MEMORY STUDIES

The place of trauma: Memory, hauntings, and the temporality of ruins

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Abstract

Implicit in theoretical treatments of the memory of trauma is the fragmented reception of the past. While a great deal of research has approached this issue from the perspective of oral testimony, what has remained underdeveloped is the role sites of memory play in contributing to our understanding of trauma. Accordingly, in this article, I intend make a foray into this convergence between place and trauma through undertaking a phenomenological investigation of the testimonial attributes of ruins. In doing so, I will pursue two central questions. First, insofar as the built environment is able to contain memory, how does the place of trauma testify to history? Second, if ruins are by their nature contingent and dynamic, how can the past be spatially preserved without creating a false unity between time and the event? In response to these questions, I will put forward the notion that sites of trauma articulate memory precisely through refusing a continuous temporal narrative. My conclusion is that the appearance of the ruin, understood phenomenologically, allows us to approach the spatio-temporality of trauma in terms of a logic of hauntings and voids.

Key words

embodiment; Holocaust; materiality; nightmares; phenomenology

> *But if I see before me the nervature of past life in one image, I always think that this has something to do with truth. (Sebald, 2002: 81)*

INTRODUCTION: PLACE AND TRAUMA

In the opening scene of Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah* (1985), we follow Simon Srebnik, a former Polish prisoner who, along with one other, survived the camp, in his return to Chelmno. As he approaches the site, Srebnik pauses, surveys the space, and nods: 'It's hard to recognize', he remarks sombrely, 'but it was here. They burned people here' (Lanzmann, 1985). During this opening scene, the camera, so far fixed on

Srebnik's devastated expression, cuts to a panning shot of a flat, desiccated clearing, punctuated by the rectangular spaces of what were the camp's structural foundations. 'No one can describe it', Srebnik says, now walking around the site. 'No one can recreate what happened here. Impossible! And no one can understand it. Even, I, here, now … I can't believe I'm here.'

How can we approach this tension between place and trauma in a phenomenological sense? On the one hand, we are faced with a scene of recognition, in which specific details are recollected from the past and applied to the spatiality of the present. On the other hand, the same place where Srebnik stands in the present is undercut by the radical singularity of the traumatic past, such that the simple fact of being there fails to contribute to the reality of time. The result of this displacement between recollection and experience is the impossibility of re-creating the felt depth of the past.

Phenomenologically, materiality, memory and time appear to buckle in this ambiguously placed emergence of the past. Far from offering itself as a testimony to the past, Srebnik's witnessing of Chelmno brings to light a fundamentally *spectral* engagement trauma occupies to place. Central to this logic of spectrality is the displacement of the body. Despite being in place, during this opening scene of *Shoah*, Srebnik remains essentially displaced from the materiality of the location. We return to his confession: 'Even, I, here, now … I can't believe I'm here.' Phenomenologically, this is a startling claim, which appears to usurp the classical notion of the body as a locus of unity and movement, evident, above all, in the work of Merleau-Ponty. Taking into consideration Cathy Caruth's account of trauma as an 'unclaimed experience', we can sense the displacement of the traumatized body, therefore, as a phenomenon marked by an experience that literally *overwhelms* the relation between place, time, and embodiment (Caruth: 1996).

In this article, I shall attempt to respond to this question concerning how we can approach this tension between place and trauma phenomenologically through considering the relation between embodiment, materiality and testimony. Through bringing these three dimensions together through the lens of traumatic memory, I shall demonstrate how the spectrality of place can fundamentally inform our understanding of traumatic memory, understood as an embodied and cognitive practice. Guiding this plan is the claim that the place of trauma and the subject of trauma form a structurally parallel unity. To elucidate this thesis, I will turn to the appearance of *ruins*.

My use of the word 'ruins' designates location of memory, in which trauma took place and continues to be inextricably bound with that location in both an affective and evidential manner. Note, however, that a ruin does not have to involve a relationship with the built environment. If this appears contradictory, consider how certain 'natural' environments can become materially altered by the events that occurred there, fields and forests shaped by human intervention. What is central here is the identity of a location marked by the events that are constitutive of that identity. At the same time, clearly there is an intimate relation between physical remains and the building that existed prior to that stage of dissolution. It is in this sense that ruins have come to assume an aesthetic presence, inviting the viewer to fill out the broken form

through the active dynamism of the imagination (see Ginsberg, 2004). In both cases, however, the term 'ruin' also refuses to fall neatly into either the region of place or site, encouraging at each stage of its evolution an ambiguous spatiality at odds with our understanding of domestic place (see Trigg, 2006).

At stake in this evolution is the parallel development of questions of testimony and temporality. One way in which this development is rendered explicit is with the magnetism places of trauma hold for visitors, survivors and even those complicit with propagating the traumatic event. Such magnetism is by no means self-explanatory, despite the symbolic import of 'mourning' frequently being conferred upon traumatic places. While themes of mourning, closure and remembrance are all clearly at stake in the relationship between the material remains of trauma and the need to witness those remains, just how this relationship is possible is harder to define.

Yet eliciting a description of this interaction between the physical appearance of trauma and the subject experiencing that appearance is the plan of this article. I propose to achieve this in the following way. Rather than beginning with materiality itself, I will, instead, phenomenologically chart the emergence of traumatic space from the standpoint of the traumatized subject. In this way, I hope to emphasize the structural parallels binding embodiment, identity and materiality. To gain an entrance into this structure, I shall call upon the work of Holocaust survivor, Charlotte Delbo. In particular, I will employ the theme of Delbo's nightmares of trauma alongside Giorgio Agamben's account of testimony, as presented in his *Remnants of Auschwitz* (Agamben, 1999). The purpose of constructing this dialogue between Agamben and Delbo is to extract the testimonial attributes common in both the surviving subject and the surviving place. By using the notion of 'spectrality' as a transitional point between the subject and the place, I will conclude by arguing that the ruin's capacity to haunt the viewer effectively undercuts a claim of temporal continuity and, instead, offers a counter-narrative in which testimony becomes guided by voids rather than points of presence.

EMBODIMENT AND TRAUMA

How can phenomenology assist us in negotiating the tension between the experience of place in the present and the blocked emergence of a traumatic memory rooted in the past? We have already glanced at this tension between Srebnik and Chelmno, but even at a glance the relationship is problematized through the inclusion of the terms 'place' and 'subject.' Are these terms legitimate if both appear to be incommensurable with the other? The frequent usage of the term 'site' in relation to the memory of trauma testifies to the tension between conflating place with trauma (see Foote, 2003; Huyssen, 2003; Till, 2005). But is the term 'site' simply employed as a methodological device to provide a link between spatiality and subjectivity? For the most part, the connotation of 'site' being levelled-out, divested of its specificity and reduced to a non-place serves to distance the remoteness and fragmentation of trauma with the felt experience of place. Further, unlike 'place', 'site' suggests a location being between other places, a liminal space at once incomplete and in transition (as in 'grave site'). Yet to what extent the

term 'site' is better suited to locations of trauma is contentious and deserves attention. Indeed, without wishing to proscribe the term 'site' in advance, there is clearly a sense in which the spatiality of trauma merits careful examination, such that both 'place' and 'site' are brought into the specific impasses traumatic memory invokes.

In order to assess whether these terms can be used legitimately, let me turn to Merleau-Ponty's account of 'inhabiting space' as a methodological basis (Merleau-Ponty, 2006: 161). Above all, I am interested in how Merleau-Ponty's description of embodiment as involving an 'absolute here' allows us to accommodate a spatial-temporal dynamic resistant to hereness. By 'absolute here', Merleau-Ponty refers to a '"here" which can gradually confer a significance on all spatial determinations' (Merleau-Ponty, 2006: 288). In this case, the 'significance' Merleau-Ponty addresses is complicit with lived experience, a significance felt in the dimensional and directional manner with which place is experienced in terms of left/right, near/far, above/below, etc. The result of Merleau-Ponty's 'absolute here' is the elevation of the body to a spatial and temporal locus, absorbing the world from inside out. Speaking about 'motor memory', temporality and space, this emphasis on synthesis and unity is made clear:

> In so far as I have a body through which I act in the world, space and time are not, for me, a collection of adjacent points, nor are they a limitless number of relations synthesised by my consciousness, and in which it draws my body. I am not in space and time, nor do I conceive space and time; I belong to them, my body combines with them and includes them. (Merleau-Ponty, 2006: 162)

By making space and time inclusive of the body, rather than either being contained in the world or structured by the transcendental ego, Merleau-Ponty establishes a synthesis, in which the body becomes a centre stretching out into the world. The resultant 'body image' manages to bind the self and world through an 'incarnate intentionality', an intentionality that prefigures conscious intentionality (Merleau-Ponty, 2006: 112–15). What this means is that the centrality of the lived body enables objective space to be positioned in a dimensional manner. I 'belong' to space and time, as Merleau-Ponty says.

What emerges from this scene of embodiment and spatiality is a tremendous faith in the power of place as a source of unity. Indeed, seen from the perspective of a lived duration, the above passage underscores the peculiar retention of body memory in (per)forming the experience of the present. The parenthesizing of 'per' in per-forming marks the role of the body in enabling the formation of the self through the body's own action in the world. Thus, it is not simply the case that the body retains the past in a dormant manner. Rather it is the case that such a past becomes actualized when the body performs specific actions peculiar to that past, conferring a sense of spatial and temporal unity in the present.

To return this to the tension framing the scene from Lanzmann's *Shoah*, two main points can be made. First, against the unity of Merleau-Ponty's 'absolute here', what unfolds in this scene from *Shoah* is the fundamental ambiguity of *hereness*. Perme-ating this scene is a paradoxical sense of radical estrangement compounded with an intense proximity between Srebnik and the location. 'Even, I, here, now … I can't

believe I'm here': with this statement, the temporality of personal identity collides with the disbelief that the same person is now witnessing the same location, right *here*, right *now*. Here and now mark the basis of Merleau-Ponty's account of embodiment. Throughout, there is a sense of orientation aided by the lineage of movements stored in the 'absolute awareness of "here"' (Merleau-Ponty, 2006: 161). Indeed, about the spatio-temporal continuity of the body, Merleau-Ponty states the following: 'Just as it is necessarily "here", the body necessarily exists "now"' (Merleau-Ponty, 2006: 162). Yet it is precisely because of this necessity of 'here' and 'now' that the appearance of Srebnik in Chelmno is essentially spectral. As an appearance without a spatio-temporal ground to support it, disbelief intervenes in this scene of return.

Second, then, phenomenologically, what can we say of the spatiality of Chelmno in relation to Srebnik? We recall that Merleau-Ponty speaks of 'belonging' to space and time (Merleau-Ponty, 2006: 162). This claim is made in relation to the unity of the body, as it proceeds to 'combine' with space and time. It is thanks to the body's 'motor memory', moreover, that movement in space entwines with the past, establishing a spatial instant in the present that 'dovetails' temporally. Placed in this context of *Shoah*, the materiality of the environment appears as basically divorced from the temporality of Srebnik, as a lived subject. Srebnik's remark that 'it's hard to recognize, but it was here. They burned people here', is less about visual recognition and more about the failure to synthesize space and time through the body. Tellingly, Merleau-Ponty admits that 'the synthesis of both time and space is a task that always has to be performed afresh' (Merleau-Ponty, 2006: 162). During the scene from Lanzmann's film, we witness such a task appear to falter. The failure to align materiality with temporality does not, however, deny the reality of Chelmno as a memory, but affirms that reality through confounding the 'absolute here' of the body. The return Srebnik makes is not, therefore, to bear witness to the temporal end of place, but to recognize the dynamic persistence of an event that continues in spite of the absence of its original containment: in effect, conceding to the power of place as a fused with a *haunted* undercurrent. In the remainder of the article, I shall attempt to account for this haunted dynamic.

DREAMING AND WITNESSING

I have given a phenomenological sketch of how temporality and spatiality are provisionally modified in accordance with the memory of trauma. What I want to do now is begin the task of aligning the structure of the traumatized subject with the traumatized place through turning to the writings of Charlotte Delbo. In doing so, I will use the nightmare of the traumatic event as a focal point in this structure. For Delbo, the appearance of the nightmare is presented as a disruption of the rational appropriation of trauma, framed as a distinction between 'common memory' and 'deep memory.' In using the phrase 'deep memory', I follow Lawrence Langer in holding deep memory as the attempt to 'recall the Auschwitz self as it was then' (Langer, 1991: 6). For Delbo, deep memory stands in contradistinction to common memory, insofar as the latter provides a restorative role on the self in the present, evincing a 'detached portrait'

of the past (Langer, 1991: 6.). As an unconscious presence, the nightmare of trauma embodies what common memory seeks to maintain at a distance. Consequentially, the structural importance of the nightmare within the broad scheme of traumatic memory is to reunite two selves divorced by experience. Seen in this light, the nightmare returns Delbo to herself, producing at once an alienated and familiar self. She writes:

> *Over dreams the conscious will has no power. And in those dreams I see myself, yes, my own self such as I know I was: hardly able to stand on my feet, my throat tight, my heart beating wildly, frozen to the marrow, filthy, skin and bones; the suffering I feel is so unbearable, so identical to the pain endured there, that I feel it physically, I feel it throughout my whole body which becomes a mass of suffering; and I feel death fasten on me, I feel that I am dying. (cited in Langer, 1995: 78–9)*

Considered structurally, what is occurring in this passage is a reunion of two selves, a chance encounter emblematically framed as an instant of death, and mediated thereafter by the suspension of rational consciousness. The result of this action is the creation of a space between other identities, a space that only opens up as the conscious and unconscious selves stand in tense proximity to one another. Central to this space is the moment of recognition in the nightmare, whereby Delbo sees her other self. Yet the reunion is not simply a case of two selves retaining a temporal distance from one another. Rather, what we witness is an amorphous fusion of those selves, constituted by parts of Delbo that simultaneously belong and do not belong. Enclosing time, the nightmare catches sight of memory catching up with self-presence. Indeed, this is precisely what is terrifying about the dream: the event returns in its absolute fullness, as was never experienced in the instance of its occurrence or in the rational recollection that took place afterwards. It is into this return that Delbo's feeling of 'dying' occurs. *Who* is dying, however, is less clear.

The lack of certainty surrounding the question of whose death is at stake in the nightmare is indicative of the testimonial impasses central to the memory of trauma. As a compound between disparate and incommensurable dimensions of the self, the voice emerging in the darkness of memory refuses a direct entrance into that narrative of recollection. Rather, what unfolds is 'a mass of suffering' taken up through the body, divested of Merleau-Ponty's 'absolute here', and constitutive of a disturbance of oral articulation. Because of this disturbance, the appearance of the dream occupies a privileged position where testimony is concerned, forging an indirect opening into the disjunction between two selves divorced in time. This position is realized as we turn to the writings of Agamben.

In doing so, however, we need to recognize a certain tension between doing a phenomenology of Delbo's nightmare in relation to Agamben's task of accounting for the aporetic structure of testimony (Agamben, 1999). In response to this tension, my method will be to focus only on those aspects from Agamben's writings on testimony that lend themselves to our overall project; namely, eliciting the testimonial attributes of sites of traumatic memory. If this approach constitutes a disservice to Agamben, then I hope that by importing his writings on testimony into a phenomenological

context that disservice can be countered. With that said, let me begin by surveying the problematic structure of witnessing.

For Agamben, what is peculiar to the relation between witnessing and testimony is an aporia that entails the impossibility of completion. More specifically, what this dynamic revolves around is the incompletion determined by the impossibility of materially surviving, in Primo Levi's words, 'the destiny of the common prisoner' (cited in Agamben, 1999: 33). How can we approach this limit? In the least, we can say that a relation between voices in the past and those in the present emerge. Moreover, we can go on to say that such a relation constitutes a dynamic of inside and out, in which the indirect opening into the memory of trauma becomes facilitated with the standoff between what is heard in the present and what remains to be said in the past. To speak of what is heard in the present and what remains to be said in the past means to confer an afterlife upon the temporality of trauma, one that outlives the immediacy of the event. Rather than simply recollecting the past into the present or otherwise allowing that same past to disperse of its own accord, it is only when conflicting temporalities are brought together, so constituting a single non-linear timescale, that trauma becomes pronounced as such. Here, let us turn to Agamben:

> But not even the survivor can bear witness completely, can speak his own lacuna. This means that testimony is the disjunction between two impossibilities of bearing witness; it means that language, in order to bear witness, must give way to a non-language in order to show the impossibility of bearing witness (Agamben, 1999: 39).

Agamben presents us with an impasse, whereby 'a non-language' establishes the impossibility of bearing witness, which itself *becomes* the act of bearing witness. 'Two impossibilities of bearing witness', stretched out between spaces in time. For Agamben, such a relation is exemplified in the figure of the 'muselmann', a term taken from Primo Levi referring the 'drowned' human being (Levi, 1996: 88). The figure of the muselmann, according to Agamben, merits a 'limit situation' whereby 'the non-place in which all disciplinary barriers are destroyed and all embankments flooded' (Agamben, 1999: 48). What is distinct to this 'non-place', taken up through the muselmann, is the fundamental indefiniteness, a deep ambiguity that renders the muselmann both human and non-human simultaneously. Indeed, it is such a proximity to the non-human that divides the muselmann from 'the common prisoner.' Such a paradoxical tension with the appearance of being human is offset by the refusal of that human state. To refer to Levi, what characterizes the muselmann is a basic absence of presence: 'an anonymous mass, continually renewed and always identical, of non-men who march and labour in silence, the divine spark dead within them, already too empty to really suffer' (Levi, 1996: 90). For Agamben, such a lacuna renders the testimony of the muselmann fundamentally unapproachable, presupposing the destruction of lived experience. Agamben's confrontation with this inapproachability results, therefore, in a synthesis between the survivor and the muselmann.

Given this structure of disjunction and dislocation, how can we find a thematic link from the subject of testimony to the place of that experience without wishing to impose a bond in advance? By posing this question, then, what is at stake is not simply

the testimonial attributes of a place understood in forensic terms, but the implicit relation between place and 'witness' (taking the latter term in a provisional sense). I would suggest that one way in which we can approach this transition from memory to materiality is with the notion of 'superstes.' For Agamben, superstes 'designates a person who has lived through something, who has experienced an event from beginning to end and can therefore bear witness' (Agamben, 1999: 17). With this notion, then, we return to the figure of the muselmann, since it is with the muselmann that the temporal conflict between the end of the event and the deferred continuity of that end fuses.

Furthermore, coexistent with this return is a double return to Charlotte Delbo's nightmare. This is made clear if we consider that both the muselmann and the nightmare not only present themselves as hallucinogenic and essential symptoms of the event, but also structure themselves in such a way that their presence is always deferred. With this hallucinogenic deferral, the muselmann and the nightmare materialize as objects seized from what Delbo has termed 'deep memory.' The significance of this is that the muselmann and the nightmare share the borderline absence into which two selves become divorced. That the muselmann was refereed to as a 'void' supports this view insofar as he is positioned on a peripheral border. Similarly, Delbo's nightmare is an exposure of the deep memory that stands as an indeterminate lacuna in the region of 'refilled memory' and rational ordering. Indeed, Delbo goes so far as to say that the dream 'gives [memory] back its contents' (cited in Langer, 1991: 6). It is this dynamic of returning content to a voided space that I shall pursue on material terms in the following section.

TRAUMATIZED ARCHITECTURE

Employing the idea of 'superstes', I have suggested that what is peculiar to the muselmann and to Delbo's nightmare is the role they play in bringing two realms together through acting as a dynamic void. This role becomes amplified if we consider that the identity of the traumatized subject is thought of as being radically divergent, to the extent that before and after the event marks two selves. In the case of Delbo's nightmare and Agamben's muselmann, two selves broken in time were maintained by the void between them. As a result, the void gained the privileged, but wholly fragmented, position of forming an intercession between time and place. What I want to propose in the current section is that a structurally parallel intercession occurs in the appearance of ruins, whereby we witness a meditation between the destruction of the past, the lapse in time thereafter, and the unexpected persistence of damaged materiality in the present.

We can think of this process in two ways. First, we can understand the persistence of a ruin in evidential terms, that is, as the forensic remains of an event, the understanding of which was blocked as it occurred. Second, the mediation can refer to the interior trace of voided experience. It is this second mode of testimony that brings the ruin into the realm of the nightmare and the muselmann. My claim, which I will now

explicate, is that the peculiarity of the spatial ruin is that it manages to attend to both the 'unclaimed experience' of trauma and the impossible 'limit situation', whereby the identity of the traumatized subject discovers a structurally determined counterpart.

To approach this claim, let me pose a question: if place is symbolically imbued with the texture of a past that is particular to that place, and if, moreover, the housing of memory is said to involve the surfacing of architectural space, then how, given their fragmentation and incompleteness, can the ruins of disaster testify to the events that took place there? Taken from a textual angle, we say that we are able to read a place for the reason that memory gains its identity through withdrawing and returning to a spatial centre. The spatiality of ruins, however, challenges the assumption of spatial centrality and thus temporal narrativity, a problem we have already detected in Merleau-Ponty.

At the outset, we discover that the ruin is both polymorphous and temporally dynamic. That is, unlike the 'felicitous' space that characterizes Bachelard's domestic enclosure, allowing time and place to coincide as unitary phenomenon, the formal features of the ruin are situated in an ambiguous zone, whereby what remains is defined by what is absent (Bachelard, 1996). With this ambiguity, the identity of place loses its certainty. Speaking of the remains of disused war bunkers, Paul Virilio writes how, 'this architecture floats on the surface of an earth which has lost its materiality' (Virilio, 2004: 12). The detachment of place from its site, invoking Virilio's floating space, compels us to consider the relationship between the materials that remain and the form from which those remains are cast. At which point, we might ask speculatively, do the history and memories of a place slide into obscurity as the same place undergoes erasure or reconfiguration? In the face of such a question, the testimonial attributes of the spatial trace, present as a void, come to the foreground.

We can analyse this relation between traces and voids in two stages. First, through the occurrence of disaster, the relation between event and place adopts an intimate, if disturbed connection. That is, insofar as the place where disaster occurred punctures the broader region that surrounds the event, a site of memory gathers the event that took place there. The notion of the traumatic event as having a spatio-temporal afterlife, independent of its original location, leads us to the second form of voided traces. Peculiar to the spatial memory of trauma is the role ruins play in housing what is absent. Such a fundamentally altered form testifies to the negative spatiality of the ruin, and ultimately to their significance. Phenomenologically, the formation and discovery of the ruin is marked by the fulfilment and embodiment of what is dynamically void. Here, the ruins of disaster paradoxically present themselves in terms of being empty of memory (a 'liminal realm' that Alexander Kozin pursues with regard to Deleuze and Tarkovsky in this issue). Instead of monumentalizing what remains, the ruin brings about a non-memory, a puncturing in spatio-temporal presence.

As such, the imprint of disaster upon space has the effect of distorting the formal appearance of materiality. How does this distortion relate to the aforementioned discussion of the terms 'place' and 'site'? Losing its meaning as a 'place', the term 'site', I believe we can now state, is thus apposite for a space in which temporal and spatial particularity is both definite and obscure. To position the remains of place under the

category of 'site' implies a deficiency that connects the ruin with an isotropic homogeneity, rather than a heterogeneous plenitude. In this sense, the usage of the term 'site' is in agreement with Edward Casey's understanding of it as a 'leveled-down, emptied-out, planiform residuum of place and space eviscerated of their actual and virtual powers' (Casey, 1997: 182). The structural property of site as a 'residuum' verifies the ambiguous temporal past it shares with place. As such, the emergence of site coincides with the disappearance of place. Rather than materializing in temporal abstraction, the site of disaster discloses a skewed, yet very dense, relation between the place that existed in advance of that site, invoking multiple interpretations of any given location.

Despite this fluidity between place and time, the emergence of a site of trauma refuses to reinforce a continuity of presence. In other words, where a site of memory 'absorbs' the place that existed prior to that site existing, a reversal of presence to absence occurs. In short, we are faced with a phenomenology of negative space, a location defined not only by what has ceased to exist, but also what cannot be accommodated spatially. Unable to be accommodated spatially, what emerges in this appearance is a dynamic tension between the desubjectification of 'place' and the contrasting emergence of 'site.' The significance of this tension is that the ruin mirrors the internal 'terrain' of the witness to trauma, and so achieves a testimonial dimension. Indeed, so far as the ruin is reduced to a 'site', thus shadowing the shift from the human to the inhuman, we are drawn back to the figure of the muselmann.

Like the muselmann, the ruin urges us to approach testimony as an impossible demand, a break in spatio-temporal presence. 'He is truly', writes Agamben, 'the *larva* that our memory cannot succeed in burying, the unforgettable with whom we must reckon' (Agamben, 1999: 81). Connecting Agamben to Delbo, we can take the metaphorical term 'larva' to mean the 'deep memory' that opposes the thin layer of 'common memory' rationality applied to that space retrospectively. In this way, the surge of larva, understood metaphorically, establishes a space created in its own unrepressed emergence; namely, the empty space from where the larva appears. Thus, it is not simply that the larva of deep memory overpowers our conceptions of the relation between trauma and materiality, but that in this collision, a new space is conceived formed through the memory of presence.

DREAMS OF RUINS

I have attempted to bring materiality, memory and trauma together through relating Agamben's account of a ruined subject with the parallel dimension of material ruins themselves. The result of this alignment is the appearance of sites of memory as a symptomatic rather than direct emergence of the traumatic past, contesting the notion of memory as being 'contained' by place. If I have so far focused on the structural dimensions of this appearance, then what I propose to do in this final section is return the attention to the *spectrality* of ruins. I will do this by materializing the phenomena of a nightmare.

Let us recall that for Delbo, the nightmare of being in the camp comes to act as a bridge between identities, each of which is distinguished by their modes of experiencing the past. But to say that the return is to a space *between* identities fails to grasp the qualitative dimension of the dream in its manifold appearances. To adjust this omission, let us also recall that the symptomatic and non-volitional aspect of the nightmare stands in contrast to what Delbo describes as 'external memory.' Seen in this light, the return to a space between identities emerges as an attempt to give back a presence, both spatial and temporal, to a non-experience. To give back a presence to an event means, above all, to *place* the event in time, an event that, as we have emphasized, has no place in time.

Yet if the function of the dream is to give presence to what is temporally altered, it is only on waking that the damaged temporality of the event is realized. Because the nightmare animates the self-estrangement of the traumatized subject, a disjuncture is positioned between what is seen in the present and what is felt as a murmur in the past. In a word, the nightmare emerges as a plane of non-experience, structured around a logic of displacement. Considered in material terms, the suspended temporality of the nightmare refers to the remains of the event leaking into the everyday world. In this sense, to 'dream without memory' also means bringing something back from the nocturnal world that is only recognized in the world of non-dreaming, albeit indirectly. The nightmare is an opening, not into the presence of being as trauma and abjection, but to the articulation of the mute void, devoid of a 'here' and 'now'.

To phrase this spatially: insofar as the ruin appears in an ambiguous border between waking life and dreams, the dream's action of giving presence to a ruptured space is precisely what distinguishes sites of memory from inanimate materiality. Unlike the memory of dreams, the ruin has a persistence, in which the sleep of memory collides and co-exists with the consciousness of daylight. Where identity has suffered under the tribunal of an 'unclaimed experience', the ruin has survived as a manifestation of this process, and this unexpected survival underpins the ruin's radical spectrality. This logic of spectrality is clear if we consider that whereas the dream entails a struggle between appearance and disappearance, ultimately consigning itself to a remote impenetrability, in the temporal present, the ruin, in its fleshy and complex materiality, mediates between these dimensions simultaneously through its attempt to house and give place to what is essentially an unhomely event.

Let us place ourselves before a scene of apparent stillness (Figure 1). In the foreground, a wide open space is marked by a paved surface, slowly ascending in steady gradients. Surrounding this ground are heaps of broken masonry, large slabs of concrete, and smaller particles of rock and brick. In the background, six tall pine trees rise above the scene of desertion and collapse. In this way, the trees offset the rubble and remains, framing the immediate scene of attention. Further still, the brittle texture of the fallen masonry is felt to be closer to the view, not only spatially but in its intensity, too. Beyond the trees in the mid-distance, a further line of trees in the background forms a double layer. Into this double layer, a small structure can be seen in the very background. On closer inspection, we realize it is a hut overlooking our own position. In effect, then, we are already in the middle of a scene, flanked on all side by a layer of

FIGURE 1 Auschwitz gas chambers

Courtesy of Wayne Stone

trees, the centre of which is our current space, and yet a position whereby we simply catch a glance of the broader scene seeping into the distance, made accessible by the broken stone.

As we are invited into this scene, comprised from a built and natural landscape, a concurrent dynamic of exclusion and disjunction ensues. There is a sense of being displaced here, of having come to a scene too late, as though the presence is defined by what fails to materialize in the present. It is in light of this tension of coming into the scene too late that the stillness of place becomes reinforced. Yet the stillness is not simply the omission of movement, but a protracted diminishment of a movement established in the absence of the viewer: in effect, a stillness played out against a past that is no longer accessible and yet intensely fused with the environment (see also Irit Dekel's article on a '*negative of space*', this issue.) Coupled with this temporal disjunction, we simultaneously discovery a visual tension between the foreground and background textures, such that the manner in which the ruined brickwork relates to the surrounding trees, embodying a classical line of balance, is wholly at odds with the irregular and asymmetrical assemblage of brick and stone. This sense of fragmentation and isolation disrupts any sense of being unified in place. Stepping into an environment as that same environment simultaneously evades our intuitive desire to *grasp* the place in its totality, the result is one of disorientation.

This disorientation adopts an overtly spectral quality as the frozen materiality of the ruin pierces the banality of the daylight, invoking the rupture from the world of dreams to the world of the everyday. Indeed, it is in banality of still daylight that the uncanny

formation of the ruin's attempt to give presence is especially clear. 'Even, I, here, now …
I can't believe I'm here', we recall Simon Srebnik saying among the remains, in an oddly
prosaic environment. Unable to be placed in the present, Srebnik's comment reveals,
not merely the distance between time and place, but the metaphysical strangeness of
a phenomenological appearance of embodied disembodiment: that is, an architectural
emergence without time and stability. In a word, an architecture of disappearance. The
encounter pushes the ruin beyond place, beyond time and toward an otherworldly
landscape comprised from remains that *ought* to have been confined to the interior
of the unconscious, but now stands before consciousness as a leftover in the world
of appearances.

CONCLUSION

Let me conclude by attempting to conceptualize the implication of this embodiment
of disappearance. I have attempted to argue that the ruin, considered phenomeno-
logically, gathers the nightmare of trauma through its own materiality before resituating
it in the everyday world of sense and sensibility. In light of this emergence, the ap-
pearance of the site shocks the attempt at placing the past through the confluence
between memory and imagination. What is experienced is less a direct fragment of a
broken narrative, and more a *murmur* of the place where that narrative once existed.

In testimonial terms, we discover a parallel to the impossibility of witnessing trauma.
Indeed, insofar as the ruin creates the necessary spatial and temporal conditions for
the past to be articulated, then precisely through that gesture the same past prohibits
articulation. The tension, surrounded by an aura of hauntings and spectrality, instils a
threshold in the viewer: as much we attempt to commune with this immediate envir-
onment, so there is a sense in being watched by the environment. This reversible duality
gathers a resonance thanks to the collision of worlds, spatial and temporal, with each
diametrically opposed to the other. The reality of the traumatic event is not reinforced
in this encounter, but instead *trembles* as an incommensurable void is given a voice
between the viewer and the place.

The trembling of places of trauma, felt as the experience of unreality becoming
real, I would like to suggest, is proof of the close relationship between materiality and
spectrality. The spectre becomes visible as the scene establishes a portal between the
past and the present. The result of this opening is the sense of the ruin – in both its
natural and built environment – becoming possessed by a past that cannot be recon-
structed in a conventional narrative. Instead, the place of trauma vibrates with an
indirect language, blocked from interpretation and displacing the certainty of self,
memory and place. In the midst of this altered dreamscape, the terms 'place' and
'site' lose their comparative bearings. Whereas the term 'place' attests to the desire
to orient ourselves in an environment, the resultant emergence of 'site' disrupts that
desire, leading to a hybrid between the two dimensions. Between place and site,
we are nonetheless in the centre of a scene that serves to gather the past through
rupturing a surrounding narrative. In this way, the ruins of trauma do not redeem time

and experience from annihilation and rupture, but help us to understand the structure of 'unclaimed experience' by mirroring our own attempt at giving presence to a place that refuses all evidence of presence.

Acknowledgements

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