MEDIA FIELDS
JOURNAL

Introduction

Memory, Space, and Media

David Gray and Jade Petermon

While memory is commonly linked with time, phenomenological writers such as Edward Casey and Gaston Bachelard have also explored the spatial aspects of memory, and the ways in which memories attach to particular places. For Casey, the body is the link between memory and place. Without an attachment to place, memories are weak and unmoored:

> To be placeless in one's remembering is not only to be disoriented; it is to be decidedly disadvantaged with regard to what a more complete mnemonic experience might deliver. Place serves to *situate* one's memorial life, to give it 'a name and a local habitation.'[1]

Because we are profoundly interested in questions of collective trauma, the body strikes us as an interesting site of exploration. If the body is the link between memory and place, how do media representations help us to approach the intersections between bodies, memory, and space? Diana Taylor writes of visiting Villa Grimaldi in Santiago, Chile, a detention center under Pinochet's rule now converted into a memorial park, and taking a guided tour given by a survivor of the camp. This tour prompts a number of

questions, including the importance of "*being in place*" in a place such as this, and that of witnessing through the proxy of a guide. Taylor writes:

> We all live in proximity to criminal violence, and though some have felt it more personally than others, this violence is never just personal. If we focus only on the trauma, we risk evacuating the politics. Standing there, together, bringing the buildings and routines back to life, we bear witness not just to loss, but to a system of power relations, hierarchies, and values that not only allowed but required the disappearance of certain people.[2]

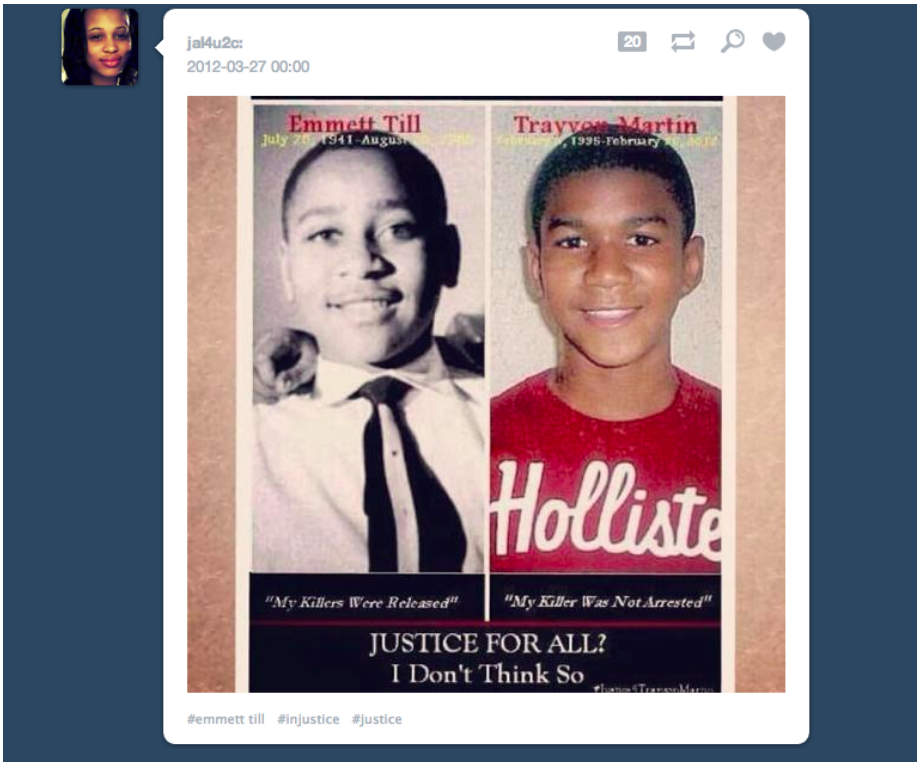
What is the relationship between "traveling" to a place in a film and standing on the ground? How do we stand then, together and apart from the bodies on screen? When places fail to convey their memories, as Nelly Richard argues occurs in a flattening of experience at Villa Grimaldi's memorial park, can media restore this texture?[3]

We believe an examination of raced bodies is especially fruitful for the discussion of memory, place, and media. Maurice Stevens convincingly argues that the field of trauma studies needs to account for the ways in which trauma *makes* subjects, rather than how it *resides within* subjects. The black body, for instance, is *always already* traumatized because of the history that is wrapped up within it. However, Stevens's insight takes this idea a step further insofar as it allows for a re-imagining of black subject formation. Not only do the collective memories of black people comprise a fact of black culture, but the circulation of these collective memories and experiences materialize in the black body. The 'black body' (as an articulation of culture) and black bodies (human beings) function as the material of memory. Giuliana Bruno writes, "our body is not in space like things; it inhabits or haunts space . . . through it we have access to space."[4] Any body is a space for memory.

Our attention to the black body as a function of, or container for, memory, creates an opportunity to explore how race shapes space and spatial relations. Sara Ahmed offers some insight into this question. In her article "Affective Economies," she argues that the movement of emotions between and across human beings is economic:

> The economy of fear works to contain the bodies of others, a containment whose 'success' relies on its failure, as it must keep open the very grounds of fear. In this sense, fear works as an affective economy, despite how it seems directed toward an object. Fear does not reside in a particular object or sigh, and it is this lack of residence that allows fear to slide across signs and between bodies.[5]

Here, Ahmed is referring to the ways in which the movement of affect between black and white bodies stirs fear in the white subject and a fear of being feared in the black subject. This demonstrates how the economy of fear changes physical space. Ahmed's argument also helps to demonstrate the ways in which history and memory get caught up in the body itself. As a result, this *body memory* impacts subject formation as well the movement of our bodies in and through space. To illustrate, we turn to the recent case of Trayvon Martin.



As a result of the affective economies constituted around black skin, black bodies have the ability to reconfigure social space. The experience of a black person walking into a store and being followed by employees speaks to this point. The black body in certain places constitutes a threat. The recent death of Trayvon Martin and the media spectacle that mushroomed around the incident is a potent example. Countless Internet memes comment on the incident in different ways, ranging from viewing it as relatively inconsequential to attempting to grapple with the murder as an instance of anti-Black racism. The most relevant memes for our discussion link the murder of Trayvon Martin to the murder of Emmett Till. The deaths of these two young men clearly demonstrate the economy of fear in relation to the black body as well as the black body's ability to reconfigure social space. Emmett Till's physical proximity to white femininity changed the space of an ordinary convenience store into a threatening one. Nearly 60 years later, Trayvon Martin's presence in a suburban Florida subdivision transformed the neighborhood in a similar way. Despite changes in time, space, and circumstance, the black body and the memories that lie within and circulate around it continue to work in similar ways. Ahmed's theory of affective economies is useful here because it provides insight into how the circulation of affect motivates action, which ultimately creates changes in space. She writes, "Emotions create the very effect of the surfaces or boundaries of bodies and worlds."[6] Emotions can be excavated from the circulation of history and memory and are essential to understanding the relationship between the body and space.

Clyde Woods and Katherine McKittrick write of the places where black people live, "Black geographies disclose how the racialized production of space is made possible in the explicit demarcations the spaces of *les damnés* as invisible/forgettable at the same time as the invisible/forgettable is producing space."[7] Woods and McKittrick open the volume with Hurricane Katrina as an example of the ways in which black geographies are usually invisible and therefore the most easily forgotten. While this is a valuable framework for evaluating black geographies, Web 2.0 platforms have the potential to challenge this configuration. The memes mentioned above, generated in response to the death of Trayvon Martin, are a useful place to begin. These memes as well as online discussions of the case demonstrate a significant activist impulse. However, many of the memes point toward a need for black people to cope with the loss of one more young black man to

racialized violence. There is a clear *desire to remember* as well as to create an online space of memorial, a space in which the collective pain can be witnessed. In this way, we argue that the Internet becomes a space wherein new black geographies are created and become visible. Social networking spaces allow black people to produce spaces of their own and as a result to make themselves visible, at least to each other. We do not want to overstate the uses and values of online community. However, for the purposes of this introduction, it is important to acknowledge the ways in which new media technologies have produced alternative possibilities for memory and witnessing.

Documentary studies has also productively explored the intersection of memory, space, and media. Janet Walker's concept of *situated testimony* argues for the importance of place in documentary films and videos. Walker writes of filmed landscapes: "the stones don't speak except through a kind of critical ventriloquism, yet they are more than mere inert features of a fixed terrain."[8] The documentary mode thus has the potential to return memories (individual and collective) to places from which they have faded. Films and other media texts can serve as memorial sites in their own right.

A host of recent documentaries function as memorial sites; we mention only a few here. In films on the dictatorships of Latin America's Southern Cone, where many family members of the disappeared still have no remains of their loved ones, place becomes particularly important as a repository of traces and memories, or a marker of absence. (Macarena Gomez-Barris explores these issues in her essay on two recent Chilean films.) At the aforementioned Villa Grimaldi, Quique Cruz, a musician and former prisoner at the Chilean camp, returns to stage a musical piece in the space of his former imprisonment, in his film *Archeology of Memory: Villa Grimaldi* (co-directed with Marilyn Mulford, USA/Chile, 2008). In an impromptu performance, Cruz drums on the wall of names of the detained and disappeared, lending affect to the memorial space.

In *Historias cotidianas (h)* (Andrés Habegger, Argentina, 2000), children of those who were disappeared during Argentina's military dictatorship of the 70s and 80s reflect on their lives without their absent parents. Among the film's most moving segments are those in which each of the protagonists try to find the location at which one of the last photographs of their parents were

taken while they were still alive. Each holds up the photograph in front of the camera from the place where it was taken years earlier, inscribing the image back into the present-day city.

The resonance of place can also elicit testimony, as in Rithy Panh's films, *Bophana, A Cambodian Tragedy* (Cambodia/France, 1996), and *S21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine* (Cambodia/France, 2003). In the former, Him Huy, a former Khmer Rouge prison guard, stands at the Choeung Ek Killing Fields and describes the procedure used to kill prisoners. Although Huy claims a limited involvement in these killings (he "only" killed five prisoners, he says), the ease with which, upon returning to the place, his body slips into the remembered position of both perpetrator and victim as he reenacts the killing process seems to belie this claim.

Bophana, A Cambodian Tragedy

While this introduction has sketched the concerns with which we embarked on this issue, the essays, interview, and film gathered here take the intersection of our three guiding concepts to new and unexpected places. Several of the articles identify media's potential to create a space where collective and individual memory can be aligned in a liberatory way. However, other voices alert us to the potential film and media have to oppress as well as liberate. A concern with the spatial aspects of witnessing also appears in multiple pieces, as does an inquiry into the way places and images work their way into collective memory. We hope that this issue demonstrates some of the many productive approaches at the confluence of memory, space, and media. We see this as a contribution intended to initiate further conversation, and look forward to seeing the still unthought possible directions this conversation will take.

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Notes

1 Edward S. Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987): 183-184.

2 Diana Taylor, "Performing Ruins," in *Telling Ruins in Latin America*, ed. Michael J. Lazzara and Vicky Unruh (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 20.

3 "The spatial homogeneity and geometry of Villa Grimaldi make an ordered *field of vision* out of what was once a lacerated *texture of experience*, disembodying the lived matter of remembrance, whose deep subjective fractures are unrecognizable in this flat, serene, uninterrupted map." Nelly

Richard, "Sites of Memory, Emptying Remembrance," in *Telling Ruins*, 177. For a detailed reading of Villa Grimaldi, see also Macarena Gomez-Barris, *Where Memory Dwells: Culture and State Violence in Chile* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), pp. 37-73.

4 Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture and Film* (New York: Verso, 2002), pp. 208.

5 Sara Ahmed, "Affective Economies," *Social Text* 22 (2004): 127.

6 Ibid, 117.

7 *'Les damnés'* as it appears here is a reference to Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth.* Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods, "No One Knows the Mysteries at the Bottom of the Ocean," in *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*, ed. Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods (Cambridge: South End Press, 2007), pp. 4.

8 Janet Walker, "Rights and Return: Perils and Fantasies of Situated Testimony after Katrina," in *Documentary Testimonies: Global Archives of Suffering*, ed. Bhaskar Sarkar and Janet Walker (New York: Routledge, 2010), 86.

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