing my journal for notes, taken at the time of visiting Tuol Sleng, I noticed that I had made very few remarks about the photographs themselves. I was initially surprised by the omission of my own personal reflection on the images (though I did take a number of photographs, some of which are included in this chapter). (con’t)
Figure 27 & 28 (top left and right): Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocidal Crime, Cambodia. Figure 29 (middle left): Paintings by Vann Nath at Tuol Sleng, Cambodia. Figure 30 (middle right): Photographic display by Stefan Jensen at Tuol Sleng, Cambodia. Figure 31 (bottom left): Chair at Tuol Sleng, Cambodia, in which prisoners were seated to be photographed. Figure 32 (bottom right): Photographs at Tuol Sleng, Cambodia. Photographs by Emma Willis, December 2008.
Figure 33 (top): Photographs at Tuol Sleng, Cambodia. Figure 34 (bottom): Tourist looks at photographs at Tuol Sleng, Cambodia. Photographs by Emma Willis, December 2008.
I myself found it difficult to know how to face the images. This uncertainty is underscored by the fact that the point of view we must adopt in order to look at the pictures is that of the perpetrator. In this sense both Filloux and Jensen attempt to reconstruct a viewing position that is a less painful one.

Choeung Ek, as noted earlier, is symbiotically linked to Tuol Sleng. During the Khmer Rouge period the road between Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek bore the weight of regular trucks that would leave the prison full, and depart the execution site empty. Now transformed into a tourist site, unlike the busy and organized enterprise of somewhere like Auschwitz, the process of visiting Choeung Ek is a quiet affair. Guides are available but on the day that I was there most visitors seem contented to find their own way around. Activities suggested in the brochure include: ‘Participate in mourning and dedicating to spirits of all victims by offering flowers and lighting incense sticks and candles in accordance with Khmer culture and tradition,’ ‘Meditate to remind of friends and relatives and all victims’ spirits who had been murdered in memorial area,’ and ‘Release stress by viewing sightseeing of large paddy fields and lake of the Mekong region’ (JC Royal). While the title, “The Killing Fields,” conjures a grand scale, in reality the graves are contained within a relatively small area easily covered on foot.

As described in the Introduction to this thesis, the visit begins at a large memorial stupa, a tall Buddhist structure, located on a concrete platform from which descend steps. Visitors climb these steps to enter its base. Inside, the structure is mostly filled with a tall glass case that reaches up towards the building’s pointed top, and which has been filled with skulls from the exhumed graves. Upon arrival visitors are requested to remove their hats and meditate for five seconds. Signage states: ‘with the commemorative stupa in front of us, we imagine that we are hearing the grievous voice of the victims … we seem to be looking at the horrifying scenes and the panic.’ The skulls within the stupa are endowed with the capacity to speak to us; our role is to listen and to identify with the voices we hear. Although the gesture is more explicitly expressed here, the dialogical dynamic is similar to that discussed already in relation to Rwanda, and sites such as Auschwitz.

After leaving the stupa there are a series of signs, each marking the site of a different component of the camp that is no longer present. One of the first of these is titled, “The Dark and Gloomy Detention.” It begins, ‘Here was the place where victims were transported…’ This phrase, ‘here was the place,’ is repeated throughout,
emphasizing the focus on the ground itself as containing the store of memory. The sign above concludes: ‘unfortunately the dart [sic] and gloomy detention was dismantled in 1979.’ The apology makes apparent the value placed on material remains as proof of the traumatic past, combating its disappearance into the realm of the wholly imaginary. The brochure notes: ‘These items were destroyed by nature and human activities. They will be reconstructed soon in accordance with real and true history.’ Other of these architectural artifacts, which the Centre intends to rebuild, include: ‘murderers’ office,’ ‘torturing and murdering tools storeroom,’ ‘sunlight attract prison,’ and ‘place where victims blindfolded before killing.’ The pamphlet material indicates a curatorial emphasis on the need for evidence, whether real or reconstructed. Yet at the same time, my feeling was that such a desire would never progress beyond the pamphlet, for in reconstructing such buildings, the very power signified by their absence would be lost. In this way, the pamphlet itself enacted a kind of drama – both showing and not showing at the same time, and suggesting the indivisibility of these two things.

Once past the series of signs acting as captions for buildings no longer visible, visitors move to the largest part of the site, the grave pits. These pits were the mass graves upon the edges of which victims were murdered and then buried. All of these pits, now excavated, are either overgrown with greenery or filled with water. Around the general area a large dyke has been built to prevent the river damaging the site. This is the area that the brochure suggests one may go walking as a form of ‘stress release.’ As opposed to the stupa where our gaze is directed upwards, walking around the pits we are compelled to look down, searching for evidence, imagining. It is here in particular that the earlier instruction to cultivate a meditative mindfulness before beginning our visit becomes important. Should we be willing to listen we may hear ‘the grievous voice of the victims.’

Together the stupa, the evocative story-telling signs, and the pits which permanently scar the ground, attempt to ‘bring to life’ the voices of those who died at Choeung Ek. As noted earlier, the site’s signage indicates the imaginary nature of such voices; we will these voices into being as a way of attempting to express a fundamental sympathy. A plaque on the stupa asks, ‘would you please kindly show your respect.’ The dramatization of absence at Choeung Ek prompts an imagination of what took place there as a means of generating respect through enabling acknowledgement. (con’t)
Figure 35 (top): ‘Juvenile female skulls’ at Choeung Ek, Cambodia. Figure 36 (bottom): Mass grave pit at Choeung Ek, Cambodia. Photographs by Emma Willis, December 2008.
The imaginary status of what we hear suggests that we must also observe the fundamental silence that characterizes the site. An awareness of both is necessary - an imaginative invocation of the voices of the past alongside the recognition of their definitive absence. Indeed, we must hear the silence first, in order to hear the voices that follow. At Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek, those who arrive in the aftermath of calamity have a vital role to play. Tourists’ presence, as in Rwanda, indicates a ‘listening community’ and the expansion of the sphere of those concerned with the genocidal event. Visitors’ re-imagination of the past counters the absence and negation of life that mark the site. Choeung Ek clearly exemplifies this in its insistence on mindful contemplation and imagination. Affectivity, then, rather than a distraction from historical reality, is an ethical prompt; this is also the major role that the photographs play within the politics of making visible the scars of Cambodian suffering.

As I noted at the beginning of this section, this affect is a difficult one that seems to thwart simple response; I struggled to write of the images just as I struggled to look at them. They seemed to render me incapable, feeling shame in looking upon them. Arthur Frank, in writing of the experience of pain, describes it as a kind of chaos marked by its inassimilable character. Representations of it always point to what cannot be represented; it is ‘told in the silences that speech cannot penetrate or illuminate’ (101). He further notes that such chaos is, ‘a mystery that can only be faced, never solved’ (Frank 112). The chaos of the other’s pain is presented at Tuol Sleng in a way that does not invite us inside of that pain, but lays bare its existence nonetheless. The pain in facing what Levinas describes as the nakedness and destitution of the other signals the ethical limit point. To return to a quotation cited in an earlier chapter:

[T]he just suffering in me for the unjustifiable suffering of the other, opens suffering to the ethical perspective of the interhuman. In this perspective there is a radical difference between the suffering in the other, where it is unforgivable to me, solicits me and calls me, and suffering in me, my own experience of suffering, whose constitutional or congenital uselessness can take on meaning, the only one of which suffering is capable, in becoming a suffering for the suffering (inexorable though it may be) of someone else (Entre Nous 94).
In the ethical encounter, one’s own pain gains meaning only in standing for the unknowable pain of the other. At the same time, the incommensurability of that pain remains acknowledged. In turning away from the pain of the other, one’s own pain becomes an abject one, ‘useless’ in character. My own experience of the difficulty of enacting such an ethical facing of the other, not just at Tuol Sleng but other sites also, suggests to me the absolute necessity of performative practice as a way of transforming such uselessness into an ethical object. Indeed, Elaine Scarry has argued for the necessity of proxies; those who give an account on behalf of the subject in pain:

Because the person in pain is ordinarily so bereft of the resources of speech, it is not surprising that the language of pain should sometimes be brought into being by those who are not themselves in pain but who speak on behalf of those who are (6).

Scarry’s statement suggests the possibility of an ethical substitute whose appropriated speaking takes into account the fundamental silence – alterity – that Levinas is concerned with and recognizes the right to silence on the part of the person who has suffered. Someone who speaks on behalf of the other does not so much mimetically represent them, but rather points to and acknowledges that realm of experience that forever remains in silence. As Butler notes, such representations – acts of speaking on behalf of – are most powerful when they point to their own limits.

Catherine Filloux’s Photographs from S-21

Catherine Filloux’s one-act play, Photographs from S-21, concerns itself with giving voice to the Tuol Sleng images. In Theatre of Genocide (which contains another of Filloux’s plays), editor Robert Skloot comments that works such as Filloux’s give an important ‘theatrical life to those whose voices have been silenced because they were marked for exclusion from a place among humanity where they rightly belonged’ (Theatre of Genocide 6). Photographs from S-21 breaks the silence of the images and offers both an insight into the lives of those whose deaths the pictures represent and a critique of their display. The play was written in response to a 1997 exhibition of a selection of Tuol Sleng photographs shown at the Museum of
Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, and was staged a year later as part of a one-act play festival at the HB Playwrights Theatre in New York. In 2001 Filloux went to Phnom Penh, Cambodia, on a Playwright’s Residency grant from the Asian Cultural Council. During the two and a half months she was there she staged two plays with Khmer (Cambodian) actors from the National Theatre, including *Photographs from S-21*. The images that accompany this chapter are of the Cambodian production while my critique refers generally to the work’s initial staging context.

The display of Tuol Sleng images at MoMA was controversial. Two Americans, Doug Niven and Chris Riley, who had been integral to the process of salvaging and restoring the Tuol Sleng negatives in the 1990s, put the exhibition together. Niven and Riley worked voluntarily on the project of gathering together, organizing and restoring the negatives of the 6000 prints remaining from what would have been a much greater number originally taken. Controversially, in the process of this work, Niven and Riley gained copyright to a small number of the images and subsequently used these in the publication of a book, called *The Killing Fields* (Niven and Riley). The MoMA exhibition was comprised from this same set of images. Additionally, and what made them the subject of strong criticism, they offered art-quality prints of some of the images for sale through a dealer gallery. Such an aesthetic commodification of the images clearly unsettled their perceived value as ethical testimony.

Addressing the controversy that accompanied the photographs’ exhibition in an art museum, Filloux’s short play directly contrasts image and testimony, exploring the difficulties of the images’ display within such an aesthetic context. The play imagines two of the photographs’ subjects, Young Man and Young Woman, come to life in an evening after the Museum has closed. Filloux constructs a critique of the viewing environment by juxtaposing the warmth and life of the animated characters with the sterility of the gallery. The action begins with a focus on the fixed archival image – the initial stage directions state that the two actors are ‘frozen’ in ‘huge life size frames.’ They ‘stare at the camera the moment after blindfolds were taken from their eyes’ (*Photographs from S-21*113). Through the dialogue that follows, details of the characters’ personal histories are elaborated. Before going to Tuol Sleng, both had been placed within labour camps where they saw family members killed. The Young Man tried to run away from the camp and was sent to Tuol Sleng, where he was tortured to death. The Young Woman was sent to the prison with her infant
daughter, where both were shot. In addition to revealing character backstory, Filloux focuses much of the dialogue on what it means, for the two characters, to be Museum objects, placing a critique of such spectatorship at the centre of the play. The work moves to a climax when the Young Man, after having coaxed the Young Woman from her frame, takes her outside to a fountain in order to conduct a funeral ceremony: ‘A proper funeral, or we will remain ghosts’ (121). After a short blackout, the lights come up and the Young Man and Woman are returned to their frames. Filloux writes, as final stage direction, ‘A flash and the click of a shutter’ (121). We, like them, are taken back to the moment of the ‘shooting.’

Filloux’s work points to the fact, as Reason states, that we can only ever imagine the perspective of any archival object:

[V]iewers cannot know what is going on outside of the frame; cannot access the context of the emotion communicated; cannot even pretend that they are seeing what the audience would have seen (Reason 121).

It is this limitation that Filloux most centrally addresses. The demand for consideration of off or out-of-frame space is explicitly addressed through the play’s dialogue. Early in the exchange between the two characters, the Young Man notices a small blur in the bottom of the Young Woman’s picture: ‘There is something strange at the bottom of your picture. It is blurred… I cannot make it out’ ("Photographs from S-21" 115). The Young Woman denies that there is anything to be seen but later acknowledges the blur as her daughter’s hand: ‘There was something at the bottom of my photo … A child’s hand.’ She continues: ‘They took off the blindfold. My daughter reached up to me. I did not move. (Softly.) Did not move… They shot her first… I did not protect her’ (120). The inaccessibility of this information, other than by personal testimony, illustrates the way Filloux sets archival image and historical experience in opposition to one another. She attempts to mitigate the absence of the testifying voice by theatrically reinstating it. This is evident from the outset in that within the play to be an image is intolerable: ‘It is unbearable. During the day the people pass. They stare into my eyes. At night, there is no air. Like the inside of a cushion’ (113). To exist as image means to be alienated and objectified. In this way the play pivots around the opposition that Rancière describes in *The Emancipated Spectator* as that between ‘two kinds of representation – the visible image and the spoken narrative – and two sorts of attestation – proof and testimony’ (89). (con’t)
(con’t) Filloux’s play attempts to show this opposition, ultimately strongly privileging narrative over the image.

Filloux’s skepticism of the archival image suggests her perception of the Tuol Sleng photographs as festishized, in the sense explained by Christian Metz. Metz argues that photographs generally are fetishistic in the sense in which they stop the gaze and prevent it from taking in what is outside of the frame, what is absent. Whilst I am not especially interested in the Freudian aspect of Metz’s argument, what is interesting is the idea that the image becomes a kind of salve that actually stops the enquiring gaze from descending into the horrific abyss of the referent’s experience. It is certainly this sense of the fetishistic aspect of the image that Filloux’s play critiques, emphasized by the photograph’s situation in an art museum: ‘The people always seem to be passing through on their way to something called “Picasso”’ ("Photographs from S-21" 114). Further, the shutter click, which Filloux uses to open and close the play, echoes Metz’s description of the photographic image which cuts off a piece of the referent. For him, the click of the shutter ‘marks the place of an irreversible absence, a place from which the look has been averted forever’ (Metz 217). Metz contrasts the ‘in frame’ of the photograph with the ‘undermined and haunted … feeling of its exterior, of its borderlines, which are the past, the left, the lost’ (217). Filloux’s play can be read as a response to the demands of the off-frame space, as exemplified through the story of the Young Woman’s daughter. Stage directions further demonstrate Filloux’s concern. As noted, to begin with the actors are ‘frozen in huge life-size frames.’ The frames constrain the characters and are something they must step outside of; thus the Young Man coaxes the Young Woman out of her frame and indeed out of the Museum. Metz’s arguments regarding the photographic object as a fetishized helps explain what, for Filloux, is most problematic about the Tuol Sleng images. Certain of the photographs are painful for spectators in terms of their graphical depiction of the results of torture – bloodied and wounded bodies – these images provide visual evidence of the regime’s violence and are intolerable in the conventional sense of being difficult to look at. Other photographs however, the ‘mugshots’ that were part of the prison’s bureaucratic machinery, do not show explicit violence – this remains out of frame. What is shown is the system itself – an inventory of dehumanized individuals. The intolerability of these images (in the sense that Rancière speaks of ‘the intolerable image), Filloux’s play suggests, lies precisely
in what they do not show; that is, their respective individual aspects – a sense of personal history capable of breaking through their generalized metonymic status.

Filloux makes use of the image of ghosts in order to suggest the unseen or off-frame aspect of the photographs. In the first instance, the distance between gallery viewers and the Khmer Rouge victims is conceptualized through the image of restless ghosts, which is first introduced when the Young Woman describes the death of her mother-in-law:

YOUNG WOMAN: I know. In the labour camp. They cracked her skull with a shovel because she was too slow working. We could not even bury her. So now she is a kmauit – a restless ghost… ("Photographs from S-21" 115).

The implication is that the play’s characters are also kmauit, their display prohibiting their rest. When the play was staged in Phnom Penh in 2001, the play’s director, Than Nandoeun, took the actors to S21 where they recreated poses from two of the pictures, which were then photographed and became the set. Filloux commented that the director wanted to use reproductions as part of the set so that ‘the souls of the photos will walk out of their frames embodied by Ly and Narith’ ("Ten Gems on a Thread" 182). The writer’s comment elegantly sums up the guiding gesture of the play. Whilst Filloux’s critique of the MoMA exhibition is pointed, she nonetheless recuperates the ability of the images to speak to us through the actors’ taking on of the task of releasing the souls of the images from their frames.

Filloux’s deep skepticism of the photographs as discreet objects of display is reflected in the sense that she suggests that such exhibition enacts the kind of violence implicit in Metz’s language.

YOUNG MAN: I don’t know if we’re really here.
YOUNG WOMAN: We feel real.
(He resumes his position in the frame)
YOUNG MAN: Maybe it’s because we’re in the photographs. And people pass by. And every time their eyes touch ours we’re back there again ("Photographs from S-21" 118).

Filloux suggests that the display of the image redoubles the violence which Metz argues as inherent within image:
[T]he snapshot, like death, is an instantaneous abduction of the object out of the world into another world, into another kind of time. Photograph is a cut inside the referent, it cuts off a piece of it, a fragment, a part object, for a long immobile travel of no return (Metz 214).

At MoMA, this appropriation, or cutting, had a double aspect. The original appropriation of prisoners’ images by the photographer was compounded by the subsequent secondary appropriation by the curators of the exhibition. What is troubling for Filloux, as noted, is the context of the images display, which she suggests repeats the original crime. When the Tuol Sleng pictures were taken, the photographs were a demonstration of the absolute power of the photographer and the total powerlessness of the subject. The photographs captured the moment when prisoners’ humanity was definitively denied. In becoming image, subjects ceased to be human.

In her dramatization of the Tuol Sleng photographs, Filloux demonstrates the contingencies of perspective bound up in the shift of the subjects’ gaze from that directed towards Tuol Sleng guards to museum visitors. This shift is deeply unsettling. As Marianne Hirsch comments:

> When we confront perpetrator images, we cannot look independently of the look of the perpetrators.... When looking and photographing have become co-extensive with mechanized mass death, and the subject looking at the camera is also the victim looking at the executioner, those of us left to look at the picture are deeply touched by that death (26).

Most significantly Hirsch points out a dual or dialectical affect at play: we are touched not only by the face of the other, but more deeply by the fact that we can only apprehend that other by co-opting the point of view of their victimizer. It is this very perspective that makes a claim upon us and which makes such images difficult to look at. Mid-way through the play the characters address the issue of who has been looking at them:

> YOUNG WOMAN: Who are they, who look?
> YOUNG MAN: Ghosts, maybe… Ghosts of the Khmer Rouge.
> YOUNG WOMAN: But they do not look the same.
> YOUNG MAN: Why else would they come back again and again to see us? To check on us? (118)
Filloux significantly conflates the perspective and actions of the Tuol Sleng perpetrators and the gallery visitors. While the visitors are not characterized as deliberately pernicious – in fact in other descriptions they appear to be thoughtful spectators – Filloux suggests that they cannot help but reduplicate the conditions of exposure, in both senses, originally undergone by the photos’ victims. In this sense she challenges audience members to reflect on the systems of display and spectatorship within which they themselves are positioned. In this way, Filloux generates what Helena Grehan has describes as ethical ambivalence in the audience, an attitude which disturbs spectatorial complacency (Grehan 29). In her dramatization of the pictures Filloux demonstrates the contingency of an imagined ethical claim yet at the same time, the very play itself is a testament to the power of the images to motivate such ethically reflexive responses to them.

**Broken Face: Rithy Panh’s S21: Khmer Rouge Killing Machine**

Before discussing Panh’s film, through which I continue to consider how the faces of Tuol Sleng might be made available to spectators, I would like to briefly discuss the concept of face in a specifically Cambodian context. In his book, *Why Did They Kill*, Alexander Hinton considers the importance of the Cambodian concept of face to understanding how widespread killing became ‘naturalized’ within the social order the Khmer Rouge instituted. Whereas for Levinas the singular term face is used to signify the core identity and existence of the other, in Cambodian culture there are multiple variations of types of faces which each signify a different function of the concept: one might have ‘full face,’ ‘big face,’ ‘little face,’ ‘shamed face,’ ‘high face’ and so on. Each variation on the term face contributes to an agreed upon means of organizing social interactions:

Face is the self-image one asserts in given contexts, depending on the evaluations and esteem accorded by self and others. Because it is directly related to the positive and negative evaluations of others, face is loosely correlated with honour and shame. The Khmer noun *mukh* literally refers to a person’s “face” or the “front” of something, but it includes among its many secondary meanings the notions of “reputation” and “place, position, rank,
title.” Face therefore reflects one’s place in the social order, a position that is strategically negotiated during social interactions (Hinton 252-53).

Hinton points out that face, in Cambodian culture, is a highly performative concept (253). One gains face by eliciting the approval of others through exercising one’s duty and elevating one’s social standing, and conversely one loses face, or has their face ‘broken’ through a failure to fulfill social expectations.

The division of the population into New and Old people provided the basis for the assignment of face status during the Khmer Rouge period. All New people were enemies, therefore all Old people were in a constant state of fear, exercising consistent vigilance in maintaining their face as authentically Old, so as not to be revealed or accused as a traitor. Hinton notes:

If a person failed to perform according to expectations, he or she would not just lose face, but would also quite possibly be put in prison and executed. Positive evaluations, in turn, could result in procuring a better position, additional food, or other advantages (258).

The sense in which face would normally assist in the smooth flow of social relations was pushed to an extreme point, turning the most banal of interactions into life or death encounters. While Old people had to maintain face to literally maintain their lives, the value of face to Khmer authorities was tied to their ability to prosper within the regime. Hinton argues that the primary means of gaining face and honour was to demonstrate one’s willingness to kill for the revolution. ‘Those who had a progressive revolutionary consciousness were given face and honour’ (263). Political education programs emphasized the importance of making the revolutionary cause the centre of one’s life, purging it of all other relationships. Young revolutionaries were commonly told that they needed to be willing to kill their own parents should they be revealed as traitors. The greatest demonstration of loyalty was the killing of enemies, regardless of one’s personal relation to them. Hinton states that: ‘Considering the paranoid atmosphere of Democratic Kampuchea, it seems likely that Khmer Rouge cadres and soliders throughout Cambodia … were at times forced to defend their honor by killing people’ (271). He further argues that within the Tuol Sleng prison, a system of competition amongst the guards for status facilitated the disconnection between torturers and their victims. As already pointed out, to be at the bottom of the guard hierarchy often meant becoming a prisoner one’s self. Thus there was fierce
competition to display loyalty and the way that this was done was through acts of violence.

All those to be tortured or killed were aggressively dehumanized through their branding as enemies. The regime also took the practical step of assigning guards, commanders, executioners and so on, outside of their home districts so that those whom they had to kill would be unknown to them. In this sense, the faces of the other were made as obscure as possible. In removing any sense of individuality and replacing this with the label of simply enemy, the Khmer Rouge facilitated regime members’ ability to kill with impunity. Hinton cites a former cadre who stated: ‘When they looked at their victims, they didn’t think they were killing fellow Khmer, just enemies’ (Teap cited in Hinton 266). This attitude exemplifies the necessity of recognizing the face of the other in order for an ethics that seeks to preserve life to be enacted; it was by making the face of the other unrecognizable that the regime was able to so easily obliterate it. As Hinton notes, such dehumanizing processes allowed the relationship between torturers and their victims ‘to spiral towards the most extreme form of violent domination, the eradication of the other’ (275).

In his documentary, S21: Khmer Rouge Killing Machine, Rithy Panh examines such a violent effacement of the other through a performative study of Tuol Sleng that brings its former perpetrators face-to-face with one of their former victims as well as archival evidence of their crimes. The photographs, which are the museum’s point of focus, play only a very small role in the documentary, however. Instead, Panh uses theatrical strategies to foreground the fundamental emptiness of the site, emphasizing it as a place of loss. In this way, it is dramaturgically cast as a kind of affective void, in the sense described by Levinas, out of which various objects and people arise. In particular, Panh takes a long room from the third floor of one of the buildings, presumably a former classroom, and uses it as a stage upon which to play out various confrontations with the former cadres’ pasts. The design of the room changes for each scene: piles of clothes move, accumulate; desks shift from one space to another; stacks of paper and photographs come in and out. In one scene, a lone individual simply wanders into the room, as if looking for something it does not contain, then exits. All of this action seems to have been thoughtfully choreographed (and edited). Other scenes take place in various rooms of the prison: in a former communal cell, Nath, a survivor, explains to the former cadres a painting (made by himself) depicting the prisoners’ conditions inside that room; in a room containing archives, Nath and
former guards read through old prisoner files, revisiting their stories; a night time sequence takes place in another former communal cell that still features the prisoners’ numbers on the wall in front of the small spaces in which they would have been shackled together.

What makes the documentary so theatrical in character is Panh’s engagement of former Cadres in re-enactments of their duties, ranging from the reading aloud of archival documents, to literally acting out the duties they used to perform. Through these performative methods, Panh inscribes the site with an uncanny dual presence, showing former systems of violence at the same time as emphasizing their disavowal. Of Panh’s approach to presenting Tuol Sleng’s history, Rancière comments:

He did not oppose witness to archives. That would unquestionably have been to miss the specificity of a killing machine whose functioning operated through a highly programmed discursive apparatus and filing system. It was therefore necessary to treat these archives as part of the system, but also to make visible the physical reality of the machine for putting discourse into action and making bodies speak (100-101).

In staging – making visible – the actions of the former regime, Panh reactivates the logic of the machine in order to break apart its discursive apparatus (101). In an interview with the New York Times, Panh affirms this commitment to making the past visible:

If we don't confront the past, we will lose these essential memories; which is why I encourage people to tell their stories. The Khmer Rouge tried to destroy our culture and our identity, but it could never be simply a process of erasing something from a blackboard (quoted in Robert Turnbull, "Staring Down Horrors of the Khmer Rouge").

Panh’s approach to telling the story of Tuol Sleng is not so much to expose the individuals who enacted the Khmer Rouge’s programme of violence, but rather the very programme itself. Through his use of reenactment and archival objects, Panh reveals the dark absurdity – the intolerability – of this programme.

The first of the key re-enactive sequences of the film shows two guards demonstrating their everyday dealings with prisoners. The mode of speaking moves between an address to the ‘prisoners’ and narrative description:
Number 13, get up. I order him, “get up.” Blindfold him with a kramar, handcuff him from behind, then I remove the bar, I close the lock again and I lead him out by the arm.

This mode is progressively developed throughout the film and finds its fullest expression in two further scenes, each featuring the same former guard. In the first, he walks into the long empty room, which has now had the desk and chair removed, but two further piles of clothes added. This addition suggests the persistence of memory, the continual ghostly presence of those who once wore the clothes. He re-enacts his ordinary routine of checking on the prisoners:

When on guard duty I inspect the locks four times. I rattle the lock and bar. I test it. All’s well. I do the next row. I rattle the lock and bar. All’s well. I come to the middle row. The middle, here. (Shouting) “This row. On your feet! Hands in the air!” I start the body search. I feel their pockets. I look here and there. They mustn’t have a pen with which they can open their veins, or hide screws and rivets they can swallow to kill themselves. Back to the middle row, “Sit! No one move!” On to this row. “Get up! On your feet! Hands up!”

He repeats this sequence a number of times, always using the same words. The second example takes place in the evening, where he demonstrates his job as a night guard. He speaks directly to the former prisoners as if they were there, with no apparent self-consciousness about assuming his former role:

At 10p.m., the interrogator brings the prisoner back. “Stand here!” I unlock the door. I lead him in. Stand there! I open the lock, put the irons on him. I take off the hand cuffs. I remove the blindfold, I go out. “Be quiet! Don’t make any noise! Otherwise it’s the club!” I lock the door. “Why are you sitting up? You gonna get it! Lie back down, and not a sound! You, too! Turn around! If I come back, beware!”

The sequence is long, four and a half minutes, and captured in a single take. The camera moves with the former guard as he walks in and out of the room, re-enacting his various duties and speaking to the prisoners, who are represented only by numbers on the wall. The former guard appears completely immersed in his role and at the same time, utterly emotionally distant from any understanding of its significance. His willingness to re-perform his past and his complete absorption in the task indicate how close to the surface Tuol Sleng’s violent history lies. Rancière notes: ‘Seemingly
without any qualms, this reconstruction is unquestionably an intolerable spectacle, as if yesterday’s torturer were ready to adopt the same role tomorrow’ (101). Tuol Sleng is shown not as a historical peculiarity, an intolerable aberration, but rather as the result of a sensible system capable of reactivation. The scenes demonstrate the rawness of the historical wounds and attempt to make a case for the necessity of a public confrontation with the country’s past. As Sontag suggests of photographs of the pain of others, these filmed images are similarly an ‘invitation to pay attention’ (Regarding the Pain of Others 117). Indeed, this ‘attention’ was the result of Panh’s film, which in addition to being critically lauded, had real effects in Cambodia. Robert Turnbull, writing for the New York Times, noted:

The film's effect was profound and immediate. The former Khmer Rouge leader, Khieu Samphan, saw “S21” and admitted the prison's existence for the first time, having formerly denied any knowledge of it ("Staring Down Horrors of the Khmer Rouge").

The performance of evidence and testimony, which underpins the re-enactive sequences and was central to the ‘machinery’ of Tuol Sleng, is further explored in scenes that feature guards re-reading interrogation reports and discussing the methods they used to extract confessions. Panh often makes these sequences, like the re-enactments, highly theatrical. In one, a former torturer sits alone in a long room. It is empty save for a large pile of clothes, and a desk that is covered in old papers, which he sits behind. He reads aloud, “methods for writing a document” [confession]:

Have them describe a scene from their treacherous lives. Reading it will reveal the secret story, the enlightening and perfectly clear cause of the espionage eating at us from within, according to their plan.

In another scene the guards discuss the fact that the reason they had to interrogate the prisoners was to find/prove the reason for their arrest. The Democratic Kampuchea regime declared they never did anything unjustly and therefore prisoners were forced to ‘confess’ their crimes to prove the justness of the regime’s actions against them. One of the guards readily states that the confessions were forced and false:

When a document was drawn up, it was all a sham. We made up an activity of sabotage, we invented the evidence in order to execute a prisoner. There was no court to judge him. When the document was finished, he was taken to his
death. Each man has his own history, his own memory. The aim was to break
down their entire memory and make an act of treason out of it.

The conclusion of the confession meant the conclusion of the prisoner’s life.

An extremely moving example is when a former interrogator, Khan, discusses
the case of a young woman he questioned. As Khan recounts the episode it becomes
clear that the girl, nineteen, was clearly innocent. Over five days he worked with her
to develop a story which confessed her crimes so that they could put it on her file. He
was ordered to beat her, which he did with a tree branch, but confessed that he felt
sorry for her, and even had feelings of love for her. He remembers the episode in
vivid details. After beating her, she asked to make a confession. He gave her four or
five days to do this. But when he read it he realized it contained no details that would
incriminate her of being a traitor:

So I explained and suggested how she write it using my method. She should
describe a network, a party, an activity of sabotage, a network leader. In the
end we managed to write up this document.

In the film Nath sits with the former guard as he recounts this story, the file open and
the woman’s photo in front of them. Nath then reads out the confession, a ridiculous
fiction in which the girl was assigned various missions by the CIA that involved
defecating in official places. He questions the believability of the confession and the
guard replies that, ‘at the time it was believable.’ He also confirms that he wrote the
confession himself, saying that she never learnt to write properly. ‘I couldn’t read her
writing, she made mistakes. So I wrote for her, corrected her, embellished it.’

The scene presents a powerful confrontation between multiple positions: Khan,
former interrogator and live historical repository; Nath as victim, witness, and now
questioner; the document itself as a piece of partial evidence; the spectre of the girl
that the document is concerned with; Panh himself; and of course us, the audience.
There is no easy way of getting to the bottom of what happened. The former cadres
are almost uniformly silent in terms of fully acknowledging any responsibility that
they might bear for what took place. When another guard, Houy, defends their actions,
saying they had no choice, Nath rejects his defense, saying that, if everyone simply
carries out orders unthinkingly ‘It’s the end of our world of justice. There are no
more ideals, no more human conscience.’ He urges Houy, Khan and others to see what is in front of them.

Look, all this is left. All this evidence is left, all these testimonies. It’s lying there but you pay no attention. I want to know, for instance… You, Houy, you worked here. When you took the men away, what were you thinking?

Houy’s reply to the accusation indicates his unwillingness to reflect:

I was young at the time. I didn’t think so far ahead. I was hot-blooded. I did what I was told. I was told to compete, so I did, to take someone to be killed, I did. As long as I was obeying Angkar. Today when I think about it, it was against the law. I’m ashamed of myself. But I don’t think about it. When I think about that, I get a headache.

The communication between the men reaches an impasse. Houy’s refusal to imagine the point of view of the other is a refusal to face him. This is strikingly illustrated in the film’s opening, in which he also describes the headache of remembering and his desire for sleep instead. This refusal places Nath in the position of forever searching for answers that remain out of reach.

Even in bringing former prisoner workers and victims face-to-face, the humanity of the face of the other, which was masked by the Khmer Rouge, remains concealed. Panh’s attempt to reverse the conditions of violence and re-humanize the face of the other, in a sense, fails: Houy cannot ‘open his eyes’ to Nath. In bringing former perpetrators back to the archival site, he reveals the sense in which even the original subjects are, as Reason puts it, ‘things, but not the thing itself.’ The guards are in no way revelatory; indeed their relationship to the archival objects and setting is unnervingly distant. Yet, the film succeeds in exposing this very emptiness. It emphasizes the necessity of facing the other through showing the consequences of its lack. As Hinton stated, the other simply became enemy. This attitude exemplifies the necessity of recognizing the face of the other in order for an ethics that seeks to preserve life to be enacted; it was by making the face of the other unrecognizable that the regime was able to so easily obliterate it. Butler similarly comments, as cited previously, that dis-identification is the basis for dehumanization:

In this case, we cannot hear the face through the face… The “I” who sees the face is not identified with it: the face represents that for which no
identification is possible, an accomplishment of dehumanization and a condition for violence (145).

As Hinton stated, the consequence of such is the violent eradication of the other. Panh’s film can therefore be read as a powerful demonstration of the consequences of the effacement of the other. What is most interesting is that it attempts to counter this, not with a focus on the faces of the victims – as the museum does – but by an emphasis, like that of Ehn’s play, on those of the perpetrators. Significantly, the guards are not depicted as inhuman or faceless monsters. Yet in giving them a face, the faces of victims become even more insistent in their claim. Despite the guards’ unwillingness to face their crimes, as Levinas suggests, their responsibility for their victims remains nonetheless. Nath’s presence in the film is an important reminder of this as is the affect of the empty space. Unclaimed responsibility is most poignantly illustrated in Houy’s headaches, which signify the weight and strain of this refusal, as if the terror of the void is bearing down upon him. In giving a theatrical aspect to this void, and the objects that arise from it, Panh works against any kind of ‘stumbling objectification’ precisely by continually reiterating the failure of such objectifying practices. In this way the film is a demonstration of failure at the most catastrophic level. Further, it significantly challenges the conditions required for an ethical meeting of subject and other to take place and reveals a high degree of contingency in any such effort. In order to counter the desire to turn away, rather than face the other, the film engages the former cadres in certain aesthetic and performative practices – reading, reciting, re-enacting. Whilst the effects of this are marked by ambivalence and irresolution, I argue that they demonstrate the theatrical character of alterity – that its call is powerfully articulated by way of substitutive affect. This affect allows for the kind of ethical identification that I have discussed to take place. Indeed, as Rancière notes of Panh’s film, its whole strategy is: ‘to redistribute the intolerable, to play on its various representations: reports, photographs, paintings, reconstructions’ (101). By way of such redistribution, which I describe as a performative practice, the ethical claim is given an urgent expression even if inadequately heard.
Conclusion

In the conclusion of the previous chapter I argued that dark tourist attractions are often an instance of filling in what Levinas describes as the void of alterity – the

there is which ‘does not correspond to any representation.’ However I also suggested that despite the many failures of tourist examples discussed in that chapter, certain aspects of those experiences suggested that the ethical may arise from within representation. I argued that alterity requires an object-other in order to be apprehended – or in Levinas’ terms, a nothing can only be perceived by way of a something. Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek, underscored by their description in the tourist brochure as ‘symbiotic,’ interestingly illustrate such a dialectic of object and void. Where Tuol Sleng overwhelms the spectator with spectral images, at Choeung Ek it is the ‘nothing’ that confronts them. What is significant, by way of Levinas, is that even this nothing is a something – an empty plentitude, a terrifying void. Hence, even though there is nothing in the pits to see, the claim they make upon us is almost unbearable.

In engaging Reason at the beginning of this chapter, I reiterated this argument, suggesting that Levinas’ ‘there is-ness’ (alterity) can be apprehended by way of performances that illustrate the very distance between the lost object and its representation. Filloux and Panh’s work, in illustrating the manner in which representations ‘contain something of the thing itself, but which are not the thing itself’ (Reason 232), similarly demonstrate the relationship between the ‘necessary failure’ of aesthetic representation and ethics. The ‘not realness’ of such presentations need not diminish their ethical impact, for, as Rancière comments in response to Panh’s film:

The problem is not whether the reality of these genocides can be put into images and fiction…. It is knowing what kind of human beings the image shows us and what kind of human beings it is addressed to; what kind of gaze and consideration are created by this fiction (102).

Rancière’s point is an important one, which suggests an ethics is worked out in the interplay among images, their creators and spectators. An ethical relationship does not exist apart from such images but is called to account through them in a way that might temper what Johnson describes as the ‘evil’ of oblivion.
Both Panh and Filloux’s works reveal the ethical fragility of the representative effort. Through theatrical practices, they demonstrate ambivalence, difficulty, contingency and failure as much – and certainly in the case of Panh’s work – more than any sense of the transformative or restorative. Yet in making such theatrical demonstrations, they more urgently articulate, or at least point to, the call of the other. The Tuol Sleng images, Filloux’s play and Panh’s film, each illustrate that there is no easy ‘access’ to the face of the other. Indeed, the fact of the other’s absence makes this impossible. However, this does not make such attempts futile. For, as argued at the beginning of this chapter, and despite Filloux’s implied argument, access to the original is not possible, in the same sense that Levi argues that there can be no true witnesses to Auschwitz (quoted in Hobsbawm 1). Rather, through performative – theatrical – encounter, historical trauma is brought to bear in the present in such a way that demands continuing response. It is the very demonstration of difficulty, which lends the greatest urgency to the ethical claim.
Chapter six: Bringing it all back home

In this last chapter I discuss two theatrical works, both from New Zealand, that attempt to depict past traumas. The first work is a tourism spectacle, *Lost in Our Own Land*. This large-scale, big-ticket performance takes as its subject the traumatic effect that the first arrival of colonial settlers had on Maori, and presents it as a reenactment spectacle. The second work, *Dark Tourists*, was a dance theatre piece, in which I was involved as dramaturge. It was an experimental work, developed and shown in an arts festival context, which took dark tourism as its subject and explored a number of images to do with tourists’ attempts to engage with the suffering of others. In discussing these works, markedly different in form, intent and audience, I will reiterate the general argument of this thesis, which is that it is not a particular type of theatre that I am suggesting is especially ethical in character, but rather that there is a particular kind of theatrical responsiveness which might be described in ethical terms. Both of the works examined in this chapter were marked by success as well as failure. In discussing them side-by-side, I will not attempt to contrast them in terms of aesthetic value, but rather consider how each of them variously illustrates the impulse to respond to the traumatic by way of theatre. The ‘bringing home’ of the title of this chapter refers not only to the New Zealand location of the works, but also to a reconciliation of the theorizations of ethical encounter that this thesis has explored with the pragmatic realities of theatrical encounter, whether touristic or highly aestheticized. In this sense, the chapter, through its two contrasting examples, is most interested in the contingencies of the theatrical character of ethical responsiveness.

*Lost in Our Own Land: putting cultural trauma on stage*

*Lost in Our Own Land* has been regularly performed in Christchurch, New Zealand, since 2008. It restages an engagement from the early nineteenth-century Maori inter-tribal conflict known as the Musket Wars. The experience unfolds over a three hour-long interactive spectacle complete with battle re-enactment and a feast. The historical context is briefly sketched in the program of the performance:
Muskets are overwhelming ancient tradition – and not just that of warfare. The way of life, traditions, spiritual beliefs, tribal structure and Chieftainship are all centuries old, but are crumbling beneath the strength of the musket. Tribe is pitted against tribe, Maori against Maori, brother against brother.

Our story … begins as the musket-wielding cult arrives in Te Wai Pounamu – the South Island. We come face to face with fearsome Te Ao Huri and Uitara … on the land of Te Tawhito and the deeply traditional people of the Matuku-moana village. Be guided by the Storyteller onto sacred land and witness the dramatic invasion of a peaceful village. Move through time and see Uitara taking the leadership mantle as Te Ao Huri dies.

As Uitara’s story unfolds further, you’ll experience the significant impact of European religion and education and the devastation of introduced illness and temptations (TamakiHeritage).

The work is a kind of double act, which combines commerce and cultural politics. By bringing specific elements of Maori history to the forefront of the production, rather than generalized aspects of Maori culture, the work reconfigures the tourist spectacle as a politically as well as economically motivated instance of dark tourism.

Described by creator Mike Tamaki as a ‘true account’ and not merely an ‘entertainment,’ the work is a dramatic fiction based on real historical events. While the piece still incorporates traditional elements of a cultural display – song, haka, demonstration of aspects of traditional life and so on – these are subjugated to the dramatic storyline. The story of Uitara is inspired by Te Rauparaha’s bloody series of conquests during the Musket Wars. Tamaki notes, ‘We’ve based the re-enactment here around portions of the Kaiapoi Pa story’ (quoted in Darling). During the period in which the work was set, Kaiapoi Pa, the settlement of South Island iwi (tribe) Ngai Tahu, was sacked by Te Rauparaha, on whom the character of Te Ao Huri – whose name means ‘the changing world’ – is loosely based. The central dramatic conflict in the work is between Te Ao Huri (along with Uitara) and Te Tawhito, leader of the fictional village of Matuku-moana, which represents the Kaipoi Pa. Of the tourism examples discussed in this thesis, Lost is the most explicitly theatrical and thus brings together the discussion of tourism and theatre. Face-to-face encounter is also the most dramatically illustrated in this of all the tourist examples, underscored through the Maori convention of the challenge, as I will discuss. In considering this commercial work, which is both economically and socially excluded from the aesthetic theatre community in New Zealand, I am most interested its use of dramatic performance as a
vehicle for communicating a traumatic history and in particular the relationship between performers and audience.

*Lost* is performed on an area of roughly twenty acres within which there are multiple areas of action: Raro Heka – House of Understanding; Matuku-moana, a replica Maori village; a battlefield; and lastly the Ferrymead Heritage Park. Ferrymead, a replica colonial town, is a long-standing Christchurch tourist attraction, which, unused in the evening, *Lost* takes advantage of. The struggle between Te Ao Huri and the Te Tawhito is played out within the first three locations. Ferrymead provides the setting for a kind of dramatic coda. The use of kawa, Maori protocols, is central to the performance. The work follows the pattern of a challenge to the visitors (manuwhiri) followed by a call to enter (karanga). The audience is then welcomed into various performance spaces analogous to wharekai, meeting houses, where oral presentation plays an important role. The whole performance finally concludes with a meal, which takes place in the eating house, wharekai. The use of kawa is not explicitly explained to the audience of largely international visitors, however I make particular note of it here as it is important to the ethos of the work. Before considering the significance of this blending of kawa and theatrical devides I would like to briefly describe the sequence of events which took place the evening I saw the work.

To begin with, the audience was corralled into a holding space, which combined both Maori and theatrical architectural features, indicating the way in which the performance attempted to weave together a specific Maori performativity with theatrical conventions. The evening I attended the work, Mike Tamaki, as spokesperson, personally welcomed the audience. He described *Lost* as depicting the ‘most horrific period of time in the development of this country.’ He explained that the performance as noted earlier, was a ‘true account’ of the effect of Pakeha settlement of Aotearoa/New Zealand on Maori. After his welcome he introduced the narrator. Costumed in traditional Maori dress, she played the role of a historian cum storyteller, and accompanied the audience throughout the performance, carrying and reading from a ‘book of history.’ Following her entrance, the key characters of Te Ao Huri and Uitara were introduced. They burst into the playing space in a kind of challenge to the audience. The three actors, with fierce gazes, moved close to individual audience members, deliberately engaging them in eye contact.
Then, from inside the gates, the voice of a woman cried out in Maori. Upon her appearance Tamaki withdrew. The publicity material for the work described the woman as a ‘seer,’ or matakite, who channels and embodies the presence of the tipuna (ancestors). The matakite led the audience through the gates to Raro Heka – House of Understanding. At the foot of the bridge to the House she offered a karakia (prayer) to announce the arrival of the visitors and ask for their protection. As the audience crossed the bridge, voices whispered through a concealed sound system reminding the audience of the tipuna’s presence.

Inside Raro Heka, the audience was seated in front of a row of monitors. An audiovisual presentation told the story of Maori land struggle from the time of colonial contact to the present. Tamaki interestingly noted in an interview that the purpose of this presentation, with its multiple screens, was to ‘bypass your intellect and go directly to your subconscious’ (quoted in Darling). The specificity of what was shown on the screens, significant moments of racial conflict in New Zealand, was not explained in a historical sense. Instead these charged moments were overlayed in an affecting multimedia collage designed to provoke an emotional response. Immediately following, Te Ao Huri, Uitara and Te Tawhito burst into the space and offered a challenge to the audience while soft strains of a haka filtered over the sound system. One of Te Ao Huri’s people shouted ‘you will learn to tread lightly.’ The terms of the conflict between Te Ao Huri and Te Tawhito, essentially the clash of old and new values, were laid down through speeches directed to the audience.

The second installment of the drama began when the audience left Raro Heka and entered a clearing featuring a replica traditional Maori village, Matuku-moana, where different elements of Maori culture were demonstrated by costumed performers. At this point the work ceded to a much more conventional tourist mode. The audience was encouraged to have their photograph taken with Maori performers, enabling them to satisfying the souvenir aspect of the experience. The demonstration mode was broken when Te Ao Huri’s warriors burst into the village and threw down a final challenge to Te Tawhito. After the dialogue of the argument concluded the storyteller signaled that the audience must move on.

The climax of the Musket Wars narrative (though not of the wider land stakes) took place on the hill above Matuku-moana with the staging of a musket battle. After a sequence that involved choreographed combat, accompanied by smoke and explosions, Te Ao Huri and Te Tawhito agreed to fight warrior to warrior to settle the
dispute. Te Ao Huri overwhelmed Te Tawhito and slit his throat. The narrator announced, ‘So with that the world of traditional Maori changed forever.’ However, Te Ao Huri’s victory was brief. He re-entered stricken with disease. Lamenting the curse of sickness that had overtaken his people, he passed the mantle of his chiefly status to Uitara. The storyline of societal and cultural decline was given a feeling of tragic completeness as the dead body of his daughter was brought onto the stage and laid out on the ground. After this the audience was moved on once again.

To get to Ferrymead the audience boarded the village’s steam tram. The short ride away from the battlefield passed by a collection of rusty buildings, described by the narrator as a ‘fringe dwellers’ settlement.’ Images of illness and depravity abounded, bottles of alcohol were apparent, punches were thrown, prostitutes solicited for business. The train paused in front of this scene and Uitara’s men and women boarded. The steam train and buildings of the Ferrymead site are from the late 19th century, some sixty or so years after the Musket Wars, and so moved the story forward in time.

The first of the two major Ferrymead scenes took place at the church where the minister and his wife welcomed the audience to a service. Shortly after it began, the sermon was interrupted by Uitara’s warriors, who performed a haka and challenged the minister before being thrown out. This kind of institutional conflict was repeated in a second scene, which took the form of an argument between a Maori woman, who formerly played the matakite, and a lawyer in front of the Land Court office. The Maori woman was defeated in her argument, rhetorically out maneuvered by a pompously characterized Crown lawyer. Once the characters departed, the narrator continued the story, stating that at the time in which the argument took place Maori still owned 66 million acres of land. Now, Maori only own 2 million. ‘Today the battle for land ownership still goes on.’

The audience was finally moved on from the Land Court to a clearing at the end of the street, where they were told that the performance was over. Maori characters performed a waiata (song) and then a haka. Mike Tamaki reappeared and gave a concluding speech, attempting to contextualize the historical drama with current challenges for Maori in New Zealand. ‘Fundamentally we are a bicultural country’ he stated, as the Maori and Pakeha performers came together and sang. Tamaki took a final bow and summarized the work as being a celebration of the survival of the Maori people. (con’t)
The performance was followed by a shared meal where audience members had a chance to talk to the actors (out of costume) and to Tamaki. This informal meal was an important part of the overall experience, allowing direct connections to be made between visitors and hosts.

What marks Lost out from many other cultural tourism enterprises is the fact that it puts on display the unromantic or ‘dark’ aspects of culture: warfare, disease and the decline of traditional cultural structures. The ability to voice these narratives is described by tourism scholar Hollinshead, cited earlier, as ‘declarative articulation.... A fantasmic projection [that] promises … a whole new creative spectrum of options via tourism as “a” or “the” enabling speech act’ (36). As a re-enactive performance, Lost attempt to draw the audience into the feeling of ‘being there.’ The ability of the work to achieve this spatial and psychological location of the audience within its fictive realm is key. At a dramatic level, the site is laid out as a series of stages, upon which core action takes place. At the level of a cultural performance, the site must be a convincing reproduction of historical customary life. But the space also works as a contemporary Maori space designed specifically, in Hollinshead’s terms, as a declarative space which configures the environment. The audience is invited to enter this space, not just as passive viewers but as surrogate historical witnesses whose presence and act of watching legitimizes the drama being performed.

The declarative nature of the site is expressed through theatrical investment that endows the site with a speaking function. The scenographic transformation of the landscape, through the construction of replica archeological objects and mocked-up historical dwellings, inscribes the site with a Maori presence. This presence is further elaborated by the performances that take place on the site, which endow it with the ability to tell the story of the past. This positioning of the site is most fully realized in the prosopopeian function ascribed to the invisible tipuna, whose voices ‘haunt’ certain areas (via audio recordings). In asserting this speaking function, Lost attempts to imbue the site with a sacred quality, which the calls and prayers of the matakite further emphasize.

In its promotional material Lost draws on the concept of encounter, promising a ‘significant, deeply integral visitor encounter with our nation, our landscapes and our people.’ The success of this meeting depends on what John Taylor, in a discussion of Maori tourism, calls the ‘sincerity’ of the encounter: ‘In sincere cultural experiences, where tourists and “actors” “meet half way”, authenticity may be
redefined in terms of local values’ (24). Taylor’s ethos echoes that of Grotowski, discussed earlier, when, describing the role of the audience, he says: ‘We are doing something, and there are others, who want to meet us…. What is it that we are to do and what people do we want to meet? And what is that something that will happen to us and among us?’ (124) Encounter is the main organizing feature of Lost, not only reflecting the theme of colonial encounter, but also drawing the tourist audience into a subtle re-staging of such a meeting. This meeting further, as already noted, draws strongly upon traditional protocols. Tourists are manuhiri in two senses: they are foreign visitors; but they also take on the role of Pakeha ‘visitors’ within the drama.

In the first instance, the audience is cast in the role of bearing witness to a Maori narrative of the consequences of colonial contact. In doing so they are inducted into the sphere of Maori knowledge and experience. The sympathetic witness role is strongly suggested in the work’s promotional material:

We have waited 150 years to tell our story…
See what we have seen,
hear what we have heard
but most of all feel what we have felt.

The statement suggests the audience are there to hear, to act as witnesses, and also, through the drama, to feel and offer empathy. The sense in which the audience is encouraged to ‘experience what we have experienced’ is important, as it signals the desire for emotional engagement – for an empathy that derives from experience. Within the performance itself there was a strong emphasis on inducting the audience into a Maori space. These invitations to engage were generously made (despite the rather hefty pricetag for the performance) and motivated by a desire to sincerely communicate an understanding of Maori culture and history.

As a theatrical performance, Lost is not always successful. The plotting of the story is uneven, many of the performers are untrained, and the need to satisfy certain touristic conventions works against the emotional intensity that the performance attempts to generate. When I attended, one particular Australian tourist in our party consistently tried to jokingly engage with the actors. At the climax of the action, when Te Ao Huri cried out ‘Who will lead my people?’ the tourist casually replied in the affirmative – ‘I will.’ At such moments the potential created through the exposure and performance of cultural trauma itself became lost within the work’s fragmented
structure. Failing to follow the story at times, visitors in my party seemed to respond most strongly to the conventional moments of the spectacle. ‘Ah, yes, that’s it – finally,’ a man next to me commented when a haka was performed at the end. Further, the performance omitted explanation of kawa to tourists, sometimes bemusing foreign tourists who lacked, by Ricoeur’s formulation, a prefigurative Maori repertory. At the outset of the work, for example, when the actors offered a kind of challenge, the audience laughed (nervously) and took pictures, inadvertently unsettling of the formality of the Maori custom of issuing a challenge to visitors. These cultural conflicts created unease and imbued the space with a tension around its possession.

As the performance unfolded, actors in the roles of the rebel Te Ao Huri’s people became more and more hostile toward the audience. As tourists climbed to the top of the hill where the major battle took place, the actors shouted to them, ‘Get up the hill!’ and ‘Come on! Get up there!’ It was at this point that the role of the audience began to shift from that of sympathetic witnesses to antagonistic outsiders. This was, however, the most interesting – and successful – theatrical strategy of the work in that it enacted a kind of reversal that necessarily placed the audience in an ambivalent position.

Once the audience reached the last destination of the performance, Ferrymead, the replica colonial town located adjacent to the Lost site, they were subsumed within the cast of Pakeha extras. This repositioning of the audience was correlative to the shift in the status of the Maori characters as Uitara’s people were dis-located, and in a sense relegated to the fringes of the setting, while the audience explicitly took on the collective role of Pakeha townspeople. This reversal interrupted the identificatory mode of the drama, though in doing so, achieved a poignant effect. In its normal operation Ferrymead generally glosses over the scars of colonial history. Lost disrupted this positioning of the site by inscribing a Maori presence there. Tamaki’s staging created an affecting sense of disjunction as Uitara’s men and women desolately wandered around the fake town full of painted storefronts. The Maori ‘occupation’ of the colonial space made the position of the audience more complex. In this final phase of the work audience members moved, as already noted, from acting as empathetic or at least neutral witnesses to taking on the role of Pakeha, occupying an ambivalent position.

Lost in Our Own Land co-opt theatres as a means of both working through the trauma of colonization and working out the relationship between the colonized and
those who have come to gaze upon them. The work assigns the audience an essential role as belated witnesses whose listening presence is a recognition of the story being told. This role is a dynamic one; spectators are required to occupy different points of view as the work unfolded. While Tamaki clearly articulated the work as a re-enactment and not an entertainment, the work was inextricably both of these things. Indeed, Tamaki cites Mel Gibson’s film *Braveheart*, which depicts Scottish oppression, as an inspiration for the work and in his interview with Stan Darling for *The Press*, consistently refers to trying to make the work like a ‘movie scene.’ What is most significant about this is that it reveals the desire for emotional engagement and dramatic identification. Yet the theatrical conditions of the work, whilst not always successful, also make it all the more interesting than a film. Indeed, the tensions between these sometimes opposing ends produced some of the work’s most interesting effects. For example, while the Tamaki performance inscribed a Maori presence into Ferrymead, Ferrymead equally resisted this through its own internal logic. The unresolved clash of these two attempts at providing historical evidence, each seeking to undo the other, produced the most significant meaning within the performance. While the Maori and Pakeha performers may have stood hand in hand singing at the end – and performing the expected haka – the paradoxes of the performance confounded any sense of Maori or nationalistic triumph. The sense of loss in the title, *Lost in Our Own Land*, is most clearly depicted through the work’s delivery of the audience to a space of loss for the performers – the ideologically unsettling image of the colonial town as kitsch utopia.

The Levinasian notion of a call is given dramatic amplification within the performance. The karanga that calls the visitors to enter the performance space is not just a mimicked effect of inviting manuhiri onto a marae, however. Rather, this call is an invitation to listen, and this listening is demanded throughout the performance. *Lost* draws upon cultural notions of the presence of ancestors which mean that the listening asked of visitors is twofold: we are to listen to the actors, but also to listen for the echo which lies behind their voices. As I’ve noted, certain technical effects literalize the idea of ancestors whispering into the ears of visitors. This doubling is unique in terms of the tourist examples discussed thus far, in that otherness is multiple and temporally stratified. Most importantly, it is made accessible through the contemporary performers who offer themselves as ciphers through which the past may be spoken; cultural history is theatrically inscribed upon the body. Such inscription
must be related to the concepts of both land and loss, which the work articulates, in that the performing bodies bear the loss that is central to the work – the performing bodies, along with the setting, offer a substitutive geography. Within this landscape, spectators are bought face-to-face, quite literally at times, with an otherness which demands recognition. Such recognition is not always easily given, and indeed the performance deliberately denies spectators the ability to sympathetically connect with performers in the last section of the work. The ambivalence generated through this positioning of spectators, whilst not necessarily always productive, demonstrates that the concerns of the work are open and ongoing. For this reason, the act of eating together is perhaps the most ethically significant of the entire performance and yet, importantly, only able to attain such significance because of theatrical presentation which has gone before it.

The contingencies of ethical responsiveness

A discussion of Lost in Our Own Land demonstrates, in a more explicitly theatrical manner than other tourist examples discussed in this thesis, the contingencies of the theatrical character of ethical responsiveness. Theatre may provide a vehicle through which the face of the other is made available, creating a context in which some kind of configurative meeting can take place. Yet the manner in which such a face is received by the spectator is vulnerable to all sorts of prefigurative misunderstandings. An openness or willingness to hear the call of the other, cannot be automatically assumed. As with the examples of Cambodia and Vietnam, Lost reveals the relationship between Levinas’ generalized ethical ideal and the reality of cultural specificity to be problematic. As argued in the case of Vietnam, the very lack of a shared prefigurative repertory thwarts what Taylor describes as a sincere encounter that takes place at a ‘mid-point’ between parties.

Theatricality may always be marked by its alterior aspect, as I have argued, but in order for this aspect to be apprehended by an audience, certain aesthetic intentions and conditions (unique to each performance) are required. In this sense, it is important to clarify that I am not arguing for the ethical aspect of all theatre events, but rather for an ethical potential contained within the theatrical medium. Whereas
some performances may choose to expose and foreground the absences that shadow them, others will cover over such wounds. As a cinematic example, _Schindler’s List_ is not concerned with its own limitations in terms of what it cannot show, nor with the significance of the aesthetic artifices that it uses. In contrast, artist Omer Fast’s response to the film, the video installation _Spielberg’s List_ (Fast), sets out to expose these limitations by way of deliberately confusing distinctions between site and set, actors and survivors. His project explicitly privileges the kind of alterity that Spielberg’s suppresses. This is not to say that works not concerned with their own alterior aspect cannot be of value, simply that they are outside of the scope of interest of this thesis.

Whilst the contingencies of theatrical responsiveness may problematize the ethical, they can also have the opposite effect. In _Lost_, for example, it was the work’s failures that were most effective in their demonstration of the continued traumatic effects of the colonial encounter. In each of the examples discussed previously, I have been similarly interested in misfires, mishaps and misapprehensions and in instances where spectatorship itself is made difficult and, in this way, has a critical light cast upon it. Failure may sometimes act as a revelatory vehicle, in that it illustrates the difficulties and sometimes impossibility of encounter, connection and understanding. Failure thwarts expectation and unsettles convention and although it may sometimes simply scuttle the ethical attempt, it may also inadvertently reveal more than was originally intended.

Taken together, each of these contingencies points to the ethical importance of the spectator within the theatrical event. In talking of an ‘emancipated spectator’ Rancière argues, as discussed in the Introduction, for a break in the dialectical positioning of audience and action: ‘Emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting; when we understand that the self-evident facts that structure relations between seeing and doing themselves belong to structures of domination’ (13). His call is not so much for a freeing of the audience from the bondage of passivity, but rather, as I interpret it, an essentially democratic call for the _activation of responsibility_ in spectators through a recognizing of the significance of their activity:
The spectator … observes, selects, compares, interprets. She links what she sees to a host of other things she has seen on other stages, in other kinds of place. She composes her own poem with the elements of the poem before her (13).

In his evocation of an emancipated spectator, it is contingency and difference that Rancière emphasizes. This is significant in that it allows for the possibility of ethical response despite difficulty and disconnection. He further states:

What our performances – be they teaching, playing, writing, making art or looking at it – verify is not our participation in a power embodied in the community. It is the capacity of anonymous people, the capacity that makes everyone equal to everyone else. This capacity is exercised through irreducible distances; it is exercised by an unpredictable play of associations and dissociations (16-17).

Contingency reveals itself, therefore, as an essential ethical pre-condition. This is why this thesis has not been so much concerned with judging whether certain aesthetic projects or tourist sites fail or succeed, but rather looking at precisely the ‘play of associations and dissociations’ that each puts forth.

Dark Tourists: the evolution of memory

I would like finally to discuss Dark Tourists, a work very much concerned with the play of associations and dissociations. Unlike Lost in Our Own Land, the work was made by and for a highly trained aesthetic community. It was shown in arts festivals to a small fraction of Lost’s ongoing audiences. Precisely because of its different aims and context, however, Dark Tourists provides a useful counterpoint in terms of examining the kinds of contingencies outlined above.

Dark Tourists was performed in two seasons: at the Auckland Arts Festival in 2007, and at the Wellington Fringe Festival in 2008. It included a cast of seven performers, mainly dancers. Performers (some changes happened between seasons) were: Paul Young, Julia Milsom, Sean MacDonald, Peter Daube, Claire Lissaman, Sally Stockwell, Mia Blake, Paora Taurima, Eden Mulholland and Malia Johnston. The music was composed and performed by Eden Mulholland. My own involvement
was as a co-director/dramaturge, working alongside co-director/choreographer Malia Johnston. The work was set in a staged environment of aftermath which evoked a past catastrophe without specifically naming it. The performance was a blend of dance and theatre; narrated text, dialogue, monologue and song were interwoven with choreographic sequences, which particularly focused on repetition, mirroring and a fixation with objects, re-enactment and documentation. The work was non-sequential, and full of echoes and allusions. Its structure was that of multiple associative connecting threads.

Performers variously took on the roles of tourists who belatedly attended the catastrophic aftermath, or those who were surviving in its wake. Sean alone played the consistent role of tourist. He began the work by pacing throughout the space as the audience entered, wearing a backpack, and ended it by transforming the environment into a museum display, around which he danced. Claire was a secondary tourist, a kind of intimate archivist whose central relationships in the theatrical world were with its props, especially shoes and coats. Julia and Peter were positioned as those who had been left behind in the wake of catastrophe. Julia kept returning to a search for ‘the place where it happened,’ both within the space and in relation to her own body. Peter and Sean were also suggested as brothers, with a mirror-like relationship, each looking back at the other. Throughout the work a series of letters from Peter to Sean made their way into the work’s soundscape, unfolding the story of two men clinging to life on the salt encrusted shores of a departed Aral Sea. Paul was a dark comic foil in the performance, antagonizing other characters and providing a series of problems: addressing the audience, he tried to sell one of the performers as a rare object; in a scene where she was most vulnerable, he coaxed Claire into a dark wooden shed, suggesting (to the audience) that a kind of horror was about to take place. Additionally performers variously took on the roles of birds, sunbathers, dogs and statues. While each performer had a particular quality, aside from Sean’s consistent role characters were not fixed, rather coming and going like apparitions. Eden was onstage throughout the work, largely playing music but sometimes also dancing. Malia had a small role, appearing once as a dead body, and later as a sunbathing tourist.

The staged environment in which Dark Tourists took place was significantly marked by traces, both material and psychological. It was most pointedly post-catastrophic; bodies, both those of survivors and tourists moved through a debris
strewn set. In the final performance the work’s central objects were: jackets, shoes and hair and tape decks. Jackets were hung throughout the space, creating a landscape of empty forms; shoes were carefully carried about in piles; and images of the performers’ hair were used to suggest their disappearance. These objects at once signified the absence of those who once wore them as well as creating associations with the familiar images of shoes, suitcases, hair etc as displayed at sites such as Auschwitz. Claire, as noted, had a particularly vivid relationship with props. Throughout the work she continuously attempted to inhabit the trauma of others through a physical engagement with their relics. Her actions were characterized by an emphasis on tactile engagement; she carefully picked up empty coats and tried them on, marking out movement phrases as if tracing the map of human history which they signified. In these gestures there was a conflation of the qualities of space, bodies and objects. Both space and objects were responded to as if/ bodies. This produced a melancholy affect marked by a series of dis-placement: body from body, voice from body, body from space and body from history.

In addition to the use of jackets, shoes, hair and tape decks, a sense of disappearance was signified in *Dark Tourists* through the other key prop in the work, the last bird. This infiltrated the work in three ways. Sean carried a paper bird with him throughout the performance from beginning to end. This origami figure was placed within the mise-en-scene at key moments as if watching over the action. It was also evoked through the recorded fragments of text. Peter’s first letter noted that – ‘the last bird flew today… the last bird to leave will be the last bird never to come back.’ Finally, this disappearing creature was an identity assumed by various performers at different times: for example, midway through the work Malia became the last bird, a rare object for sale. The last bird was simultaneously a portent and object of desire. The hopelessness of its departure – ‘the last bird flew today’ - was countered by the possibility of its possession – ‘roll up, roll up… this is your last chance to own a piece of the incredible last bird on earth.’ Yet even this attempt was thwarted, the bird disappearing just as the sales pitch reached its climax. The bird was something rare and important, yet always just out of reach.
Within the structure of *Dark Tourists* we attempted to foreground the processes of capturing, imitating, rewinding and halting time. Layers of past and present, and the characters attached to each, overlapped and interrogated one another. Two key scenic devices aided in the organization of time: a wooden shed and a plastic room. The shed had two connotative associations: firstly, a barracks; and secondly, an iconic site of DIY endeavour (‘kiwi ingenuity’) – a space of creation and transformation. It was a mobile structure that the performers had a tactile relationship with; they entered and exited through it, caressed it, and wheeled it around the stage. This movement aided in the deconstruction of time; characters looked through the window to see the re-enactment of past actions. The shed functioned as a kind of portal through which different time vectors passed. The plastic room was a space of containment and isolation, particularly for Sean. His ownership of it functioned in two ways: on the one hand, he watched the other characters through its transparent walls, as if in a spectator’s box; on the other, he himself was the isolated specimen, an object of gaze for the audience. At the end of the work, in a reversal, all of the characters and the shed were packed inside the plastic room, while Sean took over the stage space. His actions transformed the world of aftermath into a museum display, which, in the end, after having exhausted its possibilities, he walked away from.

As my own involvement in making the work excludes me from being able to describe the experience of being a spectator to it, therefore I will draw on a selection of review quotes to evoke the work before discussing in more detail certain of its images which are relevant for the thesis. Reviewers Bernadette Rae and Jennifer Shennan’s comments usefully capture the general theme and tone of the work respectively:

The theme of *Dark Tourists* – the growing trend for holidaymakers to seek out destinations of disaster, war, genocide or assassination ... raising the question of whether this amounts to empathy or voyeurism (Rae).

*Dark Tourists* is painfully well-named. Bleak and dislocated and caustic and critical and sharp and sinewy and voyeuristic and nihilistic and darkly comic.... Its territory is a mix of Hieronymus Bosch, Bill Hammond [New Zealand surrealist painter] and Samuel Beckett, in a post-modern, post-Al Gore era (Shennan).
As Shennan’s comment suggests, the work was layered with a number of different images. Lyne Pringle’s review offers an overview of these:

This is what I saw: miles of salt, a retreating sea, the last bird to leave … humans in piles, exhausted… a small white peace crane in a pocket, a bird on a shoulder … a swirling plastic house and an old rickety shed on wheels with four heads in the window … a transistor on a ladder that yearns to be cradled … a rag doll sunbathing, one bird squawking “I'm an endangered species!” and his mate saying “Evolve! Evolve!”, a bird flying in formation with itself … a woman looking for the “spot where it happened”, then mauled with two hammers … brothers taking turns hanging in a plastic room, dying in each others arms … a singing man, a bird being eaten, a side show … a bevy of falling coats, the dead being picked over … 3 women sunbathers in a field of old coats … the “evolution of our memories” … a white paper bird in the palm of a headless hand (Pringle).

Generally, the structure of the work was episodic and circular, working and reworking images in differing contexts. Derek Tearne’s descriptions of the set and characters are particularly helpful in this regard:

The set devices are multiply coded. There is a building which is at various times a toilet, a house, a shop, a bus, a hunters hide, a trophy cabinet, a surfboard and many other things. There is a cage made of plastic sheets which is at times both restrictive and protective of the solitary bird who resides within, and of the human characters. Coats appear throughout the set of Dark Tourists, hung from above, casually dumped around the stage, and worn/removed by the dancers.

Each character is multiply coded, being at various times a bird, a human and a dark tourist. The characters are all suffering loss of some kind, either as birds or humans, and that loss is due to the actions or inactions of humans and to a lesser extent the birds themselves. The bird characters are used as exemplars for the failing environment, to demonstrate that neither evolution or flight will ultimately allow escape from confinement/extinction/endless repetition of mistakes. Birds are also the ultimate tourists… (Tearne).

It is finally important to note that the work received mixed responses. Most notably, Bernadette Rae commented of the 2007 version, that ‘an hour and a half later ... we were none the wiser, uninformed by the proceedings and distinctly lacking in any empathy’ (Rae). Pringle and Shennan’s comments refer to a subsequently reworked version of the piece which was much more positively received: Raewyn Whyte, for New Zealand National Radio, described the work as ‘profound and intelligent’ (Whyte).
Whilst other theatre works discussed thus far have been concerned with specific cultural traumas, *Dark Tourists* used theatre to explore, at a more abstract level, the relationship that spectators might have to other people’s suffering – as noted, the particular catastrophe that the characters were responding to was an unnamed one. As the final example in the thesis, the work is useful in its attempt to dramatize the theatrical nature of dark tourism. For example, after a movement sequence in which one of the performers danced in the shadow of a pile of old shoes, she was addressed by a tape recorder placed on the top of a high ladder. Like a friendly tour guide the voice urged her to come up, promoting the beautiful view and marvelous sights – ‘you can see the marks that the people left behind.’ After finally coaxing her to the top, the voice begged, ‘hold me.’ She picked up the tape deck and cradled it as it continued to speak. Slowly the language turned, calling her ‘a scrap, a remnant’ and accusing her of ‘fouling the land with her slimy limey deposits.’ As the language built, the dancer threw the tape deck where it landed back in the arms of another dancer, who carried the voice off stage. The original performer was then left isolated at the top of the ladder while the performance continued beneath her. Her relationship with the tape recorder had been an intimate one. The care which she initially lavished on the device illustrated an absurd split between voice and body – the recorded voice becoming the nostalgic and desired object. In its reversal of attitude, the taped voice negated the humanized face to which it had originally addressed itself. By this address the performer was designated as the abject and unwanted other. The turn of the voice was like an instance of traumatic recall. The response of the performer, in turn, was to negate the voice as it had negated her: she threw away the tapedeck, which was caught and carried off stage by another performer, but she herself was left sitting, alone, high atop the ladder as if returned to a moment which could not be forgotten. This sequence was a choreography of the ambivalent positioning of tourists and the fragility of theatrical modes of engagement.

Another such image was the key publicity shot for the work, which featured a dancer, naked and prone, arched backwards over a tall pole. This image was realized during the work near the end when a female dancer, wearing one of the old coats, draped herself across the top of a ladder. The tableau was a clear aestheticization of pain, lit to emphasize the form of the body, drawing particular attention to its structure, whilst at the same time highlighting its vulnerability. Such an image leads back to the question of how a focus on the materiality of the body and on embodied response
relates to and works within dark tourist sites. The sites I have discussed vary in their approach to both representing bodily absence and drawing spectators into an affective experience of the absence. At Murambi the body as pained material is most significantly demonstrated, and to literally startling effect in the accounts of Stewart and Thompson. At former Nazi concentration camps, however, even the ghosts of the dead seem to have been banished; absence is given a final and absolute quality. Spectators are never invited into an intimate contemplation of what the brutal disembodiment of the other might mean. Rather than bodies, the objects that the dead left behind are made to point to a multitudinous absence. The War Remnants Museum in Vietnam, with less care than Murambi, attempts to show precisely brutal disembodiment as a way of generating a shock of recognition. At Hoa Lo the body is again put on display, but this time in a way that emphasizes its wholeness and warmth (which is contrasted with the situation in which the bodies are positioned); in a gentle manner, the spectator is invited to meditate not on the woundedness of the body, but rather on its humanity. A similar ethos also governs Tuol Sleng, where the plaintive faces of those tortured at the prison are all the more poignant for not bearing evidence of the pain that would follow their being photographed. They show us an image of the human at the very moment, or on the very brink, of having their human face erased. As such, the photographs are an illustration of the very fragility of that face. At each site the body and its absence most potently speak to the spectator. (Significantly it is the shoes and hair in this sense that seem to draw the strongest response from visitors to Auschwitz.) In Christchurch, absence is understood on Maori terms: tipuna are always present and call us to account. Through affecting or pretending a dialogical terrain, the sites I have discussed activate a dramaturgy of bodies. They show a landscape that has borne the ‘disappearance of man’ (Muller in Lehmann 81), through invoking the disappeared (or exited.) Such an evocation has a flickering quality, the coming and going described earlier; it appears and disappears, it speaks and is mute. Walking through Tuol Sleng, where there are so many photos, one passes some by with little engagement, while others seem suddenly to cry out. They invite our contemplation whilst simultaneously pointing to a breach in our ability to understand. They ask us to bear the pain of this breach, to continue to turning back towards them for every instance of turning away.

In *Dark Tourists*, bodies were caught in this interplay of appearance and disappearance, entering and exiting. The body was suggested as both subject and
object. The effect of this on the audience was mixed, as reflected in Rae’s review. The sense in which certain reviewers felt distanced from the work suggests a perceived emptiness in the imagery. At the same time, other spectators such as Derek Tearne, who saw the same season as Rae, commented that they found the work ‘profoundly moving’ (Tearne). The point is not to argue the validity of one position over the other, but rather again to return to the point of contingency. Whilst all critical responses are contingent, what makes this case interesting is that contingency of response was also the subject of the work. The responses that radiated out from it therefore reflected a certain ambivalence that underscored the nature of the performance generally, which had to do with the possibilities of representation, its aesthetic and ethical limits.

In his discussion of postdramatic theatre, of which *Dark Tourists* might be described as an example, Lehmann comments, ‘the figure of the other in theatre always has a reality only of arrival, not presence…. we may call this essence of the theatrical figure its *representability*’ (172). The image of something that arrives, enters, but is not yet present – is in a continual state of arrival – is a dialectic that reflects the double movement of the spectator who turns towards, away from, and again towards, the face of the other. What Lehmann significantly argues, as have I, is that it is theatricality that makes such an alterior potentiality perceptible: ‘life never attains such a representation but in being articulated theatrically its “representability” appears’ (173). He further states:

> Representability as an experience that is simultaneously aesthetic and ethical is the manifestation of fate, the main theme of tragic theatre. However, while the dramatic theatre inspired by the ancient tragic model relegated fate to the frame of a narration, the course of a fable, in postdramatic theatre it is articulated not through a plot but through the appearance of the body: fate here speaks through gesture, not through myth (173).

*Dark Tourists* could be described, in this way, as a dramaturgy of the appearances and disappearances of the body, entering and exiting: a continual emergence and retraction of the possibility of representability. By way of its double movement, such theatricality transcends the frame of conventional dramatic representation. Lehmann notes: ‘Representability, the inner logic of theatrical reality, thus by no means contradicts the insight that human reality can only be dealt with under the premise that it remains unrepresentable’ (173). In regard to dark tourism, it is the always arriving
and yet never present aspect of the bodies of the past, when successfully evoked, that makes them most ethically powerful. This perpetual arrival suggests the call of the other and its ceaseless aspect. What I have argued throughout this thesis is that it is *theatricality* that may allow such an affect of arrival to be apprehended. An ethics of spectatorship to such sites might be said to begin with the acknowledgment that, despite an arrival that is never completed, and a lack of presence, we are nonetheless located within a shared ethical space. That is, by our own presence – our appearance – we acknowledge our responsibility towards the disappeared, those who have exited. Through our emplacement we are dramaturgically implicated in the ethical and representational breaches that mark the site.

A contingent analysis allows us to understand the ethical positioning of the spectator that takes into account the fragmented, discontinuous and irresolvable aspects of such sites. In the way that postdramatic theatre, as Lehmann argues, seeks to abandon totality, memorial sites might be described as most ethically complex when they reject monumentality as a form of dramatized coherence. Indeed, the aspects of memorial sites I have been most interested in generally interrupt their own smooth functioning in order to jolt the spectator into a mode of non-complacent engagement. As discussed in relation to Grotowski, this can be regarded as an aesthetic of trauma by which the ‘emotional safety’ of the spectator comes under attack (Niziolek 26). Other scholars have variously described aesthetics of shock, atrocity and so on, by which an ethical consciousness might be provoked. Grehan has usefully described such aesthetics as generating ambivalence in the audience: on the one hand, the performance inflicts a kind of emotional wound, while on the other, it calls attention to a greater woundedness depicted on stage. In *Akropolis* this was significantly achieved through spectators’ confinement within the world of evil that the performers created. In *Dark Tourists*, near the conclusion of the work, Peter, through a recorded fragment of text which he listens to from one of the tape decks, evoked an image of tourists which suggested the instability and contingency of memory:

They pluck the crusted ground for souvenirs. Leaving, their pinch of loss becomes bird in hand. New born, soft, jerking, its wings are brushing the lines of their palms. My brother and I are watching. On the horizon one thousand birds slip through foreign salty fingers. Look how they take flight. It is the evolution of our memories.
The tourists, like Rancière’s anonymous spectators, appropriate and reinvent what they encounter. Yet the image, as suggested in the text, is not an abject one, but perhaps, rather, one of fragile emancipation.

**Conclusion**

*Lost in Our Own Land* is a commercially driven (albeit politically charged) tourism spectacle aimed at a broad audience. *Dark Tourists* was a small-scale experimental dance theatre work aimed at an audience of, as noted, aesthetically trained spectators. Yet each, dealing with trauma by way of theatre, necessarily confronted the inherent difficulty of giving a voice to such material, which in its very nature is marked by a fugitive character. In the works and sites discussed in the thesis generally, contingency, failure and irreparable loss underscore both the traumatic history at hand and the attempts to represent them. Within these contingent attempts, there is a common play of voice, place and encounter. In the varying configurations of these elements, identification, in the manner argued in this thesis, has an important ethical role to play in terms of awakening in the spectator a sense of responsibility for the other. I return to Grotowski’s earlier statement regarding the concept of theatrical encounter: ‘We are doing something, and there are others, who want to meet us…. What is it that we are to do and what people do we want to meet? And what is that something that will happen to us and among us?’ (124) Whilst such a meeting, which I argue has a Levinasian ethical aspect to it, is important, equally important are instances in which spectatorship is made *difficult*. I argue that we might think about such problematization of spectatorship as in fact creating the conditions for an *activation of responsibility* in the spectator through a recognition of the significance of his or her activity, whether associative or dissociative. Indeed, as stated in the Introduction, it is the dialectic itself that makes evident the crucial critical limit against which we must each, as anonymous spectators, position ourselves.
Concluding remarks: after the catastrophe

The twentieth century was marked by a series of social catastrophes that profoundly challenged humanist values. It was also the century of the tourist. Economic and technological changes opened the world for viewing. This thesis has been interested in a particular kind of viewing that has resulted from such opening, not that of the picturesque, but its dark opposite. I have asked how such spectatorship, which willingly faces the pain of others, might be thought of in ethical terms. Dark tourism sites, as a means of memorializing what has been lost, most markedly call into being what is absent. I have shown that such practices can be usefully understood as theatrical. Further, this theatricality is significantly manifest in the role of the spectator, through whose imagination the absent object, or symbolic replacement, must be rendered meaningful. For example, such a role maps strong symbolic value onto objects such as shoes or hair at Auschwitz. Or the apple in the explicitly theatrical context of the performance of The Investigation, where it became a charged object. Our imagination of the voices of the dead (in the sense that objects, or even bodies in the case of Rwanda, may ‘speak’ to us) is a means of counteracting their effacement or de-personification within the historical context in which they were victimized.

Proceeding from such a theatrical reading of dark tourist sites, and complemented by a discussion of theatre works that address the same historical circumstances, I have asked whether such spectatorship, which requires an imaginative engagement on the part of the spectator, can be understood as ethical in the sense described by Levinas. In reply to the question of whether the relationship between imagination and aesthetic substitution can be read ethically, I have replied in the affirmative. That is, theatricality may provide a face that challenges a sense of ethical responsibility in the subject; as I have discussed, the final image of Beckett’s Catastrophe neatly illustrates this.

The reason I have given for the complementarity of theatre and ethics, as conceived by Levinas, has to do with the representational limit that events such as the Holocaust confront us with. These histories challenge us to consider how the unshowable might be shown. I have argued that in this context it is useful to think of alterity – the experience of the other – as the unrepresentable. I have further argued
that theatre generally is always marked by alterity, by that which, as States asserts, it is not and can never be (213). For, as previously cited, Kennedy argues that live performance is always shadowed by its opposite, death, ‘the perpetual ghost at the spectator’s banquet’ (8). In its very liveness and its openness to the spectator, theatre, of all art forms, is marked by its alterior counterpart. This is why our responses to spaces marked by absence are available to be experienced and analyzed as theatrical in character.

In developing how we might more closely understand this type of theatricality, I have turned, in part, to Lehmann’s description of postdramatic theatre. For me, although Lehmann does not especially address it, there is a strong ethical undercurrent in the type of theatrical practice he discusses, especially in the sense that he describes such performances as generally ‘resisting’ interpretation. For, as Butler argues:

> For representation to convey the human, then, representation must not only fail, but must show its failure. There is something unrepresentable that we nevertheless seek to represent, and that paradox must be retained in the representation we give. In this sense, the human is not identified with what is represented but neither is it identified with the unrepresentable; it is, rather, that which limits the success of any representational practice (144).

Resistance to interpretation is marked by an openness to alterity, in terms of both theatre itself and an understanding of inter-subjective relations generally. Given the ethical aspect of such theatrical practices, and the sense in which I have argued that dark tourism is generally theatrical in nature, I suggest that it may, though not in all instances, be thought of as a kind of postdramatic practice. Such tourism requires a theatrical gaze (in the sense meant by Féral) on the part of the spectator, and is necessarily elliptical, truncated and marked by absences. It engages repetition, simulation and reconstruction. Narrative is present but complicated, fragmentary and often overwhelming in scope. Such destabilization has been evident not just in my own accounts as a tourist but also in Thompson and Stewart’s responses to Murambi in Rwanda. Like Grehan, I have argued that such unsettling of the spectator has an ethical aspect to it.

The thesis has not focused solely on postdramatic examples, however. Delbo’s performance of Molière’s The Hypochondriac, for example, demonstrates, as I have argued, that it is not a particular type of theatre that is most ethically valuable, but rather, a kind of theatrical responsiveness. This responsive quality is malleable,
adapting itself according to given circumstances. Thus, whilst fracture, rupture and dissonance may produce ethical effects in certain instances, in others, a similarly powerful effect may be achieved through a performance that is integrative and restorative. As Thompson notes of applied theatre work carried out in crisis situations, ‘Beauty is most intense when it is experienced in a place of deprivation, and, more significantly, here we have a sense that beauty reveals and perhaps fulfils, a need’ (151). Or, as the theatre-as-reconciliation participant, cited at the beginning of Chapter one, stated ‘When we sing and dance, we feel happy and excited. I no longer see them as enemies, but those that share problems of the survivor’ (Theatre for reconciliation participant in Breed 509).

I would like finally to reiterate the performative-ethical thread of this thesis by returning to where it began, Rwanda, and briefly considering the work of Chilean-born, New York-based artist, Alfredo Jaar. Jaar went to Rwanda in the immediate aftermath of the genocide. He made a series of works in response to what he saw there, which he collectively titled, *The Rwanda Project 1994-1998*. I would like to discuss five works from that series: *Signs of Life, Real Pictures, The Eyes of Gutete Emerita, The Silence of Nduwayezu* and *Emergency*. Although the works were not performance pieces, I argue that they have a significantly theatrical aspect to them in their interplay of presence and absence, by way of foregrounding the ‘characters’ of the genocide, and the sense in which he draws the audience into certain stagings of the event. Of the series, David Levi Strauss comments:

> It is not possible to make an image of genocide. But it is possible to make images of individuals, and to put words and images and sounds together to say something in relation to genocide. Without turning a sea of griefs into a proscenium, one can still effect the mise en scène’(43).

While Strauss rejects a sense of conventional theatricality, he acknowledges the performative aspect of Jaar’s work. The aesthetics and ethics of *The Rwanda Project* poetically illustrate how such a relation might be thought of in theatrical terms.

In *Signs of Life*, Jaar sent a series of kitsch wildlife and cultural postcards from Rwanda to friends elsewhere in the world, each proclaiming an individual’s survival: ‘Justine Hunararungu is still alive!’ ‘Caritas Wamazuru is still alive!’ ‘Jerome Uwanahoro is still alive!’ The conflicting glimpses of idealized landscape and violent
social reality spoke to the imagination of Rwanda (at that time) and its reality. Jaar’s announcements of survival were acts of affirmation. They recognized the identity of individuals, giving a face to what was an almost incomprehensible catastrophe to foreign audiences. The ethical power of the work lay in its designation of people’s names, and its celebration of their survival. They also powerfully pointed to what was absent from the picturesque image.

If Signs of Life was a desperate act of affirmation carried out from within the genocidal landscape – the cards were sent in 1994 – Real Pictures, which followed a year later, considered how the evidences of such a time should be dealt with after the event. The work comprised a number of tomb-like black boxes, displayed in a reverentially low-lit gallery space. The boxes contained the hundreds of photos that Jaar had taken while in Rwanda but which he now felt unable to show. On top of each of the boxes was a description of the testimony offered within. For example:

Ntarama Church, Nyamata, Rwanda
40 kilometers south of Kigali
Monday, August 29, 1994

This photograph shows Benjamin Musisi, 50, crouched low in the doorway of the church amongst the scattered bodies spilling out into the daylight. Four hundred Tutsi men, women and children who had come here seeking refuge were slaughtered during Sunday mass.

Benjamin looks directly into the camera, as if recording what the camera saw. He asks to be photographed amongst the dead. He wanted to prove to his friends in Kampala, Uganda, that the atrocities were real and that he had seen the aftermath.

The work is marked by ambivalence, most notably that of Jaar toward his own artistic practice – the vexed photographic objects are buried, encased and out of view. Such burial has a ceremonial aspect – a kind of substitutional burial of the dead – and at the same time is a kind of burying of the aesthetic endeavor, as if its only value lies in its disavowal. While Jaar significantly conceals the photographic representation of the face, however, he calls it into being in another way; rather than being shown the face of Benjamin Musisi, we must imagine it. The excerpt above shows a movement from fact, to account, to encounter. Real Pictures draws the audience into such an encounter while asking them to acknowledge the contingencies of their own spectatorship.
In the year following *Real Pictures*, Jaar produced a slide-show work (of seven slides), called *The Eyes of Gutete Emerita*. The work explored how the face of the other might be represented in a way that emphasized its ethical claim. The first six slides, composed only of text, briefly related Emerita’s testimony via Jaar’s recollection of it. (The paragraph breaks below indicate the slide breaks):

Gutete Emerita, 30 years old, is standing in front of church where 400 Tutsi men, women and children were systematically slaughtered by a Hutu death squad during Sunday mass. She was attending mass with family when the massacre began. Killed with machetes in front of her eyes were her husband Tito Kahinamura, 40, and her two sons, Muhoza, 10, and Matirigari, 7. Somehow, Gutete managed to escape with her daughter, Marie Louise Unumararunga, 12. They hid in a swamp for three weeks, coming out only at night for food.

Her eyes look lost and incredulous. Her face is the face of someone who has witnessed an unbelievable tragedy and now wears it. She has returned to this place in the woods because she has nowhere else to go. When she speaks about her lost family, she gestures to corpses on the ground, rotting in the African sun.

I remember her eyes.

The eyes of Gutete Emerita.

These six slides are followed by a seventh, which briefly, and in close range, flashes an image of Gutete’s eyes. Jaar has commented:

In that fraction of a second, I want the spectator to see the massacre through the eyes of Gutete Emerita. I think that this is the only way to see the massacre now, since we failed to see it in the actual images of the Rwandan genocide (*Let There Be Light: The Rwanda Project 1994-1998* 61).

It was in the very coming and going of the image that Jaar located its power. In an arresting flash of light, the image seared itself onto the spectator’s mind then disappeared again, almost like Grotowski’s figures disappearance into the crematorium oven at the end of *Akropolis*. What is significant in *The Eyes of Gutete Emerita* is Jaar’s hope that through this effect we will see through Emerita’s eyes, even if only momentarily. Such sight is necessarily identificatory in nature. It also
asks us, again, even if only momentarily, to perform a kind of substitution, in the sense meant by Levinas.

A year later, Jaar revisited the image of the eyes in *The Silence of Nduwayezu*. Jaar had met Nduwayezu, a young boy, in a refugee camp. The boy had ‘seen with his own eyes’ the hacking to death of his mother and father by machete. Jaar notes that Nduwayezu, for a month after the event, was silent. In a recent interview Jaar has described this meeting:

I visited a refugee camp and Nduwayezu was seated on the stairs of a door. I discovered very quickly that all these kids were orphans that had witnessed how their parents were killed. Nduwayezu actually saw his mother and father killed with machetes. His reaction was to remain silent for approximately four weeks. He couldn’t speak. His eyes were the saddest eyes I had ever seen, so I wanted to represent that and speak about his silence—because his silence refers to the silence of the world community that let this happen ("Interview: The Rwanda Project").

In the exhibition *The Silence of Nduwayezu*, spectators read Jaar’s text, which was displayed on light boxes, before turning a corner where they were met by a huge light box table, upon which were piled a million slides, each of Nduwayezu’s eyes. Spectators were invited to pick the slides up and look through them. The work explored the same gesture as *Emerita* in terms of inviting the spectator to look through the eyes of the other. Importantly, Jaar describes this gesture as an *identificatory* one:

When we say a million deaths it is meaningless. So the strategy was to reduce the scale to a single human being with a name, with a story, and that helps the audience to identity with that person. And this process of identification is fundamental to create empathy, to create solidarity, to create intellectual involvement ("Interview: The Rwanda Project").

Jaar’s framing of identification is precisely that which I have argued as necessary throughout this thesis. Such identification – a recurrent device within Jaar’s work – does not, as Butler suggests, consist of ‘an extrapolation from an understanding of my own precariousness to an understanding of another’s precarious life’ (Butler 134). Rather, by seeing through the eyes of the other, we are invited to more profoundly acknowledge what they see and have seen, and at the same time recognize our inevitable distance from that sight. As Jaar comments:
I’m interested in that moment when the audience takes a look. They look at the eyes very carefully, and that is the moment I’m looking for—when their eyes are a centimeter away from the eyes of Nduwayezu, who witnessed what we didn’t want to see ("Interview: The Rwanda Project").

Finally, there is *Emergency*, made in 1998, near the end of the Rwanda Project. The work consisted of a large black pool filled with water. Reflected in the pool one could see the gallery environment. Then, at intervals, a model of the continent of Africa would rise from the water before disappearing again. This pattern of rising and falling repeated continuously. The performative poetics of the work are powerful. The rise and fall of the object – Africa – is a critique; it suggests that we have, as yet, failed to grasp its identity and import. At the same time, the work comments upon the ethical-representational project itself. It repeats the manner in which Jaar’s work vacillates, or hovers, upon the kind of representational breach point. By the very manner in which spectators are both engaged and yet limited in their engagement, Jaar attempts to engender an ethical consciousness, one that operates through inviting the audience to ‘take a look.’ What his work suggests, and what is resonant for the practice of dark tourism, is that such looking incurs ethical obligation.

The productive contradictions within Jaar’s responses to Rwanda – the photograph as a weak simulacrum in counterpoint to its necessity as evidence, words as both strong and weak, the ethics of either concealing or revealing the face – underlie the impossibility of an ideal representational practice. As Jaar notes:

> There is this huge gap between reality and its possible representations, and that gap is impossible to close. So as artists we have to try different strategies of representation and the silence is just one more attempt to represent the very difficult and tragic situation ("Interview: The Rwanda Project")

Nonetheless, substitutes, as attempts to draw us into a relation with the suffering of others, demand ethical attention despite their limitations. What makes Jaar’s work so successful, and theatrical in character, is his exploitation of the very gap between reality and representation. Through bringing together narrative, image and spectator, Jaar makes the *absent* bodies of victims and survivors palpably felt. As such, his work usefully illustrates an aesthetic-ethical practice within which spectators are drawn to what is in-between reality and representation, presented alternately with
spoken and unspoken, seen and unseen. In this way, spectators are called upon to locate themselves in relation to the other, and at the same time required to recognize the identity of the other, even if this is unavailable, as necessary for such a location to take place.

The dialectical, ethical, representational and theatrical problems that run through this thesis have been addressed and bought into relation with one another, but yet not finally resolved. This irresolution reflects the very nature of the subjects that they speak to: catastrophe, genocide, unspeakable loss. While the question of inexplicable suffering may never be answered, our very humanity depends on the ceaseless pursuit of a world in which such suffering, even if beyond comprehension, is diminished. Levinas’ ethics make precisely this claim upon us; in urging us to awaken to the call of the other, he asks us to recognize a humane subjectivity that is constructed in response to the other. In bringing Levinas to a theatrical project I have sought not so much to prove a theatrical dimension encoded within his ethics, though I believe that in certain regards such a case could be made, but rather to ask how his provocations might challenge us to think through the role that theatricality might play within social life, examined here specifically in the example of dark tourism. If theatre is always marked by loss, then it is precisely for this reason that it is capable of calling us to account. Writers cited within this thesis have argued similarly, making cases for various aesthetics of risk, shock, ambivalence and unsettlement. Such arguments commonly aim at a kind of piercing-through of complacent spectatorship. They focus their aim on the moments in which the other either comes into being – arrives – or disappears from view, thus thwarting what Levinas describes as the solidity of the object. Rather than binding us to a horizon, such palpitating objects unseat the certainty of coherent subjectivity. A performative practice – of entering and exiting – which captures this tenuousness, or what Butler describes as precariousness, is most significant in its grounding in the here and now. As Butler states: ‘reality is not conveyed by what is represented within the image, but through the challenge to representation that reality delivers’ (146). At concentration camp sites the central ethical point is not what is shown, but what is not, what cannot be. Theatre, in its dialectical or alterior aspect, heightens such awareness in the spectator, and this awareness can be fruitfully described as imbued with theatricality. It is
through the manner in which spectators must confront such absences that a substitutional ethic comes into play:

To substitute oneself does not amount to putting oneself in the place of the other man in order to feel what he feels; it does not involve becoming the other nor, if he be destitute and desperate, the courage of such a trial. Rather, substitution entails bringing comfort by associating ourselves with the essential weakness and finitude of the other; it is to bear his weight while sacrificing one’s interestedness and complacency-in-being, which then turns into responsibility for the other (Levinas in Robbins 228).

By way of such an ethic, complacency gives way to profound concern. Theatricality, I have argued, allows us to perform such an association, which is necessarily one of recognition, even if not of comprehension. It is by way of such association that the sphere of concern constituted in response to the catastrophe might be widened. Further, a theatrical analysis helps to clarify what is at stake in such spectatorship. For as Levinas notes, ‘the self cannot survive by itself alone, cannot find meaning within its own being-in-the-world’ (quoted in Butler 132). To be alive is to be necessarily bound to other lives and deaths. A theatrical taking on of those who have died recognizes this binding together of our own lives with the fact of their death. The gesture is generative, staging a kind of coming-into-being of the ethical moment, which is an awakening to shared humanity and mutual responsibility. Theatricality, as a medium, allows such a being with otherness, a being with what is otherwise than being, to take place.
Appendix

NB: Please find attached to the inside back cover of this thesis, a DVD copy of *Dark Tourists*, performed at Te Whaea Theatre, as part of the Wellington Fringe Festival, 1998.
Works Cited


*Platoon*. Dir. Oliver Stone. MGM, 1986. Film.


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