

**Observance, Notes Towards Decipherability**

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## **Observance, Notes Towards Decipherability**

### **Abstract**

Provoked by the terrorist-related murders in England that mark the spring and summer of 2017, I have felt compelled to write this article on the idea of observance (observe, care, follow, obey). I engage with this idea in the context of our contemporary Memory Industry – that confluence of memorialisation, remembrance, and commemoration culture; Memory Studies and Trauma Studies; tangible and intangible heritage; digital memory and media archaeology; and its series of facing-backwards-to-go-forwards impulses (the archival impulse, the genealogical impulse, and the archaeological impulse.). Through the Contemporary's prism, I deploy observance as a rejoinder to the seeming irreconcilability between, on the one hand, the incomprehensibility of the Shoah, and, on the other hand, the prevalence of its rendering in figurative and abstract memorials, literature, art, and film; and by way of dark tourism, Shoah selfies, and genealogy websites. I'll propose that because of its assorted senses, as a grievable moment observance may be a way of negotiating (without necessarily wanting or needing to reconcile) such irreconcilability. I'll argue that this is possible because of how observance (observing a minute's silence for instance) as a (secular, vernacular) performative action somehow opens up a space of the imagination that might lead, for good and ill, to a decipherability all the more necessary in our interminable state of exception that is the Contemporary.

### **Key Words**

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2  
3 Observance; grievable moment; memory, remembrance, and commemoration;  
4 memorials and memorialization; the Shoah; dark tourism; genealogy websites;  
5 Shoah selfies; performative action  
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### 14 **Introduction: A Minute's Silence**

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17

18 It's 10.56 a.m. on Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> May 2017.  
19

20 I'm standing outside the Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology in  
21 Oxford, the world's first university museum. I'm with a colleague and our  
22 students, a cohort of around 20 currently studying on the MA Museums &  
23 Galleries in Education programme. We're on a 'study day' in Oxford, guests of the  
24 staff from University of Oxford's Gardens, Libraries & Museums (GLAM) group;  
25 finally an acronym of which to be proud. We have a schedule, with an itinerary  
26 that in addition to the Ashmolean includes the Museum of the History of Science,  
27 the Museum of Natural History, and the Pitt Rivers Museum.  
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38 A museum security guard approaches us. She tells us we need to enter the  
39 Ashmolean, and quickly. It's nearly 11 o'clock. It's almost time to observe a  
40 minute's silence for the 22 adults and children murdered by a suicide bomber,  
41 later identified as 22-year old British Muslim Salman Ramadan Abedi, in  
42 Manchester at an Ariana Grande concert on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2017.  
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48

49 It's 10.57 a.m.  
50

51 We're ushered into the Ashmolean's Education Department, and settle in  
52 haste. We hear a bell tinkling.  
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55 It's 11.00 a.m.  
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3 The minute's silence begins.  
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5 Should I keep my eyes open, or close them? I'm never sure – closing one's  
6  
7 eyes always struck me as an odd way to observe anything. If I keep them open,  
8  
9 where should I look? Anywhere other than down and I might catch someone's  
10  
11 eye, and then what: meet their eye? Tear my eyes away? Ignore them? Look right  
12  
13 through them, staring off into the distance (which is where both the past and the  
14  
15 future, anywhere but the present, seem to reside)? Acknowledge them, with a  
16  
17 slightly involuntary grimace, a wince? With stoicism? And how should I look? I  
18  
19 really should have my most solemn face on but I can't quite remember how to  
20  
21 make it, how it feels from the inside out.  
22  
23

24 I close my eyes. Head down. I'm solemn enough.  
25

26 My mind starts to wander...  
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28

29 It's curious that when we close our eyes, we see otherwise. It's brought  
30  
31 on, it seems, by a certain inattentive attention, or maybe it's an attentive  
32  
33 inattention. It's an odd combination of remembering, speculating, and  
34  
35 meandering. It's a daydreaming, an imagining, a visualising. And it's in my mind's  
36  
37 eye – whose perceptual apparatus is cinematic, *kinema*, κίνημα, both motion and  
38  
39 emotion, as ancient Greek etymology tells us - that I picture the scene: the  
40  
41 screaming crowd at the concert, the collective panic and confusion; the smell of  
42  
43 fear. And it's in my mind's eye that I picture the dead. The never-to-grow-up. The  
44  
45 never-to-grow-old. The never-to-be-born. I think about Manchester, and a  
46  
47 previous bombing attack there back in 1995 or 1996, around the time of my  
48  
49 father's death, at the Arndale Shopping Centre carried out by the IRA. (Might  
50  
51 Arndale Centre be an anagram of Ariana Grande, I wonder?) And I remember  
52  
53 standing on Oxford Street in '81 or '82, and being shouted at by a panicked  
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3 policeman to 'RUN, JUST FUCKING RUN!' when an IRA bomb was detonated in  
4 the Wimpy Bar (whatever happened to Wimpy?), and feeling the boom in my  
5 stomach a split second before the whole building's windows blew out. And I  
6 glimpse a flash of televisual news footage of the aftermath of the nail bomb in  
7 Hyde Park in '82 or '83, and the dead horses, their gargantuan bodies strewn  
8 over the tarmac (did any people actually die?). And I recall, after the events of  
9 September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, having to listen to Americans going on and on about how  
10 *you don't know what it's like having a terrorist attack on your own home soil*; and I  
11 recall telling them that that's what it was like growing up in London-England in  
12 the '70s and '80s. And I cringe at the memory of the suicide bomb attacks on  
13 London's tubes and on a double-decker bus (on a double-decker bus for fuck's  
14 sake????) on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2005 (our very own 7/7 to rival their 9/11; what catchy,  
15 handy, strikingly vivid numerical shorthand!) I think about terrorists, terrorism  
16 internationally, and about how sick and tired, and sad and fucking furious I am  
17 with terrorists, with our War on Terror, and with the almost unremitting (feeling  
18 of the) terror of terror. (And I smile at how, in my younger days, in the early to  
19 mid '80s I would go on CND rallies to protest over the siting of nuclear missiles  
20 in the UK; and how with friends I would steal about in the dead of night daubing  
21 'Barclays fund apartheid' on the bank's storefront in protest at their contribution  
22 to the British Empire's complicity in South Africa's white minority regime.) And I  
23 ponder imperialism, globalisation and semio-capitalism, democracy and neo-  
24 liberalism (and I wonder about how liberalism used to be a good thing, and ask  
25 myself how it came to be a bad thing; how strange.)

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54 A minute's silence is a mnemonic, I say to myself, a labyrinthine system of  
55 memories, sites, and acts.  
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3 All this in the blink of an eye.  
4

5 I think about Trump with his small hands, and Brexit; and how I'm still in  
6 denial about that fiasco. And I wonder what the future now holds (and what it no  
7 longer holds) for my daughter, who is a British citizen, and I can see why her  
8 mother is pushing so hard to get her an Italian passport. Which reminds me, my  
9 daughter's school sent us an email this morning, telling us that they were going  
10 to be observing a minute's silence for those murdered by the suicide bomber in  
11 Manchester. And I speculate about what my daughter's form teacher... I must ask  
12 her... is telling my daughter right now...I must ask her too... and her classmates  
13 about what it is to observe a minute's silence: what is a minute's silence? What  
14 happens in that minute? What's it for? Who's it for? And what does it actually  
15 mean for it to be *for* those murdered? How should my daughter and her  
16 classmates behave? How should they use the time? Should they fill it, and, if so,  
17 how should they fill it, and with what? My daughter is only five and three  
18 quarters; how can she possibly comprehend any of this? And I wonder what my  
19 daughter is actually thinking right now.  
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46 A minute's silence is a grievable moment. As a grievable moment, in that one  
47 minute's silence hundreds of lucid and poor images rolodex by; it's a *musée*  
48 *imaginaire* taking shape. Profound and paltry thoughts in equal measure come  
49 and go. Feelings so heart-wrenching and so self-indulgent. Found memories,  
50 fragments of memories, screen memories, stray words and phrases, evidence  
51 and conjecture, all pouring into my mind's eye from goodness knows where,  
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3 arranging and re-arranging themselves without necessarily logical connections.  
4  
5 These are the shapes, the directions, the trickling streams (the percolating, as  
6  
7 Michel Serres might put it [1995[1990], passim]) of my consciousness. It's not  
8  
9 random; it's a patterning.  
10

11           This grievable moment is my minute's silence, from 11.00 a.m. to 11.01  
12  
13 a.m. on Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> May 2017. I, you, one, we observe a minute's silence like  
14  
15 this or like that. I have had many others, and I'm afraid I know that there will be  
16  
17 many more to come.  
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27 As a grievable moment, what and how is a minute's silence?  
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29           As a ritual, a minute's silence is observed to mourn, remember, and  
30  
31 commemorate the dead; it is a keeping watch over them. It is a ceremony to  
32  
33 think and reflect, to be together – in our difference - in solidarity. It is a gesture  
34  
35 of respect, and, respectfully, it is performative act that is generative of thought,  
36  
37 utterances, debate, argumentation; it is a demonstrating.  
38  
39

40           What incident, though, 'gets' to count? Who 'gets' the silence? On what  
41  
42 grounds? How is it formalised? Who decides?  
43

44           A minute's silence is observed, and it is also held. But how do we hold it  
45  
46 (as if it were a thing): Lovingly, touchingly, tightly, carefully, at arm's length?  
47  
48

49           A minute's silence is scheduled to take a minute. (What kind of taking is  
50  
51 this – is it borrowed, loaned, purloined? And from where? And from whom?) And  
52  
53 with all these minute's silences, sometimes two, three, or even four or five  
54  
55 minute's silences – don't think there aren't those who baulk at this 'silence  
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3 inflation' - how much time have we banked, individually and collectively, and  
4  
5 what might we do with it, how might we spend it, what might we spend it on?  
6

7           A minute is sanctioned for this silence, is given to it, is given over to it, but  
8  
9 such an apportioning is a red herring, a logical fallacy, a mere device. Like time  
10  
11 itself. Because the minute in a one-minute's silence is not under the tyrannical  
12  
13 rule of Chronos; we are not subjects of and subject to such metering and  
14  
15 measuring and managing. Or, rather, perhaps as a hyper-minute, the most  
16  
17 minuted minute, in which each second is felt, more so than in the previous or  
18  
19 successive minutes, it circumvents such managing. Either way, a one minute's  
20  
21 silence as a time of and for observance, as a grievable moment, is instantaneous  
22  
23 and goes on forever; it is a stretching, like daydreaming, imagining, visualising.  
24  
25 This minute's silence is chrono-logical time yielding to the kairological.  
26  
27

28  
29           A conjuncture between structure (rituals instituted, conventions  
30  
31 prescribed, operations enacted) and contingency, as a performative action this  
32  
33 minute's silence is always and already a right or opportune moment, a moment  
34  
35 of time lapse, a moment of indeterminate time, an interruption of time,  
36  
37 immanence, an intervention in time, *time unleashed*, released, set free, in which  
38  
39 we as temporal beings might intervene to transform circumstances. It's not so  
40  
41 much a matter of time per se as it is the matter of timing, and in particular the  
42  
43 right timing; and that such timing necessitates human intervention. (Chan,  
44  
45 2010).  
46  
47

48  
49           As a grievable moment, a minute's silence embodies and articulates such  
50  
51 a combination of remembering, speculating, and meandering; and immanence.  
52

53           In this grievable moment, this one-minute's silence, in my mind's eye, I  
54  
55 see my father. Horatio, methinks I see my father. My long dead father. And I see,  
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3 for a split second, his parent's families, the majority of whom were murdered by  
4  
5 the Nazis in the Shoah.  
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### 9 **Observing, Caring, Following, Obeying**

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14 Observance is, etymology dictates, from the French (*observance*) and the Latin  
15 (*observantia*). Because of how I want to use observance in this article – I have no  
16  
17 interest in, use for, or truck with its religious filiation – I present its etymology  
18  
19 thus: From the Anglo-Norman and Old French *observance* is the action of  
20  
21 observing a ~~religious~~ rule, ~~religious~~ rule, ~~religious~~ order observing a rule, rule of  
22  
23 a ~~religious~~ order, respect, and action of observing. From the classical Latin  
24  
25 *observantia* is keeping or following of a law or custom, attention, respect,  
26  
27 reverence, notice, in post-classical Latin also observance of ~~divine~~ law, ~~religious~~  
28  
29 rites, rule of a ~~religious~~ order, rule of the Franciscans.<sup>i</sup>  
30  
31  
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33

34 For my purposes here, the Oxford English Dictionary shows explanatory  
35  
36 origins that enable us to comprehend observance as (1) the action of *observing*,  
37  
38 noticing, or paying attention to what is said or done (2) attentive care (appearing  
39  
40 in Chaucer, Shakespeare, and elsewhere) (3) the act or practice of *following* or  
41  
42 respecting a particular law or of fulfilling a duty, etc.; adherence or due regard to  
43  
44 a particular custom, practice, principle, etc. (4) an action performed in  
45  
46 accordance with (and conforming to, *obeying*) prescribed usage; a customary  
47  
48 action, ceremony, or ritual; a custom; an act performed in accordance with social  
49  
50 convention; formerly a necessary or obligatory action, practice, etc.  
51  
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54 Despite my disinterest in observance's religious filiation, I do have an  
55  
56 interest in what a more secular or perhaps vernacular observance – as a word,  
57  
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3 an act, a performative action, a moment to intervene – might look like, what it  
4 might be, and what, as a grievable moment, it might have the capacity to *do*; as  
5 impossible as it is, I know, to untether fully (or even perhaps sufficiently) this  
6 word, and its meanings and its usage, from its theological moorings.  
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11 Etymology makes such intervening conceivable though because  
12 observance is always and already a performative action: it is the *action* of  
13 observing, *attentive* care, the *practice* of following a particular custom, an *action*  
14 performed in accordance with a ritual. Moreover, *observantia* and *observatio*,  
15 both diverbal substantives from *observo*, intimates that to observe isn't always to  
16 obey, and that to always obey may well be to fail to observe matters of  
17 significance.  
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## 29 **The Shoah, Memory, and Memorialisation**

### 30 It's All My Father's Fault

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38 I've been writing a book about my father, long dead. It's a book partly about  
39 memoir, biography, and autobiography as forms. It's also a book partly about  
40 research itself as a praxis (re-searching, searching, finding, not finding, and what  
41 to do about all this.) Finally, it's an actual biography of my father (his Polish-  
42 Jewish émigré parents; his Communist leanings as a Jewish boy brought up in  
43 1920s and 1930s east London; his anti-fascist acts; his Jewishness or lack of it;  
44 his trade with the Soviet Union in the 1950s and 1960s; his hosting of  
45 fundraisers for individuals affected by McCarthyism as well as for Communist  
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3 organizations internationally; his spying for either the KGB or MI5 or both; his  
4  
5 bankruptcy; his radiance as a man and his failings as a father).

6  
7 So, I'm writing this book, but currently I'm stuck.<sup>ii</sup> I'm researching and  
8  
9 writing the chapter about the murder by the Nazis of the majority of my father's  
10  
11 parent's families in the Shoah. The chapter centres on a photograph that marks  
12  
13 the visit he and his parents made to their families in Poland in 1936 or 1937, to  
14  
15 try to persuade them to come back to London. They didn't come back. The  
16  
17 photograph may have been taken in Chmielnik, where my father's father's family  
18  
19 came from, or the Lublin/Lukow area, where my father's mother's family came  
20  
21 from, or Warsaw, where one or other or both families may or may not have  
22  
23 moved to by the 1880s or by the mid-1930s. I know nothing about any of the  
24  
25 individuals in the photograph. Nothing. About any of them. (Other than my  
26  
27 father, and his parents, of course.)  
28  
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31  
32 There is scant information on my father's family, or on my father actually  
33  
34 - no diaries, no notebooks, no unpublished memoir, and no family archive,  
35  
36 nothing but a few photographs, a small cardboard box of his belongings, inexact  
37  
38 memories, half-remembered stories, anecdotes, and the past as an image that  
39  
40 flashes up fragments that force their way into consciousness.  
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43  
44 So I sit in the British Library, reading and crying. Because to supplement  
45  
46 such a skeletal family archive, I've read scores of Shoah survivor autobiographies  
47  
48 and memoirs; survivor and victim diaries and journals and collections of  
49  
50 notebooks, these notes towards histories of the present written for the future;  
51  
52 and the records of the death-camp *Sonderkommandos*; evidence given at the  
53  
54 Nuremberg trials on the Auschwitz extermination camp (and other such  
55  
56 evidence); hundreds of books and articles by academics and researchers; and  
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3 listened to hours and hours of recorded oral testimony. Not to mention my non-  
4  
5 British Library-related research activities: watching documentaries and movies,  
6  
7 and searching genealogy websites for information on my dead father's dead  
8  
9 family.  
10

11           It turns out that you can't dip your toe in the Shoah; it's not a subject you  
12  
13 wander around blithely. I know that now, and for sure I know I've bitten off more  
14  
15 than I can chew. So as I conduct research for the chapter of the book on my  
16  
17 father on what is surely one of the most delicate academic subjects of all time,  
18  
19 I'm doing whatever I can to try to cover my arse, to make sure my unfamiliarity  
20  
21 doesn't come back to bite me; which it inevitably will.  
22  
23

24           My own misgivings notwithstanding, even though it might be too soon, I  
25  
26 feel the need to enunciate. This is provoked by three musings: (a) my thinking  
27  
28 about my thinking about the one minute's silence on Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> May 2017 as  
29  
30 a grievable moment; (b) feeling emboldened by the idea of observance (observe,  
31  
32 care, follow, obey) as an act, a performative action, a moment to intervene, a *do*-  
33  
34 ing; and (c) being urged on by what it means to do research on/think the Shoah  
35  
36 at this historical conjuncture which to me seems to have become an interminable  
37  
38 state of exception in which the Contemporary's present-ism museumifies the  
39  
40 past, history, to sell it on at a profit, and in so doing colonises the future to  
41  
42 mitigate its risk.  
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### 49 To Destroy the Evidence

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53 Against the present Memory Industry's ahistorical attitude,<sup>iii</sup> some of what I've  
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55 learnt so far is this:  
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3 The Shoah is a perfectly calibrated calamitous union of dispassionate  
4 bureaucracy and de-individualising malice. On the one hand, with its modern  
5 bureaucracy and technological imperative, as many have argued the Nazis  
6 utilised the principles of instrumental rationality to stage industrialised mass  
7 killing. The destruction of European Jewry was a textbook 'administrative  
8 process'. (Hilberg, 1961, 9) *The Final Solution to the Jewish Question (die*  
9 *Endlösung der Judenfrage, Endlösung* for short, codified at the Wannsee  
10 Conference on 20<sup>th</sup> January 1942) may have been either determined by or an  
11 outcome of Nazi bureaucratic culture. (And, like so much bureaucracy, what  
12 starts out as a means to an end becomes an end in itself.) But either way, as a  
13 death factory the Shoah was a technocratic operation in efficiency seeking  
14 optimum solutions to exterminate the Jews. On the other hand, is its de-  
15 individualising malice; because of course such 'machinery of destruction' doesn't  
16 have its own volition. (Hilberg, passim) It was powered by a racist ideology of  
17 'redemptive antisemitism' (Friedlander (1997[1988])), and manned by vicious,  
18 brutal, ruthless, super-ego-charged, antisemitic individuals who wanted to wipe  
19 the Jews off the face of the earth.

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40 The intent of such Nazi bloodlust - which is what makes the Shoah  
41 genocide not 'simply' a crime against humanity - was to wipe out each individual  
42 Jew, one by one, and 'the Jews' en masse. To wipe them off the face of the earth,  
43 and also *from* the earth itself (to de-contaminate the polluted Nazi-occupied  
44 soil), and to extricate them from individual and collective memory. To eradicate  
45 them so that it is like that they never existed. So that there is no corpus - no body  
46 to claim, no bones to bury, no ash to inhume; they must be obliterated at the  
47 atomic level. To be disappeared. Completely. No corpus, no body, but also no  
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3 body of writings nor texts, no language nor speech, no religion nor law nor  
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5 ethics, no culture nor identity nor cuisine, no everyday practices nor infra-  
6  
7 ordinary observances. So that there is no body to remember; and so no body to  
8  
9 mourn.

10  
11           And nobody to remember. Because if there is no one left to mourn, there  
12  
13 is no more memory. To 'destroy the evidence', as Primo Levi puts it in *The*  
14  
15 *Drowned and the Saved*, (Levi, 2003[1986], 1) is to destroy memory, which is to  
16  
17 destroy the past, yes, but it is also to destroy the possibility of memory into the  
18  
19 future, and thus the possibility of the future per se. Memory deletion is not  
20  
21 sufficient; only memory destruction will do. Which is why the Nazis were also so  
22  
23 intent on destroying Jewish synagogues, cemeteries, and gravestones: if there is  
24  
25 no one left to mourn, and no place left to mourn, there is no future as such.  
26  
27 (Young, 1993, 189).  
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### 34 Indecipherability

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38 Against our Memory Industry's complicity in 'the obscenity of the project of  
39  
40 understanding' (Lanzmann, 1995, 207), I would want to affirm that the Shoah is  
41  
42 a calamity beyond comprehension; it is a failure to understand.  
43  
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45           As an event it exceeds our capacity as human beings to apprehend, *to get*  
46  
47 *it*. Again and again it is described as inexplicable, unintelligible, unspeakable. So  
48  
49 incommensurate is it that, commentators have proposed, we should not  
50  
51 empathise even, *because we cannot empathise*, with an experience of survivors  
52  
53 and victims so beyond our grasp.  
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3           It exceeds the limit of the bearable, of what is capable of being endured.  
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5       For us the Shoah must remain in- or un-comprehensible. It is forever un- or non-  
6  
7       imaginable. Eternally ineffable. It is described, rightly, as un-describable. It  
8  
9       exceeds the limits of language. It defies language. Words are insufficient; *these*  
10  
11       words are insufficient. It exposes crudely the insufficiency of words as such.

12  
13  
14           It exceeds the limits of representation. It is inexpressible and un-  
15  
16       representable. Representation itself is found wanting.

17  
18           It exceeds the limits of form, of all forms, whether figurative or abstract,  
19  
20       of form as communicable, of communicable form.

21  
22           For the Shoah is an anacoluthon, a sentence (or construction) whose  
23  
24       grammar collapses; it is a logical incoherence of thought, a discontinuity, a *not*  
25  
26       *following on from*.

27  
28           It has an in-communicability about it.

29  
30           Some would say that this calls for silence.<sup>iv</sup>

31  
32           Others would say that the Shoah is beyond comprehension, and that *as*  
33  
34       incomprehensible, *because of its incomprehensibility*, we must struggle to  
35  
36       decipher it, *in its incomprehensibility*. Levi uses this verb, to decipher (*decifrare*),  
37  
38       in his attempts to explain the Shoah's inexplicability and thus the need to  
39  
40       decipher it.

41  
42           To choose not to speak, to be silent, to refuse to communicate – and here I  
43  
44       am with Levi again – is to peddle in ambiguity. *One can and must communicate*,  
45  
46       he writes. (Levi, 2003[1986], 68, 69).

47  
48           This is a necessity; it is also an injunction. There is an ancient Jewish  
49  
50       injunction to remember; as there is an injunction to name the dead, to honour  
51  
52       them, and give them a proper burial.

1  
2  
3 One must struggle, then, to decipher the un- or in-decipherable. One must  
4 find words (a language) to articulate the unspeakable; to find forms to forge a  
5 bridge to the unintelligible and the inexplicable; to render the un-representable;  
6 to mould from the ashes and bone fragments and gold fillings words and forms  
7 that can be fabricated into social hieroglyphs that are decipherable, even if we  
8 always already know that such words and forms are insufficient.  
9  
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11  
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15

16 Why? Because we have to remember. And because this remembering,  
17 which is a mourning and a commemorating both, can take place by way of words  
18 and forms, even if they are insufficient, which they are.  
19  
20  
21  
22

23 'To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric', pronounces Theodor  
24 Adorno in 1951, which has always for me been a demand to struggle under these  
25 exact conditions to do so. (Adorno, 1997[1951], 34).  
26  
27  
28

29 You can't bridge the abyss, to paraphrase filmmaker Claude Lanzmann,  
30 (Lanzmann, 1995, 204, 206) and yet I'd argue you must try to find the words and  
31 the forms to articulate the impossibility of articulating it. Because what there are,  
32 are words and forms that describe and render *how there are no words and how*  
33 *there are no forms* to describe and render the Shoah. And while such words and  
34 forms will always only ever be a proxy, always ever only an *approximation*, they  
35 are at least that. This is the paradox or double bind in which we find ourselves.  
36  
37  
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45

#### 46 The Unmarked

47  
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49  
50

51 How, then, to mark the unmarked?  
52

53 The injunction to remember, and to historicize – *always historicize* –  
54 demands the sheer abundance of words (of poetry, of literature, of  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 autobiography and memoir, of research and academic studies), of images  
4 (photographs, drawings, documentaries, movies), of things and objects, of  
5  
6  
7 memorials and monuments and museums. Because we need to remember, we  
8  
9 need to need to remember, and we can't remember in a vacuum, especially if we  
10  
11 have no memory from which to draw. And, because of this obligation to  
12  
13 remember, despite and because of its complexity, such an obligation needs to be  
14  
15 honoured.  
16  
17

18 That said, such a demand has led to words and images and environments  
19  
20 many of which, for me, are found wanting because they do not carry with them  
21  
22 this *a priori* knowledge that they are insufficient, proxies, *that there are no words*  
23  
24 *and there are no forms* to describe and render the Shoah.  
25  
26

27 Nonetheless they all serve a purpose as memorials around which our  
28  
29 remembering (if not our memories) might congregate.<sup>v</sup> In this regard, memorials  
30  
31 (I am referring to all of these words and images and environments as memorials;  
32  
33 as structures-to-remind-us) are perhaps best understood as *operative* words and  
34  
35 *operative* images and *operative* environments (to use and extend filmmaker  
36  
37 Harun Farocki's term 'operative images') that 'do not represent... but rather are  
38  
39 part of an operation'. (Farocki, 2004, 17) For, they are sites for the mediating and  
40  
41 re-mediating of memory; they are shaped by and shape memory itself. They are a  
42  
43 mnemonic, and to this extent they collectively form a post-fact Shoah archive for  
44  
45 the future. It is around and by way of such memorial forms, by which memory is  
46  
47 constituted for the purposes of mourning and remembering and  
48  
49 commemorating, that narrative, however fragmentary, might emerge. It is  
50  
51 around them, *as them*, that extermination camps, concentration camps, ghettos,  
52  
53  
54  
55  
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1  
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3 killing sites, archives, museums, and many individuals might begin a process of  
4  
5 memory-telling.  
6  
7  
8

9 \*

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11  
12  
13  
14 Already in the 1940s, along with the first memorials to the Shoah period (the  
15  
16 *Yizkor Bikher* or 'memorial books') came the first of hundreds and now  
17  
18 thousands of memorials. Early sculptural memorials were in the tradition of  
19  
20 funerary monuments and war memorials (towers, stelae, and so forth), and  
21  
22 included figurative sculptures, often in the 'heroic' socialist realism traditions,  
23  
24 depicting and celebrating the human spirit, acts of heroism, and the fallen. But  
25  
26 soon enough Shoah memorials become more abstract, more in line with avant-  
27  
28 garde sculptural traditions, and from the 1960s onwards, whether as abstracted  
29  
30 figurative forms or abstract forms per se, this has persisted as the most  
31  
32 customary Shoah memorial form. This is absolutely because of the Shoah's  
33  
34 abstract nature, which is to say that abstraction attends to both the need to  
35  
36 represent and to remember, and also because abstract form lends itself to the  
37  
38 abstract thinking necessary for rendering the barbaric violence of history  
39  
40 arrested, the devastation of lives cut short, the shattering of hope and the  
41  
42 ruination of the future, and the indescribability of the Shoah as it pertains to  
43  
44 individuals, in its particularity, and in its enormity.  
45  
46  
47  
48

49 In all cases, with abstract form, it seems that the fragment is the unit, the  
50  
51 building block for the possibility of operative re-assembling (of history, lives,  
52  
53 hope, the future itself), much as one knows that such a re-assembling is  
54  
55 insufficient.  
56  
57  
58  
59  
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10 To mark the unmarked is the de facto operation of memorials as structures-to-  
11 remind-us at the two predominant types of Shoah sites: on-site 'sacred' places  
12 and off-site secular places.  
13  
14

15  
16 On-site sacred places name the place, the peoples, the individuals:  
17  
18 extermination camps, concentration camps, ghettos, death marches, and the  
19  
20 killing sites where mass shootings took place. They are sites of mass death, or of  
21  
22 an individual death, and are haunted by the ghosts of the unmarked multitude –  
23  
24 Auschwitz, Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka, and so on.  
25  
26

27 Memorials at off-site non-sacred places – museums, monuments, public  
28  
29 statues, archival resources, etc. – in the interests of remembering sever, or  
30  
31 deracinate even, the affect of proximity from proximity itself, and, in re-siting it  
32  
33 as a 'Holocaust effect', (van Alphen, 1997, *passim*) do violence to such sacredness  
34  
35 even as they look to heal a wound (what Levi calls 'the old trauma, the scar of  
36  
37 remembrance') that demands to remain raw. (Levi, 2003[1986], 185)  
38  
39

40 Memorials *at* sacred and non-sacred sites, but more saliently sacred and  
41  
42 non-sacred sites *as* memorials, do though mark the unmarked. In their own  
43  
44 ways, as insufficient as they are, if and when they carry this knowledge with  
45  
46 them palpably, they mark real murder and abstract murder; since the death at  
47  
48 the extermination camps, but also elsewhere, is always figured as both literal and  
49  
50 figurative, referential and metaphorical or symbolic. It's because of this that they  
51  
52 can be places of reflection and learning; of remembering and commemorating; of  
53  
54 comfort, sentimentality, and affect; of claustrophobia and kitsch; public and  
55  
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3 private, collective to the point of generality, particular to the point of over-  
4  
5 identification. They let in the light bathing us in an ethereal glow, and they block  
6  
7 it out, casting us out into a shadow hinterland. They are sympathy machines, and  
8  
9 as sites of memory operation, with their tropes of modern memorialising, by  
10  
11 'arrest[ing] the past as past' they can both mark the unmarked *and* expose the  
12  
13 profound dangers of monumentalisation as tantamount to forgetting which is,  
14  
15 ironically, a decisive feature of the Memory Industry. (Young, 1993, ???)

## 20 **The Memory Industry: Dark Tourism, Shoah Selfies, and Genealogy**

### 22 **Websites**

23  
24  
25  
26  
27 In our Memory Industry, especially as it vectors with the leisure or 'experience  
28  
29 economy', the resonance of such site-specific and site-responsive memory-telling  
30  
31 spotlights three troubling features that are, perhaps, a consequence of our  
32  
33 dealing with sacred places in secular ways. They are all of a new-ish  
34  
35 commemorative order: the pre-Internet phenomenon of dark tourism, the post-  
36  
37 Internet trope of 'selfies at Auschwitz', and genealogy websites which,  
38  
39 surprisingly, may turn out to be the most odious of them all.  
40  
41

42  
43 Any visit to Shoah sites, whether sacred or non-sacred places, is always  
44  
45 and already dark tourism.<sup>vi</sup> Such dark tourism (including Shoah tourism, more  
46  
47 generally referred to as Holocaust Tourism – lest we forget, Auschwitz is  
48  
49 Poland's most popular 'tourist attraction') is troubling because it is never not  
50  
51 fraught and irresolvably contradictory edu-tainment. On a good day, for good or  
52  
53 ill such tourism encourages historical understanding and self-knowing, enables  
54  
55 us to learn the lessons of the past, confront our mortality, letting us pay our  
56  
57  
58  
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1  
2  
3 respects, remember and mourn, satisfy our need and our curiosity, do penance,  
4  
5 clean our conscience, and assuage our guilt. On a bad day, such sites as touristic  
6  
7 form commodify our humanity beyond compare, turn death and suffering into  
8  
9 commercialized consumables, monetize memory, exploit what we have left of  
10  
11 our *empathia* for gain (this is what Disneyfication really means), and prompt us  
12  
13 to luxuriate in our morbid wanderlust. (Usually it's an admixture of the two.)  
14  
15

16           Such contradictions are captured rather well in Ukrainian filmmaker  
17  
18 Sergei Loznitsa's documentary 'Austerlitz' (2016), a study of dark tourism, or,  
19  
20 better, 'dark tourists' at Nazi concentration and extermination camps including  
21  
22 Dachau and Sachsenhausen, screened recently at Tate Modern and elsewhere  
23  
24 internationally. (Figs. 1, 2, 3)  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29





Employing some of the sensibility deployed by photographers Martin Parr in 'Small World' (1995) (which is still unsurpassed in its absurdist and biting vision of the joylessness of touristic banalities) and Paul Antick in 'itourist? Journeys through the Holocaust' (2006-07) (which is still unsurpassed in its photographs of dark tourists assuming the stylized poses of the iconographic blankness of fashion advertising) (Fig. 4), the documentary is an observing, you might say, without commentary, using a hidden camera to show tourists taking photographs and selfies and listening to audio-guides, mediating and re-mediating their experience of site, history, remembering, and observing itself.<sup>vii</sup>



They wander, they stop, they stare; they stare at things and they stare through things; they look confused, bewildered, lost or bored, with glazed gazes, and then they take a photograph, and snapping a snap seems to make them feel better. It's comforting and satisfying like they've accomplished something - done their duty, endured - like their conspicuous compassion has been affirmed and confirmed. This is how the documentary draws our attention to what we already know: performing (rather than performative) observance is unreflexive obedience, a passive engagement that, by way of a preservationist impulse, turns history as materialist concept into heritage artifice.

The Memory Industry's second troubling feature is that in the Age of the Selfie dark tourists are engendered to document themselves posing at Shoah sites by way of photographic self-portraits. Here I am, giving a thumbs-up at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin. (Fig. 5) Here I am, cuddling at the main entrance gateway to the Auschwitz camp. (Fig. 6)



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These self-portraits are then posted on Facebook and Instagram, but also on geosocial networking mobile apps Tinder and Grindr. There has been much shrillness around these ritual selfie acts as disrespectful and inappropriate, as evidence of the ignorance of tourists, of youthful stupidity, the vacuity of narcissistic irony. The moral backlash is well under way, with 'shaming' the most prevalent rejoinder: the journalist Jason Feifer's *Selfies at Serious Places* tumblr

1  
2  
3 blog re-posts them; and Berlin-based Israeli artist Shahak Shapira's 'Yolocaust'  
4 series (<http://yolocaust.de>) photoshops them into archive footage of the Shoah.  
5  
6  
7 In spite of this, perhaps because of it, I might dare to argue that if dark tourism is  
8 generally a passive or docile engagement, in this specific instance, taking a selfie  
9  
10 at a Shoah site is an *active* or willful *disengagement*, and that as a performative  
11  
12 action of *non-observance* it is institutive. Whether they know it or not, whether  
13  
14 they care or they don't, they're *dis-obeying*. They're breaking the (etymological,  
15  
16 but even more so the moral) stranglehold of the obligation, the rule that obliges  
17  
18 us to observe, to care, to follow, and to obey. Given that observance exerts a  
19  
20 formidable collective pressure to obey, this dis-obeying is a refusal to be obliged,  
21  
22 and refusals that flout the rule of law are always interesting.<sup>viii</sup>  
23  
24  
25  
26

27 (These selfie-portraitists are also, incidentally, disobeying the rules of  
28  
29 injurious looking that are woven into the fabric of the tourist gaze: they don't  
30  
31 stare *at*, they don't gawk, or rubberneck, or seek out a so-called *authentic Shoah*  
32  
33 *memorial experience*; they just look at themselves looking at themselves in an  
34  
35 infinite regress. And are delighted if slightly embarrassed by this self-beholding.)  
36  
37

38 Passive engagement is supplanted by active (even if it's not willful)  
39  
40 disengagement. Such passivity is supplanted by active disinterest as  
41  
42 disobedience. Willfully disrespectful and inappropriate acts, whether born of  
43  
44 ignorance or impropriety, even if it is merely incidental dis-obedience, at a  
45  
46 minimum such dis-obeying foregrounds how the Memory Industry disappears  
47  
48 the profound challenges of critical thinking, the traumas of history, and the  
49  
50 obligation to remember, thereby pushing them to the fore. I'll take such acts of  
51  
52 active disengagement and disinterest over passive engagement almost every  
53  
54  
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1  
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3 time; and let's be reminded that no one ever claimed that performative action is  
4  
5 always intrinsically for the good.  
6

7           The third feature of this new-ish commemorative order is for me the most  
8  
9 disturbing, strangely: the advent in our Memory Industry of online genealogy  
10  
11 sites. They are the new memorial sites of pilgrimage for The Genealogy  
12  
13 Generation. They are new regimes of remembrance and commemoration, new  
14  
15 modes of storing and gathering and transmitting the past, for our reasonably  
16  
17 new, hugely popular and populist preoccupation with personal history. These  
18  
19 websites have become custodians, caretakers, archivists of memory globally,  
20  
21 including of the Shoah. They are the new memorials to the dead. Like memorials  
22  
23 before them, they are 'memory spaces' offering a 'surrogate experience', (Young,  
24  
25 1993, 285) but it is an experience that is doubly displaced and thus doubly  
26  
27 disturbing: for the genealogy tourist, history as materialist concept becomes  
28  
29 heritage artifice *and* place in its singularity becomes non-place (aka my or  
30  
31 anyone else's office or living room or study or bedroom). It is the benign benefits  
32  
33 of these online genealogy sites that for me are, perhaps somewhat counter-  
34  
35 intuitively, the reasons why they're now at the forefront of dark tourism praxis:  
36  
37  
38  
39

40           (a) These web-based archival sources and resources are plentiful,  
41  
42 convenient, available, and easy to access. This is what it means to do genealogical  
43  
44 research in the age of the Internet – for the armchair genealogist, it's a dream  
45  
46 come true. Quickly, too quickly, a search results in an abundance of Shoah-  
47  
48 related websites, online databases, and aggregating databases, collections, and  
49  
50 documents. Such searchable databases are search-able to an unprecedented  
51  
52 degree. A record, a document, a Page of Testimony is easily available. It's  
53  
54 searchable, findable, gatherable, navigable, arrange-able, distribute-able, and  
55  
56  
57  
58  
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60

1  
2  
3 display-able. Such effortless-ness in the Brave New World of The –Able perturbs  
4  
5 me because of the extent to which genealogy sites and their archiving categories  
6  
7 and operations don't simply enable us to access such material but actually  
8  
9 produce and determine our understanding of the Shoah. (See Shandler, 2017)<sup>ix</sup>  
10

11 (b) They are comforting and empowering. Such self-curating – whether  
12  
13 it's on Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, or in family albums – offers compelling  
14  
15 fantasies of cheer and consolation, as well as of self-governance and self-  
16  
17 determination.  
18

19  
20 (c) They are rewarding. Like most activities in our leisured consumer  
21  
22 capitalist experience economy - which tries to make us feel that 'doing' stuff, and  
23  
24 then 'sharing' it, is a replacement rather than merely a refinement of 'buying'  
25  
26 stuff - the more we invest the greater our return. Searching for and retrieving,  
27  
28 examining, and placing another newly verified piece of evidence in the jigsaw  
29  
30 that is our imminently completed family portrait - the false promise of put-back-  
31  
32 together-again-ness - validates further our impulse as armchair genealogists to  
33  
34 do research, to search, to be curious, to have our un-fulfil-able will-to-know  
35  
36 sated again and again in an endless eternal return of desire, accumulation, and  
37  
38 consumption.  
39  
40  
41

42 (d) They encourage multi-tasking. Curiosity on the Internet is born of a  
43  
44 browsing sensibility, as we surf from one memorial site of pilgrimage to the next,  
45  
46 wander from one genealogy database to the next, from one document to another,  
47  
48 and, effortlessly, wander off to read the *Guardian*, watch some porn, post on  
49  
50 Twitter, and wander back again. While such browsing is no more of less  
51  
52 prevalent when searching online genealogy sites than any other websites, it's  
53  
54 being distracted from this knowledge's particularity that concerns me.  
55  
56  
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1  
2  
3 (e) It's the most effortless (and thus painless) site-seeing. Shoah pilgrims  
4 that are too lazy or can't be bothered to actually go to Poland or wherever can sit  
5 at home on our fat arses and do our genealogical research remotely. And the  
6 remote-ness that this affords is a blessed relief because it circumvents the  
7 material encounter. Online genealogy *sites* provide no *site*, sacred or otherwise,  
8 and so barely a physical, corporeal, or affective experience. No monuments. No  
9 sculptural forms. No gateways or barracks. No crematoriums. No artefacts, no  
10 remnants, no belonging. No piles of eyeglasses. No piles of toothbrushes. No piles  
11 of children's shoes. No piles of wedding rings. No piles of the ashes of incinerated  
12 Jews. No incomprehensibility and thus no need for decipherability. Let's be  
13 honest, removed from the actual extermination camps and museums of  
14 remembrance, searching online, in the comfort of your own home, is the most  
15 wonderfully wilfully sanctioned way to avoid or refuse the demands and  
16 challenges of traumatic history, of direct (albeit still proximate) affective  
17 experience, and of critical self-reflection. Instead, these sites offer words and  
18 images; and for sure we know how to look at images on the Internet, whether  
19 they're porn, food porn, property porn, ruin porn, war porn, Shoah porn,  
20 whatever.

21  
22  
23 (f) Online genealogy sites offer words and images and... clicks. In our  
24 contemporary épistémè of re-search, in which all knowledge is a capitalized and  
25 monetized commodity in our 'knowledge economy', and when information rarely  
26 reaches the heady heights of knowledge as such, these sites confirm that when it  
27 comes to doing genealogical research, in fact any research, there is an  
28 intensification of the degree to which *what* can be searched for (i.e. content) is  
29 now perhaps almost less important than *how* we can search for it. Rather than

1  
2  
3 content, then, it is in these dynamics of searchability, along with the  
4  
5 processuality and the operationality of the system (such as archiving software),  
6  
7 that value resides. We might try to deny it, but it is true whenever we (i) goggle  
8  
9 at the speed of our Internet-related services (ii) delight at the ease with which  
10  
11 we find another piece of our genealogical puzzle, and (iii) sit there marvelling  
12  
13 *that* on our screen there's a Page of Testimony for what might be great-great  
14  
15 uncle Hersz listing his date of death as 04/03/1943 and his place of death as  
16  
17 Ludwigsdorf Camp; or *that* there's a photograph of a crowded Chmielnik town  
18  
19 square on 08/10/1942, the day the town was liquidated and almost all of its  
20  
21 Jewish inhabitants, about 8,000, were transported to Treblinka's gas chambers.  
22  
23 And we want to cry for the dead, for *our* dead, to remember and commemorate  
24  
25 them, to mourn them, to feel the affect, and to observe and care and follow and  
26  
27 obey the protocols of mourning rituals and the emotions stirred by them, to have  
28  
29 an experience provoked by such an historically vivid, indexical redolent  
30  
31 invocation of the dead, of *our* dead, but all we can say is: 'Wow, that's, like, really  
32  
33 moving. I don't know what to say'. And then we click on the next tab...  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39

### 40 **Conclusion: Resilience**

41  
42  
43  
44  
45 We hear a bell tinkling.

46  
47 It's 11.01 on Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> May 2017.

48  
49 In the Ashmolean Museum's Education Department, we shake ourselves  
50  
51 from our reverie. Our students have observed the minute's silence immaculately.  
52  
53 I can tell that they've observed, they've cared, they've followed and obeyed. So  
54  
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3 have I. Our study day in Oxford continues; life is forever changed, and forever the  
4  
5 same.

6  
7 That evening, I'll speak with my daughter about her minute's silence at  
8  
9 school, and she'll tell me that she can't remember what her teacher said to her  
10  
11 and her classmates, nor can she remember what she did, nor what she thought.  
12  
13 My daughter is five and three quarters, and has the short-term memory of a gold  
14  
15 fish. The following week I will speak with my daughter's teacher who says that  
16  
17 the School's Head - having sought guidance from colleagues, the School's  
18  
19 governors, and heads of other schools - marked this grievable moment by  
20  
21 speaking with the children collectively in a 'child appropriate manner'.  
22  
23

24  
25 I began writing this article a week or so after the minute's silence on  
26  
27 Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> May 2017. From Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2017, the day of the terrorist  
28  
29 bomb attack at the Ariana Grande concert in Manchester, until 21<sup>st</sup> September  
30  
31 2017, the day I submitted it for consideration to *Journal of Visual Culture*, the  
32  
33 death toll in England from terrorist-related murder stands at 35. In this finite  
34  
35 timeframe, an inventory of terrorist-related murders, and major and minor  
36  
37 incidents relating to them, could be logged thus:  
38  
39  
40  
41

42  
43 22.31 British Standard Time (BST), Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2017, Salman Ramadan  
44  
45 Abedi detonates a bomb at an Ariana Grande concert in Manchester Arena,  
46  
47 murdering 22 adults and children. (His death by suicide makes it 23.)  
48

49  
50 11.00 BST, Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> May 2017, a minute's silence is observed for  
51  
52 those murdered in Manchester.

53  
54 11.01 BST, Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> May 2017, after the minute's silence ends in  
55  
56 Manchester's St Ann's Square, a woman in the crowd begins to singing 'Don't  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 Look Back in Anger' by Oasis. Others assembled join her. It isn't everyone, as  
4  
5 media reports suggest, but it's a significant number raising their voices in  
6  
7 solidarity. It might be what Judith Butler would call a performative action.  
8  
9 (Butler, 2015, passim)  
10

11 22.07 BST, Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2017, ambulances are called in response to a  
12  
13 white van being driven purposefully into pedestrians on London Bridge. After  
14  
15 the van crashes, three men run to close-by Borough Market where they stab  
16  
17 people sitting outside cafes, bars, and restaurants with long knives. Seven people  
18  
19 are known to have been murdered.  
20  
21

22 04.43, Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> June 2017, the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States of  
23  
24 America tweets:  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29



45 Trump's tweet is 'liked' 168,308 times. (Fig. 7)  
46

47 Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> June 2017, Ariana Grande stages the One Love concert in  
48  
49 Manchester to benefit those affected by the bomb attack on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> May.  
50

51 Monday 5<sup>th</sup> June, Islamic State claim responsibility for Saturday's attack.  
52  
53  
54  
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2  
3 11.00 BST, Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> June 2017, a minute's silence is observed for those  
4  
5 who lost their lives and were affected by the attacks on London Bridge/Borough  
6  
7 Market.  
8

9  
10 Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> June 2017, a body is recovered from the Thames at  
11  
12 Limehouse. It is confirmed that it is the eighth victim of the incident on 3<sup>rd</sup> June.  
13  
14 It is thought that he was hit by the white van, and thrown off London Bridge into  
15  
16 the water.  
17

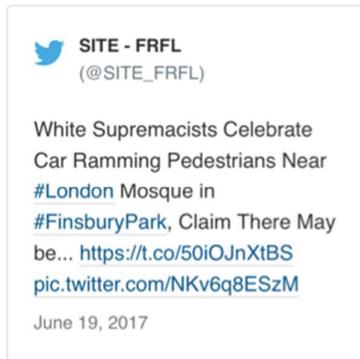
18  
19 Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> June 2017, all but one of Saudi Arabia's national football  
20  
21 team fail to observe a minute's silence held before a World Cup qualifier against  
22  
23 the Australian national football team at Adelaide Oval in tribute to the two  
24  
25 Australians killed in the terrorist attack in London on 3<sup>rd</sup> June. This is a decision,  
26  
27 it seems, made by the Saudi Arabian Football Federation. It turns out that 'a  
28  
29 minute's silence [is] not a recognised way to show respect and condolences in  
30  
31 [Saudi Arabia's] culture or in Islam more broadly'.<sup>x</sup> On Friday 9<sup>th</sup> June, the  
32  
33 Federation make an 'unreserved' apology, and announce that it 'condemns all  
34  
35 acts of terrorism and extremism and extends its sincerest condolences to the  
36  
37 families of all the victims and to the government and people of the United  
38  
39 Kingdom.' Final score: Australia 3, Saudi Arabia 2.  
40  
41

42  
43 14<sup>th</sup> June 2017, it is announced that Manchester city council will make  
44  
45 Ariana Grande an honorary citizen of the city.  
46

47  
48 00.20 BST, Monday 19<sup>th</sup> June 2017, a white van, rented in Cardiff, Wales,  
49  
50 four days earlier is driven into a crowd of worshippers leaving Ramadan prayers  
51  
52 at a community centre in Finsbury Park, north London, killing one and injuring  
53  
54 nine others. Witnesses report that the driver shouted: 'I want to kill all Muslims'.  
55  
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3 A 47-year-old man, Darren Osborne, has been charged with terrorist-related  
4  
5 murder and attempted murder, but is yet to stand trial.  
6

7 0.5.12, Monday 19<sup>th</sup> June 2017, white supremacists in the US celebrate  
8  
9 this murder, declaring that there may still be 'hope for the British'. (Fig. 8)  
10  
11  
12  
13



29 On the evening of Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2017, Noel Gallagher, formerly of  
30  
31 Oasis, performs 'Don't Look Back in Anger' at Glastonbury.  
32

33 Around 18.40 BST, Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> June 2017, Liam Gallagher, formerly of  
34  
35 Oasis, performs 'Don't Look Back in Anger' at Glastonbury, dedicating it to those  
36  
37 who lost their lives in the Manchester terror attack, the London terror attack,  
38  
39 and the fire at Grenfell Tower, a West London residential tower block.  
40  
41

42 12.00 BST, 27<sup>th</sup> June 2017, a minute's silence is observed in remembrance  
43  
44 of those affected by the terrorist attack in Finsbury Park.  
45

46 11.30 BST, 7<sup>th</sup> July 2017, a minute's silence is observed to remember the  
47  
48 52 people killed in London on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2007 when four suicide bombers  
49  
50 detonated devices across the transport network.  
51  
52  
53  
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4  
5 I must admit, I don't understand why 'Don't Look Back in Anger' by Oasis would  
6  
7 be the song to suit the situation, to provoke, galvanise, or rally performative  
8  
9 action.  
10

11           What does the song mean? Don't dwell in the past, look to the future? You  
12  
13 have to work through the past in order to move on? Just move on? We forgive  
14  
15 you? We will carry on? 'We won't let hate win', said Ariana Grande, and it's glib,  
16  
17 but its sentiment is consistent with the vox populi. Charlotte Campbell, at a vigil  
18  
19 for her daughter, Olivia, aged 15, murdered in the terrorist attack at Manchester  
20  
21 Arena, implored the assembled crowd: 'Please stay together, don't let this beat  
22  
23 any of us. Please. Don't let my daughter be a victim'. But it has, and she is.  
24  
25

26           Perhaps there is a better question: what do these performative actions  
27  
28 *do*? Such congregating are poignant acts of solidarity, of community in the face of  
29  
30 adversity, whether in Manchester or London or Barcelona or Berlin or Stockholm  
31  
32 or Turku, or Charlottesville. It's not so much that the song per se becomes an  
33  
34 unofficial anthem of defiance and resilience, but that *its singing as defiance and*  
35  
36 *resilience demonstrates* the rights of the individual to assemble. As an event, a  
37  
38 grievable moment, of conjuncture between the structure of our quotidian  
39  
40 existence (our rituals and conventions, and their operations) and the  
41  
42 contingency afforded by the minute's silence, as I referred to it earlier, such  
43  
44 rights are exercised by individuals on their own behalf, on behalf of one another,  
45  
46 and their city, as citizens of this broken country. Like memorials as structures-to-  
47  
48 remind-us that carry with them an *a priori* knowledge that they are insufficient,  
49  
50 so an exercising, an articulation, a statement (at a vigil, as a memorial), such an  
51  
52 operative performative action becomes an affirmative site, a site of affirmation,  
53  
54  
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56  
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1  
2  
3 an utterance around which remembering can congregate and the process of  
4 memory-telling can begin. (Simply, the act of stating or uttering or singing  
5 shatters perhaps irreparably and strikingly the silence, and what it stands for,  
6 ushering in a new patterning for observance.) Such public action, these acts of  
7 political self-determination, enact those rights. They are acts of symbolic  
8 defiance, of defiance and resilience, of collective determination - despite or  
9 perhaps because of the carnage, the trauma, the *Nachträglichkeit*, Brexit, ten  
10 years of austerity, precarity, and so on and so forth. *Demonstrating coming*  
11 *together-ness* – solidarity and diversity, solidarity in diversity, solidarity as  
12 diversity, diversity as solidarity - is what observance as a grievable moment has  
13 the capacity to do.

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Such acts fill me with awe and wonder; and not a little jealousy. I am so filled with admiration for a human being's capacity, let's say Charlotte Campbell's capacity – let's add Susan Bro, the mother of murdered anti-fascist protester Heather Heyer, at her daughter's memorial service - to be brave and outraged and undaunted. (Susan Bro urged the crowd to honor the memory of her daughter by channeling 'anger into righteous action'.) That Campbell, that Bro, that we have the capacity, the... humanity... to be sympathetic, empathetic, compassionate, defiant, angry, to effectuate numerous spontaneous acts of kindness and heroism, right in the midst of such a grievable moment. To be resilient. The greater the evil, the stronger the good becomes; I don't know how to think in terms of good and evil, but they do, and they are unerring.

All I can do is be inspired by (as well as sceptical of) these acts, try to be better and do better myself, and mark such performative action, for good and ill,

1  
2  
3 by way of this article as a testament to both the engendering as well as the  
4  
5 ungracious character of us as human, all too human.  
6

7           In British national life, for almost 100 years, since the first anniversary of  
8  
9 the Armistice on November 11<sup>th</sup>, 1919, we have been using commemorative  
10  
11 durational silences as a secular, vernacular ritual of observance associated with  
12  
13 remembering the dead. While such a praxis may obliquely carry the  
14  
15 unacknowledged residue of the Quakers' silent worship, and before them of  
16  
17 observing and remembering the Sabbath for Christians and Jews, it strikes me  
18  
19 that in the contemporaneity of our Memory Industry such observance as a  
20  
21 performative action evokes planetarity and is thus more considerable than mere  
22  
23 religion.  
24  
25

26  
27           There will be no let up in this need for observance: the need to assemble;  
28  
29 to come together as a nation (which is not a time for nationalism); to pay  
30  
31 attention and care, follow, obey, to observe and to be seen to be observing; the  
32  
33 need to need to mourn, to remember, and to commemorate the dead.  
34  
35

36           And let's be reminded that etymology is clear, as I wrote towards the  
37  
38 beginning of this article, that observance is not observing per se but the *act* of  
39  
40 observing and paying attention and caring, not following per se but the act of  
41  
42 following a particular custom, not obeying per se but an action performed in  
43  
44 accordance with a ritual. Observance as a grievable moment turns it into what it  
45  
46 always and already is: it turns observing, caring, following, obeying into action,  
47  
48 into acts – often into righteous action - of reciprocal obligation to others.  
49  
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2  
3 To remember the dead is to mark them. This function has frequently been served  
4  
5 by 'the list' as a trope or form or operation, with increased regularity since the  
6  
7 emergence of an earlier iteration of the Memory Industry's archival impulse. The  
8  
9 list was adopted early in memorials to the Shoah, having been utilised already in  
10  
11 1946 to commemorate the dead by way of a memorial inscription on the  
12  
13 chimney of the Flossenbürg crematorium. Its frequency (the 'wall of names'  
14  
15 model for instance) encompasses the monumentality of the Vietnam Veterans  
16  
17 Memorial in Washington DC (Maya Lin, dedicated in 1982) and the more modest  
18  
19 wall of names in the synagogue in Chmielnik, the Polish town of two of my great-  
20  
21 grandparents, which because of the long-derelect synagogue's restoration in  
22  
23 2013 is now a regular stop on the shtetl route.  
24  
25

26  
27 To list the dead, often to mark the unmarked, is also to begin the task of  
28  
29 re-membering the destroyed synagogues, the razed cemeteries, the broken  
30  
31 headstones. For the list serves a referential function (it is historical,  
32  
33 informational, instrumental, returning the dead their names), whilst at the same  
34  
35 time serving a metaphoric or symbolic function (remembering, commemorating,  
36  
37 marking itself). As a mnemonic device, its function as memorial is then both  
38  
39 indexical and metaphorical, an enumeration and an articulation. It is specific and  
40  
41 generalizable, individualised and collectivist, finite and endless. Anxiety-inducing  
42  
43 and a calming balm. It is filled with painfully personal details and (banally,  
44  
45 sublimely, horrifically) repetitive ad infinitum, as are the facts in and that  
46  
47 constitute any and every listing.  
48  
49

50  
51 To end this article it seems fitting, then, to take as my guide the ultimate  
52  
53 list or listing paradigm: the Page of Testimony from The Central Database of  
54  
55 Shoah Victims' Names at Yad Vashem. As is well known, Yad Vashem was  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 established in 1953 as Israel's official national memorial authority and  
4  
5 institution to the victims of the Holocaust, and now describes itself as the 'World  
6  
7 Holocaust Remembrance Centre' and 'the Jewish people's living memorial to the  
8  
9 Holocaust'. The listing format for its Pages of Testimony (first name, surname,  
10  
11 born date, son of, born in, married to, profession, residence, date of death, place  
12  
13 of death) is tried and tested. It is perhaps because of Yad Vashem that the Page of  
14  
15 Testimony is now the ur-form of commemoration, and the privileged form for  
16  
17 truth telling, for preserving memory.  
18  
19

20  
21 What is perhaps less well known (but should come as no surprise) is that  
22  
23 Yad Vashem is also, according to Wikipedia, the second-most-visited Israeli  
24  
25 tourist site, so, given this article's concerns, it seems somewhat fitting, and  
26  
27 hopefully not too indecorous, not too much of a 'Holocaust effect', to adapt and  
28  
29 re-purpose this format for a non-Shoah-related, in fact not-at-all-Jewish  
30  
31 performative action of secular, vernacular observance.  
32  
33

34  
35 One final thought: given that listings are seemingly endless, and can thus  
36  
37 so easily dissolve individualised referentiality into a transcendental symbolic  
38  
39 *memento mori*, it's a righteous action to read them painstakingly.  
40  
41

42  
43 Abedi, Salman Ramadan, 22, from Manchester, killed by his own homemade  
44  
45 bomb, Manchester Arena, Manchester, 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2017.  
46  
47

48  
49 Ali, Makram, 51, born Bangladesh, lived in Haringey, North London, struck by a  
50  
51 white van and died of multiple injuries, Seven Sisters Road, Finsbury Park,  
52  
53 Monday 19<sup>th</sup> June, 2017, murdered by Darren Osborne.  
54  
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2  
3 Archibald, Christine, 30, from Castlegar, British Columbia, struck by a white van  
4  
5 driven into pedestrians by terrorists, died in her fiancé's arms on London Bridge,  
6  
7 murdered by Khuram Shazad Butt, Rachid Redouane, and Youssef Zaghba on  
8  
9 Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2017.  
10

11  
12  
13  
14 Atkinson, John, 28, from Radcliffe, Greater Manchester, support worker,  
15  
16 murdered in terrorist attack carried out by Salman Ramadan Abedi at  
17  
18 Manchester Arena, Manchester on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2017.  
19

20  
21  
22  
23 Bélanger, Sébastien, 36, from Angers, French, chef, stabbed to death at Borough  
24  
25 Market, murdered by Khuram Shazad Butt, Rachid Redouane, and Youssef  
26  
27 Zaghba on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2017.  
28

29  
30  
31 Boden, Kirsty, 28, from Loxton, South Australia, stabbed in the chest while  
32  
33 coming to the aid of the injured at Borough Market, murdered by Khuram Shazad  
34  
35 Butt, Rachid Redouane, and Youssef Zaghba on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2017.  
36

37  
38  
39  
40 Boyle, Courtney, 19, from Gateshead, student at Leeds Beckett University,  
41  
42 waiting to collect her younger sister Nicole, murdered in terrorist attack carried  
43  
44 out by Salman Ramadan Abedi at Manchester Arena, Manchester, on Monday  
45  
46 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2017.  
47

48  
49  
50  
51 Brewster, Kelly, 32, from Sheffield, civil servant, died shielding her niece from  
52  
53 the blast, murdered in terrorist attack carried out by Salman Ramadan Abedi at  
54  
55 Manchester Arena, Manchester on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2017.  
56

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5 Butt, Khuram Shazad, 27, British citizen, born in Pakistan, former London  
6  
7 Underground worker, shot dead by police marksmen in Borough Market by  
8  
9 22.16 BST on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2017.  
10  
11

12  
13  
14 Callander, Georgina, 18, from Chorley, Lancashire, student at Runshaw College,  
15  
16 murdered in terrorist attack carried out by Salman Ramadan Abedi at  
17  
18 Manchester Arena, Manchester on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2017.  
19  
20

21  
22  
23 Campbell, Olivia, 15, from Bury, Greater Manchester, pupil at Tottington High  
24  
25 School, murdered in terrorist attack carried out by Salman Ramadan Abedi at  
26  
27 Manchester Arena, Manchester on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2017.  
28  
29

30  
31  
32 Curry, Liam, 19, from South Shields, student at Northumbria University,  
33  
34 murdered in terrorist attack carried out by Salman Ramadan Abedi at  
35  
36 Manchester Arena, Manchester on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2017.  
37  
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39  
40  
41 Echeverría, Ignacio, 39, from Las Rozas, Spain, worked in money laundering  
42  
43 prevention at HSBC, died in Borough Market trying to defend a woman who was  
44  
45 being stabbed, murdered by Khuram Shazad Butt, Rachid Redouane, and Youssef  
46  
47 Zaghba on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2017.  
48  
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50  
51  
52 Fawell, Wendy, 50, from Otley, West Yorkshire, former primary school worker,  
53  
54 murdered in terrorist attack carried out by Salman Ramadan Abedi at  
55  
56 Manchester Arena, Manchester on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2017.  
57  
58

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4  
5 Hett, Martyn, 29, from Stockport, PR manager, murdered in terrorist attack  
6 carried out by Salman Ramadan Abedi at Manchester Arena, Manchester on  
7 Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2017.  
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13  
14 Howe, Alison, 45, from Royton, Oldham, waiting to pick up her daughter,  
15 murdered in terrorist attack carried out by Salman Ramadan Abedi at  
16 Manchester Arena, Manchester on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2017.  
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22  
23 Hurley, Megan, 15, from Halewood, near Liverpool, pupil at Halewood Academy,  
24 murdered in terrorist attack carried out by Salman Ramadan Abedi at  
25 Manchester Arena, Manchester on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2017.  
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30  
31 Jones, Nell, 14, from Goostrey in Cheshire, pupil at Holmes Chapel  
32 Comprehensive School, murdered in terrorist attack carried out by Salman  
33 Ramadan Abedi at Manchester Arena, Manchester on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2017.  
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39  
40 Kiss, Michelle, 45, from Whalley, Lancashire, waiting to pick up her daughter,  
41 murdered in terrorist attack carried out by Salman Ramadan Abedi at  
42 Manchester Arena, Manchester on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2017.  
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48  
49 Klis, Angelika, 40, from Poland, lived in York, waiting to pick up her two children,  
50 murdered in terrorist attack carried out by Salman Ramadan Abedi at  
51 Manchester Arena, Manchester on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2017.  
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1  
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3 Klis, Marcin, 42, from Poland, lived in York, cabdriver, waiting to pick up his two  
4  
5 children, murdered in terrorist attack carried out by Salman Ramadan Abedi at  
6  
7 Manchester Arena, Manchester on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2017.  
8  
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10  
11 Leczkowski, Sorrell, 14, lived in Adel in Leeds, pupil at Allerton High School,  
12  
13 Leeds, murdered in terrorist attack carried out by Salman Ramadan Abedi at  
14  
15 Manchester Arena, Manchester on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2017.  
16  
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18  
19  
20 Lees, Lisa, 47, from Royton, Oldham, waiting to pick up her daughter, murdered  
21  
22 in terrorist attack carried out by Salman Ramadan Abedi at Manchester Arena,  
23  
24 Manchester on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2017.  
25  
26

27  
28  
29 MacLeod, Eilidh, 14, from the Isle of Barra, Outer Hebrides, pupil at Castlebay  
30  
31 Community School, murdered in terrorist attack carried out by Salman Ramadan  
32  
33 Abedi at Manchester Arena, Manchester on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2017.  
34  
35

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37  
38 McIver, Elaine, 43, from Ellesmere Port, Cheshire, police officer, waiting to pick  
39  
40 up her step-daughter, murdered in terrorist attack carried out by Salman  
41  
42 Ramadan Abedi at Manchester Arena, Manchester on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2017.  
43  
44

45  
46  
47 McMullan, James, 32, from Hackney, east London, web entrepreneur, stabbed to  
48  
49 death on Borough High Street, murdered by Khuram Shazad Butt, Rachid  
50  
51 Redouane, and Youssef Zaghba on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2017.  
52  
53

1  
2  
3 Pigeard, Alexandre, 26 or 27, from Caen or Colleville-Montgomery, Normandy,  
4 waiter at Boro Bistro, stabbed in the neck, murdered by Khuram Shazad Butt,  
5 Rachid Redouane, and Youssef Zaghba on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2017.  
6  
7  
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10  
11 Redouane, Rachid (aka Rachid Elkhdar), 30, Irish identity, claimed to be  
12 Moroccan and Libyan, pastry chef, shot dead by police marksmen in Borough  
13 Market by 22.16 BST on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2017.  
14  
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16  
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19  
20 Roussos, Saffie Rose, 8, from Tarleton, near Preston in Lancashire, pupil at  
21 Tarleton Community Primary School, murdered in terrorist attack carried out by  
22 Salman Ramadan Abedi at Manchester Arena, Manchester on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> May  
23 2017.  
24  
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27  
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30  
31 Rutherford, Chloe, 17, from South Shields, student and part time travel agent,  
32 murdered in terrorist attack carried out by Salman Ramadan Abedi at  
33 Manchester Arena, Manchester on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2017.  
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40 Thomas, Xavier, 45, French national, business and events and travel manager,  
41 mowed down by terrorists' van on London Bridge and thrown into the Thames,  
42 death by immersion, murdered by Khuram Shazad Butt, Rachid Redouane, and  
43 Youssef Zaghba on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2017.  
44  
45  
46  
47  
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50  
51 Tron, Philip, 32, from Gateshead, waiting to pick up his step-daughter Nicole  
52 Boyle, murdered in terrorist attack carried out by Salman Ramadan Abedi at  
53 Manchester Arena, Manchester on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2017.  
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5 Tweddle-Taylor, Jane, 51, from Blackpool, receptionist, murdered in terrorist  
6  
7 attack carried out by Salman Ramadan Abedi at Manchester Arena, Manchester  
8  
9 on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2017.  
10

11  
12  
13 Zaghba, Youssef, 22, Italian national, born in Fes, Morocco, lived in east London,  
14  
15 development coach at children's gymnastics club, shot dead by police marksmen  
16  
17 in Borough Market by 22.16 BST on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2017  
18

19  
20  
21  
22 Zelenak, Sara, aged 21, Australian national, born in Brisbane, lived in London,  
23  
24 nanny/au pair, stabbed to death in Borough Market, murdered by Khuram  
25  
26 Shazad Butt, Rachid Redouane, and Youssef Zaghba on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2017.  
27  
28

29  
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31 \*

### 32 33 34 35 36 **References**

37  
38  
39  
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9 <sup>i</sup> Derrida would be turning in his grave at such a mis-use of *sous rature*.

10 <sup>ii</sup> This article is a 'working through' of the ideas that conceptually underpin and  
11 over-arch that chapter as it's being researched, and coming to be written. It's an  
12 effort to get myself un-stuck.  
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17 <sup>iii</sup> For an account of the emergence of the Memory Industry in an earlier iteration  
18 see Klein, 2000.

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20  
21 <sup>iv</sup> Here I allude to Elie Wiesel, and also George Steiner.

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24 <sup>v</sup> It turns out that iconomachy is a double bind too: the performative action of the  
25 destruction of images and objects and forms is, in turn, a proem to performative  
26 action.  
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30 <sup>vi</sup> Now a ubiquitous global phenomenon, dark tourism has been documented as  
31 such for around 150 years, from Mark Twain's *Innocents Abroad* in which Twain  
32 writes about the exploiting of the past for profit, and dedicates a chapter to  
33 Pompeii, to Anton Chekhov, the original 'gulag tourist', and beyond.  
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37 <sup>vii</sup> See also the controversy at 2017's documenta14 around Franco 'Bifo' Berardi's  
38 'Auschwitz on the Beach' performance, and the discussion on the controversy  
39 here: [http://www.documenta14.de/en/calendar/24356/shame-on-us-a-  
40 reading-and-discussion](http://www.documenta14.de/en/calendar/24356/shame-on-us-a-reading-and-discussion)  
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47 <sup>viii</sup> This thinking emerges from somewhere between Baudrillard's interpretation  
48 in *In the Shadow of the Silence Majorities* (1978) of the passivity/docility/non-  
49 participation/indifference of 'the masses' as an active refusal of (a 'collective  
50 retaliation' against) society's recommended ideals; and Hardt and Negri's  
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4 considerations of the refusal/failure of 'the multitude' to enter into a social  
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6 contract with a sovereign political body as sketched in *Empire* (2000) and  
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8 *Multitude* (2004).  
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11 <sup>ix</sup> Note that I'm not of course advocating that a web-based search for and access  
12  
13 to material relating to the Shoah should be any different in terms of speed and  
14  
15 efficiency to any other kind of search, but simply pointing out that the absence of  
16  
17 a discernable difference, operationally, between them and any and all  
18  
19 information on the Internet leads to a flattening out of the knowledge/content  
20  
21 therein.  
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24 <sup>x</sup> [https://www.theguardian.com/football/2017/jun/08/saudi-arabia-  
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28 footballers-ignore-minutes-silence-for-london-attack-victims](https://www.theguardian.com/football/2017/jun/08/saudi-arabia-<br/>25<br/>26 footballers-ignore-minutes-silence-for-london-attack-victims) (accessed 9<sup>th</sup> June  
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30 [2017](#))  
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