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Michael S. Bowman and Phaedra C. Pezzullo

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# What's so 'Dark' about 'Dark Tourism'? Death, Tours, and Performance

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**Michael S. Bowman**

Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, USA

**Phaedra C. Pezzullo**

Indiana University, Bloomington, USA

## Abstract

Tourist studies scholars have sought to differentiate tours of the picturesque, the romantic, and the sublime from those of the disgusting, the abject, and the macabre. The assumption is that tourist destinations for relaxation and play involve a notably different clientele, tour operator, and set of ethical questions than those destinations where death and tragedy once occurred. An increasingly popular framework to approach this research is 'dark tourism'. Despite the emerging discourses questioning it, none have interrogated the trope of 'dark' itself. This essay identifies and interrogates the scholarly and political assumptions behind labeling tourist destinations at sites of death as 'dark'. Then, drawing on performance theory and the authors' own fieldwork, the essay recovers a range of ways that the performance studies turn in tourist studies can be a productive approach to studying the intersections of death and tourism, including questions of ritual, play, identity, everyday life, and embodiment.

## Keywords

dark tourism; death; embodiment; everyday life; identity; performance; play; ritual; tragedy

## Introduction

Nothing lasts, not even a great city, whether Pompeii, New Orleans, or Los Angeles. Musicians and artists know this, and so do scientists and Mardi Gras revelers. But too many of the rest of us don't even want to look. Death is everywhere, always, and the deal we make with it determines

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### Corresponding author:

Michael S. Bowman, Department of Communication Studies, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803-3923 USA.

[email: [spmich@lsu.edu](mailto:spmich@lsu.edu)]

the course of our lives. The deals are all different, and they are our stories, but make no mistake: there is always a deal (Zakin, 2006: 69).

Recently, tourist studies scholars have sought to differentiate tours of the picturesque, the romantic, and the sublime from those of the disgusting, the abject, and the macabre. Surely, some assert, tourist destinations for relaxation and play involve a notably different clientele, tour operator, and set of ethical questions than those destinations where death and tragedy have occurred. Several labels have been given to variations of this tourist niche: for example, 'negative sightseeing' (MacCannell, 1989), 'Black Spots tourism' (Rojek, 1993), 'tragic tourism' (Lippard, 1999), 'thanatourism' (Seaton, 1996), and 'grief tourism' (O'Neill, 2002; Trotta, 2006). The most popular name, 'dark tourism', was coined by Lennon and Foley (2000: 3) 'to signify a fundamental shift in the way in which death, disaster, and other grotesque atrocities are being handled by those who offer associated tourist "products"'. The term 'dark tourism' now appears in popular and academic tourist discourses, as the theme of academic conferences, and as the subject of an online forum. Owing no doubt to its popularity, we find our own work in environmental justice advocacy and battlefield tours increasingly linked by colleagues, students, and editors with this trend, even though we do not identify ourselves as dark tourism researchers.

Although dark tourism research prompts important discussions about the intersections of touring and death, Sharpley (2005: 216) rightly notes that 'dark tourism literature remains eclectic and theoretically fragile, raising more questions than it answers'. Likewise, Keil (2005: 481) argues that '[the dark tourism] phenomenon has so far been inadequately described, and lacks a theoretical relationship to wider studies of violence and by-standing'. Even so, many who have questioned the term thus far have exacerbated the problem by trying to identify different 'shades' of or umbrella terms for 'darkness' without challenging the term itself (e.g. Miles, 2002; Strange and Kempa, 2003; Sharpley, 2005: 224–26; Stone, 2006).

In what follows, we draw on our own research of touring in the US and western Europe and recent performance-centered scholarship in tourist studies to interrogate the dark tourism framework. In particular, we want to ask: What is so 'dark' about dark tourism? Lennon and Foley (2000: 11) offer no explanation for their choice of terms and state that they 'do not wish to enter into any philosophical debates' over its use. However, the negative valence of the term is unmistakable in western cultures: 'dark' is understood as a place devoid of light. In tourist studies, we might assume the label serves as a contrast to the trifecta of Sun, Surf, and Sex that many narrowly associate with a holiday vacation. 'Dark' also could allude to the 'dark deeds' (e.g. genocide, assassination, murder, war) that animate such sites and the 'dark mood' or morose tones such events might invite. Lennon and Foley link dark tourism with the contemporary (post-World War I) historical period, and there is perhaps a suggestion that dark tourism is a sign that the postmodern, post-Enlightenment world augurs a new 'Dark Ages'. Finally, we find in the range of connotations of 'dark' a suggestion that such sites are devoid of actors and performances: 'The theater has gone dark'. In contrast, we suggest that remembering and attending to the performances at sites associated with death might undo or at least help trouble the troubling nomenclature of 'dark tourism' to reclaim space for different approaches.

## Questioning the 'dark tourism' framework

Dark tourism research is motivated in part by the desire to understand why tourists would be drawn to sites where death has occurred; yet, it also bespeaks the scholarly desire to name, sort, and categorize phenomena, a desire that has been felt keenly in tourist studies. As Franklin and Crang (2001: 6) note, 'tourist studies has been prey to coping with an expanding field through ever finer subdivisions and more elaborate typologies as though these might eventually form a classificatory grid in which tourism could be defined and regulated'. No tourist label or category exists without exceptions to the rule and counter-examples that undo neat and tidy distinctions between types of tourism and tourists. Thus, Sharpley (2005: 220) suspects that 'dark tourism' has become a 'fashionable and emotive' term that perhaps 'oversimplifies a complex, multi-faceted and multi-dimensional phenomenon'. Yet, our reticence about dark tourism exceeds our dissatisfaction with labels in general.

Most dark tourism researchers acknowledge that people traveled to places associated with death well before the advent of modern touring. Seaton (1996) linked such practices to a thanatopic tradition, which has long been a part of western religious and philosophical thought and intensified during the Romantic era of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Thanatopsis, the contemplation or meditation upon death, may not be a 'light', cheery practice, but whatever 'darkness' it may possess is redeemed in the thanatopic tradition for its edifying moral, spiritual, ideological, and even aesthetic rewards.

Indeed, contemplating death invites us to recognize the fragility of life in general, as well as our individual mortality and relative insignificance in the universe, an experience that, as de Botton (2002) reminds us, is linked with notions of the sublime. Touring sites of or about the global slave trade, assassinations, and genocide further goads us to grapple with the human ability to act inhumanely and selfishly in seemingly unspeakable ways. War memorials and battlefields provoke questions of the ongoing perpetration of war, a costly choice for both sides. Natural and technological disaster destinations further cut to some of the most callous and arrogant moments in history. It would be surprising if anyone contemplating such things did not question the modern western vision of history as a linear, forward march towards progress.

Recognizing thanatourism's history and its possible benefits, dark tourism researchers do not suggest that sites of death should be forgotten or unvisited. Yet, Lennon and Foley (2000: 3) argue that the relations between touring and death have changed since the end of World War I, such that dark tourism 'is both product of circumstances of the late modern world and a significant influence upon those circumstances'. Lennon and Foley (2000: 11) link the shift in patterns of presentation and consumption of death at tourist sites to three factors: (1) 'global communication technologies play a major part in creating the initial interest' in both the deaths themselves and in traveling to see the sites where they occurred; (2) 'the objects of dark tourism themselves appear to introduce anxiety and doubt about the project of modernity' and thus are hallmarks of or 'intimations' of post-modernity; and (3) 'the educative elements of sites are accompanied by elements of commodification and a commercial ethic', and thus the boundaries between the meaning of the site and what transpired there with its commercialization as a tourist 'product' have become increasingly blurred. Why these factors are more salient to dark

tourism than to tourism-in-general is an unexplored question, even though there is ample evidence to suggest that the various technological and commercial factors involved in reshaping tourists' encounters with death also shape tourist encounters with relaxation and pleasure. Likewise, the question of whether tourists become 'anxious' about the project of modernity as a result of their visits to these sites remains uninvestigated. Perhaps anxiety motivates the tourist in the first place and touring helps relieve that anxiety. Further, what evidence exists to show that 'tourist interest in recent death, disaster and atrocity is a growing phenomenon in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries' (Lennon and Foley 2000: 3)? As Sharpley (2005: 216) suggests, the perception that tourists' interest in death has increased may be due to the fact that there are simply more tourists and accessible places to tour now than there were a century ago. It is possible that people are no more interested in touring sites associated with death than they have always been, and, for all we know, it is just as reasonable to conclude that interest has decreased.

Yet, we are less invested in cataloging the lack of evidence in such a preliminary undertaking that has been provocative to so many. Rather, at this point, we are more concerned with the significance of simply naming this practice 'dark tourism'. MacCannell (1989) pointed out long ago that naming and framing sites matters. In this instance, the trope of 'dark' works to create the reality it purports merely to describe. In refusing to interrogate the term, scholars also have refused to identify and to interrogate the assumptions such language entails. By labeling certain tourists or tourist sites 'dark', an implicit claim is made that there is something disturbing, troubling, suspicious, weird, morbid, or perverse about them, but what exactly that may be remains elusive and ill-defined because no one has assumed the burden of proving it.

The first point to recall is that tourists in general often are not held in the best light. As Lippard (1999: 119) reminds us, tourists already get a bad name, partly from the inscrutability of their motives, and that problem is exacerbated when tourists visit sites of death. By naming such tourist practices 'dark', might we not be contributing to the already-formidable body of criticism and popular opinion that attributes only vulgar, base, or superficial motives to tourists?

Further, to accept such a label would mean accepting the binary distinction used by Lennon and Foley that differentiates certain tourist destinations as 'dark' and others as 'heritage'. Yet, tragedy and heritage are not mutually exclusive categories and, as Ashworth (2002: 191) notes, commercial tourists are not the only audiences for whom such sites exist. Just because we may not be proud or happy about all of our ancestors' pasts as the oppressed or the oppressors does not mean that 'death, disaster, and atrocity' are not part of our collective heritage. If we jettison historical tragedies as not part of the broader desire for heritage tours, don't we continue to marginalize stories of subaltern, emergent, and counterpublic voices by marking 'their' sites as 'dark' and privilege the sites of those in power as 'heritage'?

How do we distinguish, for example, whether or not a practice such as antebellum plantation tours in the southern US should be imagined as a desire for heritage, presumably because they are about past cultures (e.g. architecture, home décor, culinary habits), or a desire for the 'dark', if, for example, they incorporate slave quarters or other historical facets of oppression? Does disregarding the slaves on the tour preclude the 'dark tourism' label? By this logic, former US President Thomas Jefferson's Monticello estate was a heritage site when it used to ignore the slavery question, until activist historians

'darkened' it by leading unsanctioned tours of the plantation grounds about the life and culture of the slaves. Likewise, how can we justify claiming that the Acropolis in Athens, Greece, is simply a heritage tourist site because it symbolizes the birth of Western democracy though there were slaves at the time? Is Robben Island off the coast of South Africa a dark tourist site because it was an active prison during Apartheid, even though Nelson Mandela was profoundly shaped by his experiences there before becoming the first democratically elected President of the nation post-Apartheid?

Strange and Kempa's (2005) insightful research on touring Alcatraz and Robben Island undoes the usefulness of the label 'dark tourism' – even as they use it – because they clarify that what one might imagine as 'dark' can also contain the seeds of hope for radical social and political change. This is further illustrated when we consider why all so-called dark sites describe atrocities of the past, when there are current tourist practices – big game hunting trips, sex tours, noncommercial advocacy expeditions of polluted communities (Pezzullo, 2007), and touring places with human rights violations (Lovelock, 2008) – that exist at the crossroads of touring and death. Labeling a site as 'dark' seems to be a complicated matter of perspective and privilege.

In addition, as Urry (2004) has argued, there are few places of play – for recreational, leisure, or presumably 'light tourism' – where death is not part of the story for someone at some time. Urry quips that many places of play are often considered 'places to die for', in the sense that one 'must see' them before one dies. Places themselves often die, too, insofar as they either are exhausted in terms of their capacity to offer the experiences today's tourists want or else they become inhospitable to life due to earthquakes, volcanic activity, pollution, hurricanes, decay, and so forth. Many of the original tourist destinations, moreover, were, after all, places where people went to die, places offering treatments or confinement for the ill, disabled, or aged, as in the Thomas Mann story from which Urry borrows his title. Furthermore, because tourists and terrorists rely on the same communication, transportation, and support infrastructure and because terrorists have targeted tourist destinations and transport systems, the threat of death exists, however minimally, in virtually every popular tourist destination.

Beyond a designation for specific sites, implicit in Lennon and Foley's critique is the notion that there is a 'proper' way to present and respond to death, a way that may be positively associated with thanatopsis in its more edifying spiritual or ideological 'contemplative' sense ('Silence and Respect,' as the signs at Arlington National Cemetery and other sites command). So long as such sites are tourist destinations for some presumably more noble purpose (e.g. educational, religious, spiritual, national, or heritage pilgrimages), Lennon and Foley seem to have fewer worries. When such destinations become filled with busloads of grumpy or boisterous tourists looking for a bathroom or something to eat, as well as commercial vendors hawking food or souvenirs, however, things appear to them to have gone horribly wrong. Lennon and Foley (2000: 23) believe that these visits owe more to 'serendipity, the itineraries of the tour companies or the merely curious who happen to be in the vicinity'. Because such encounters presumably require less planning, time, labor, intentionality, and personal commitment than the pilgrimages of old, their meaning is cheapened or degraded. Observing groups of casually dressed tourists taking snapshots, eating sandwiches, and spending only 90 minutes at Auschwitz is, to them, evidence of the 'extent of commodification of the process of visiting the camp' (2000: 60–61).

But responses to death are culturally bound and historically variable. One of us was reared in the Roman Catholic faith in which her family paid for open caskets to display deceased loved ones, and the living mourned loudly with many tears and cries of pain. The other was reared in a Protestant denomination in which the funeral rites were performed soberly, discretely, and quietly and where the public display of affect was considered vulgar and self-centered. Neither of these is the 'correct' approach, of course, although both our families might be somewhat bewildered or offended by each other's performances of funeral rites. Misunderstanding at other people's attitudes toward or behavior in response to death is hardly unusual in the annals of travel or anthropology; indeed, it is almost a staple motif of representations designed to reinforce or exaggerate the difference between 'us' and 'them'.

We have done enough research at battlefields, war memorials and museums, toxic sites, and disaster areas to recognize that such destinations also provoke different reactions among tourists because people travel for different reasons. Some wish to mourn for ancestors lost in what they would consider to be a sacred site, some pay for a guide to learn about what they perceive to be a telling moment in history, and some remain unmoved due to boredom, antipathy, apathy, or preoccupation with someone or something else. Some visit memorials weekly, annually, once in a lifetime, or never at all. This range of reactions may be appalling to those of us who deeply identify with the deceased at a particular site, whether it is a result of nationalist feelings, blood ties, ethnic similarities, or our human capacity to empathize. Is the solution, however, to police this range of emotional reactions or to ban those who are unmoved or unpersuaded that they should care? Shouldn't we risk feeling offended or slighted in the hopes of reaching new and less convinced audiences? If the goal is advocacy – to learn from past mistakes and misdeeds so that they may be prevented in the future – we must be reflexive about the widest possible range of audiences who travel to these sites. As Strange and Kempa (2003: 402) contend regarding former prisons as tourist destinations: 'The murkiest project of all would be to close them to tourists rather than confront the ongoing challenge of interpreting incarceration, punishment, and forced isolation.'

Further, when it comes to issues of violence, oppression, and marginalization, do we really do ourselves a service when we act as arbiters of suffering? For example, consigning the US Holocaust Memorial Museum to the 'dark' side because it was established on soil where World War II deaths did not occur, as Lennon and Foley do (2000: 147–51, 156), seems to marginalize, at best, those Holocaust survivors who emigrated from Europe to the US. Are those who fled to avoid or to escape concentration camps less 'authentic' than those who are born near a camp after World War II and can more readily tour? Can we dismiss memorials off-site merely as signs that the Holocaust has been 'commodified' for easier 'consumption'? Such an interpretation is an unproductive direction for tourist studies to pursue. Instead, we prefer to turn to performance theory to help parse out some of the complexities of the relationship between death and touring.

## Remembering the performative turn(s)

Travel has been recognized as a performed art for centuries, and contemporary touring may be recognized as a manifestation of this art (Adler, 1989). Metaphors of

performance, drama, and theatre have been integral to tourist research since MacCannell's (1989) seminal work. Influenced by Goffman's (1959) analysis of everyday social interaction, the dramaturgical framework used by MacCannell and others in tourist studies imagines tourists as performers by calling attention to the artifice of the interaction order: to the conventions and shared norms that govern tourists' self-presentation in order both to manage others' impressions of them and to achieve certain instrumental goals. The emphasis on the instrumentality of tourists' social performances helps capture some aspects of the habitual, normative, or scripted character of tourist behavior, particularly the canalization of individual tourists into stock 'roles' or 'types' or 'styles', but it also conjures images of the tourist as another example – perhaps indeed the prototype, as in MacCannell's argument – of (post)modern, alienated individuals who go on tour to escape the artificiality of everyday life, only to find themselves failing, falling ever deeper into the abyss of the simulated, the staged, the 'fake'.

Useful though social dramaturgical studies have been in both structural–functional and ideological analyses of touring, more specifically performance-centered research seeks to reorient the researcher's gaze from looking at tours in terms of performance metaphors to looking at the actual performances and theatrical displays that commonly constitute tourist 'destinations' (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998). When tourists travel, in other words, what they witness isn't merely *like* a performance, it *is* a performance insofar as the site is often composed of live bodies engaged in acts that are put on display for tourists (Desmond, 1999). From this standpoint, tourists are not so much 'consumers' of 'products' as they are audiences of multimedia, oral-dramatic events. By attending to the different genres, modes, and styles of these events we discover that 'spectator' – with its connotations of passive viewing – is a less accurate descriptor for the tourist than something like Boal's (1985) 'spect-actor': an interactive co-creator of the performance who may take a more or less important role in it. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998) has shown that many of the productions staged for tourists are more akin formally to happenings, environmental theatre, or other styles of avant-garde performance than they are to conventional theatre, with its physical separation of and clear demarcation of roles for actors and onlookers. While it may be true in some sense that tourists are often cast in the role of 'spectators' by the productions that are mounted for them, such productions often encourage tourists to become co-performers. As Edensor (2000, 2001) emphasizes, a performance perspective encourages us to imagine tourists not as 'types' but as people engaged in a variety of tourist practices.

Joining those who have attempted to theorize the 'consumption' of so-called dark tourism from a sociological perspective (e.g. Stone and Sharpley, 2008), we aim to recover a space for a performance studies approach to the relations between touring and death. Because there is a multiplicity of tourist performances at sites that induce acts of remembering death, we aim to be generative, not exhaustive. Our hope is that these prompts help illustrate how meaning and affect at tourist destinations associated with death can be negotiated by tourist performances.

### *Performing rituals*

Death occasions an extraordinary outlay of ritual, far exceeding that of birth (Grimes, 2000: 218). Death rites are performed not merely to mark the passage of the deceased but

also to try to heal the wound left in the social fabric of families, communities, societies, and nations by the decedent's passing. Among these death rites, too, is the ritualistic 'cleansing' of a place where a death has occurred. Rituals thus become a way to enact and negotiate communities once a disaster or atrocity has 'polluted' (Douglas, 1968) a landscape. Through these rituals, sites of violence and tragedy (in the US, anyway) tend meet one of four fates: sanctification, designation, rectification, or obliteration (Foote, 1997). The point to bear in mind is that whatever fate is accomplished, it is done so performatively via the rituals enacted on the site after the death has occurred. Like the pilgrimages of old, tours may be viewed as a means to recruit and mobilize bodies to perform this important social ritual work.

Turner and Turner (1978) and Graburn (1989) call attention to the formal similarity between tours and ritual. Along with MacCannell (1992), Edensor (1998), and Franklin (2003), however, we reject the notion that a ritual approach to tours necessarily entails viewing it from a functionalist perspective as being necessarily socially integrative, conservative, or 'ideological'. Imagining tours as a 'liminoid' (Turner, 1982) ritual performance enables us to explore how people subject themselves to a process of deconstruction as they separate themselves from the routines and habits of daily life and enter a liminal-like state where their identities become temporarily unfixed and where the rules of living change. In this space, tourists can try on other positionalities and practices, and then return home changed in some way – reconstruction with a difference. As Schechner (1993: 1) argues, the upshot of ritual as performance is artificially heightened behavior, normally displayed publicly, that marks 'the startling ability of human beings to create themselves, to change, to become – for better or for worse – what they ordinarily are not'. Ritual is performative and transformative. It is also restorative in the sense that it recalls, retrieves, and reenacts living behavior before it. It is, in Schechner's (1993: 1) terms, 'restored behavior' or 'twice-behaved behavior'. In this sense, it might be worthwhile to imagine tourist sites that induce memories of death as rehearsals, spaces where we can try on reactions and imagine the subjunctive 'what if?' This possibility of transformation seems pivotal to the ritual of touring places that evoke memories of death.

Further, as noted earlier, death is not merely an event in our past. Negotiating memory is not just about preserving history, but also about shaping the present and the future. As such, it seems worth further exploring how some tours at sites of death open up possibilities for solidarity or alliance-building, particularly those that are sites of environmental disasters (from tsunamis to industrial accidents, such as Chernobyl, to ongoing polluting industries that threaten public health, species extinction, and ways of life for specific cultures) and/or social injustices (from prisons to sites of politically or ethnically motivated violence). In addition to providing forums for mourning and remorse, tours can help assess damage, educate key constituents, and galvanize much needed support. Acts of remembering what has and still may be happening ideally can provoke cultural change.

In addition, as Winter (1995) has pointed out in his studies of World War I memorial sites, most of the interpretive work has focused on the meaning of the monuments and memorials as carriers of political and aesthetic ideas, such as nationalism or imperialism or fascism or the many varieties of justification for going to war. Their symbolic meaning, in short, has drawn attention away from the rituals that occur at such sites. Winter (1995: 79) writes, 'War memorials were places where people grieved, both individually and

collectively. The ways they did so have never been fully documented.' Consequently, Winter and Sivan (1999) suggest shifting the discussion from 'memory' to 'remembrance' to avoid trivializing memory as virtually any contact or connection with the past, personal or collective. 'To privilege 'remembrance' is to insist on specifying agency, on answering the question who remembers, when, where, and how?' (Winter, 2007: 3).

### *Performing play*

Schechner views performance as 'ritualized behavior conditioned/permeated by play' (2006: 89). Since his notable ethnographic study of the Taj Mahal (a tomb that has been a tourist attraction since mid-16th century), Edensor (1998, 2000, 2001) has called the attention of tourist scholars towards 'improvisational', 'unbounded', and 'resistant' ritual performances as a means to note the degrees of uncertainty, chance, and play involved in tourist actions that occur in heterogenous spaces and outside the lines of more enclavic, disciplined, ritualized and scripted activities. Perhaps his most iconic exemplar is the reiterated act of tourists staging photographs in front of the mausoleum, a performance that often signifies both pleasure on the part of tourists to declare they 'were there' and a sense of respect for the magnitude of this romantic monument of mourning. Conversely, tourist research conducted in relation to the 'dark tourism' trope seems inevitably trapped in questions of authenticity versus commodification, which falsely present the matter as one of either/or, suggesting that such places must be serious or frivolous, educational or entertaining, authentic or inauthentic, and historically accurate and edifying or devoted to nostalgia and tourist kitsch. This neglects the ways in which tourists blur such binaries by ascribing meaning to such sites through play.

Associating death and play may seem macabre or tasteless to some, but there is a deep connection between them in many cultures that can be seen in the jazz funerals and second line parades of New Orleans, in the Mexican *El Día de los Muertos* celebrations, in the cycles of creation and destruction of the Indic *maya-lila*, or in Gloucester's remark in *King Lear*: 'As flies to wanton boys are we to th' gods, / They kill us for their sport' (Shakespeare, 1974: 1281). Some forms of play and playing (bungee jumping, skydiving) put the players at substantial risk of injury or death. Moreover, sites of death sometimes inspire reenactments, such as battlefields where groups of individuals engage in mimetic play as they imaginatively and theatrically try to recreate elements from the *mise en scène* of the original battle, striving to achieve the sights and sounds, including those of death and injury, in excruciating detail. Further, when families tour a battlefield or military park, children can hardly be restrained from 'playing war' or 'playing army' when they wander past cannons, trench works, and fortifications, and they sometimes recruit parents into their games. Living history presentations are often highly playful in their manipulation of costuming, props, speech, and behavior to create the illusion that tourists have stepped into the past. Although living history is regarded as mere entertainment or kitsch by those who think certain subjects like history or death should be treated more soberly and seriously, playing with temporal frames around such performances often is part of the delight for tourists.

Playing also can entail serious stakes. In 1996, for example, one of us attended the commemorative events for the D-Day landings in Normandy. While talking to a group of

veterans from the US, Canada and the UK, we were all suddenly dumbstruck by the sight of a small convoy of World War II vintage US Army vehicles rolling slowly down the road toward us. The convoy pulled to a stop, and two dozen or so men dressed as American GIs hopped out of the vehicles. When the 'GIs' began speaking German to each other, the mood suddenly shifted, and the British, Canadian, and American veterans, their families, and other tourists gathered became uncomfortable and angry. Things became so tense that several men circled around the Germans, appearing as if they were ready to reinitiate the hostilities from World War II. The 'GIs' were taken aback by this reaction and apologized profusely if they had upset anyone. They explained that they were a group of reenactors from Germany who had come to Normandy to pay tribute to the Allied veterans of D-Day; choosing to reenact the roles of American GIs was meant to perform an expression of their identification with the Allied cause rather than that of the Nazis. In an instant, the emotional tone of the crowd changed. One moment the Germans' reenactment was considered offensive and disrespectful; the next it became flattering, commendable, an act almost of atonement that was profoundly affecting to those who were there. Like other forms of play, this performance began by creating division and antagonism but ended by creating *communitas*.

### *Performing identity*

Butler (1990, 1993, 1997) is best known for theorizing the performative possibilities of identity and reminding us that such acts should not be imagined as isolated or singular, but rather repeated and sustained. She draws the concept of 'gender performativity' from Austin's (1962: 6) concept of 'performative utterances', in which 'the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action'. Diamond's (1996: 4–5) writings distinguish between 'performance' or 'a doing' and the 'performative' or 'a thing done – a pre-existing oppressive category', clarifying that 'Butler's point is not that gender is just an act, but that gender is materially "performative": it "is real only to the extent that it is performed." ... It's not just that gender is culturally determined and historically contingent, but rather that "it" doesn't exist unless it's being done.' This approach to identity is applicable to tourists insofar as people tend not to identify as 'tourists' unless they are acting out such a role at that time. As Franklin and Crang (2001: 18) argue, 'Performance tends to thus work against ... fixity and stability – to have an ontology of doing and acting together rather than being.'

Performativity, of course, can be enacted through identification or disidentification. The phenomenon of 'tourist shame' that MacCannell (1989) first identified – the tourist as a loathsome creature whom even other tourists hate – calls attention to how important it is for people to disarticulate or deinterpellate themselves from the position of 'tourist'. As a form of 'Othering' that allows us to separate ourselves from the 'mass' or 'herd', '[t]he cultural energy that goes into getting provoked or upset by those other tourists is striking' (Löfgren, 1999: 264). Following this logic, *tourists* go to Bavaria for the Alps, Neuschwanstein, Mozart, *lederhosen*, and beer halls; *anti-tourists* go to Bavaria for those things plus a trip to Dachau. To prove to themselves and others that they aren't merely superficial pleasure-seeking dopes, they willfully (or serendipitously) subject themselves to something unpleasant or disturbing. This logic works much like backpackers who distinguish themselves from tourists by traveling in ways that the tourist might regard as unpleasant.

Slade's (2003) inquiry into the motives of Australian and New Zealander tourists in Gallipoli, for instance, argues that because the site and the battles that occurred there are associated with the birth of their nations, their motives for touring have more to do with performing a nationalist identity than that of a 'thanatourist' or 'dark tourist'. Slade (2003: 792) notes: 'These people have feelings about the dead at Gallipoli and they know, understand, and commemorate their deeds, especially their role in helping define their two nations. Very few have feelings for the dead, at least in the sense suggested by Seaton.' Of course, touring as a means of connecting with one's national identity can be animated by mourning (Franklin, 2003), but it might as easily be animated by a sense of pride (Clark, 2004).

Rather than seeing tourist sites and practices as products, destinations, or consumption that always-already interpellates us as 'tourists,' we might instead, as Löfgren (1999: 7) puts it, imagine tours 'as a cultural laboratory where people have been able to experiment with new aspects of identities, their social relations or their interactions with nature and also to use the important cultural skills of daydreaming and mind-travelling.' Neumann (1999: 286–90) also reminds us that scenic national tourist destinations such as the Grand Canyon can attract some who wish to commit suicide as an 'existential performance.'

### *Performing the everyday*

De Certeau (1984: xi) articulates 'everyday life' as a critical term to signal our "'ways of operating' or doing things". Touring, Lefebvre argues, is 'a temporary break with everyday life', a form of leisure motivated by 'the prospect of departure, the demand for evasion, [and] the will to escape' that which we might otherwise take for granted (1971: 54, 85). Tours, therefore, offer tourists counter-experiences of their everyday life, in which there is, at minimum, a sense that one is doing something other than one's normal routine. This can be a marker of privilege, as Pezzullo (2007: 36) argues:

Thus, if one lives in a tropical rainforest or works in a theme park, one is not considered a tourist of that forest or park. Touring a battlefield also presumes that you are not on a military 'tour' at the time or living in an active war zone. Naming these practices 'tourism' presumes that you can afford – in addition to the cost of traveling and the freedom not to have to work during that time – the energy and desire that are required to travel to a marker of horror.

Such distinctions between those who are able to imagine a site as a tourist destination and those who cannot may become a source of contention (Kincaid, 1988), one that seems inevitable as long as people have different experiences of the everyday. MacCannell's (1989) critical and reflexive conversation about the ways tourist sites are purposefully constructed with frontstage and backstage dynamics reminds us, at minimum, of the different experiences of a tourist site a tourist may have compared to a person who works at or lives near a tourist destination (Bruner and Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 1994; Crang, 1997; Bowman, 1998).

Further, as Keil (2005: 491) argues, the banality of the tourist itinerary sometimes is particularly difficult to imagine at tourist destinations animated by memories of death:

Many visitors believe that the birds don't sing at Auschwitz-Birkenau. ... They do, of course, but the imaginative demand for silence and absence overrides the evidence of the senses. As tourists, visitors to Auschwitz have stepped outside the routine of their lives into 'exploratory time' (Graburn 1989) – time that has been set aside and dedicated to purposes in which the festive is structurally mixed with the serious. Their trip may have included seeing the Leonardo portrait at the Czartoryskich Palace, or sightseeing round the Royal Castle on Wawel Hill, or listening to klezmer music in a Kazimierz night-club. But even at Birkenau, at the most sombre and portentous moment of their journey, after an hour or two, visitors will get in their cars or tour buses, drive back to Krakow, and think about what they are going to have for dinner. They are, after all, on holiday. Auschwitz-Birkenau is a shrine, but it is also a point on a tourist itinerary.

Juxtaposing the spectacular nature of many of the tourist sites we are discussing with the banality of everyday life continues to be a provocative tension.

Likewise, the specificity of a destination's rhythms of everyday life matters to how we imagine the relationship of touring and death. New Orleans, Louisiana, was a popular international tourist destination until the summer of 2005, when two hurricanes, a flood, two tornados, and an abysmal government response to these disasters transformed the city. When commercial touring resumed, it integrated narratives of death and loss into the tourist industry that could be salvaged from before what some locals call 'the storm' (Pezzullo, 2010). Though controversial, not only do these tours help generate revenue, jobs, and publicity, they also relieve residents of the burden of remembering every time a newcomer visits town. Without this formal structure, local residents often bear the burden of memory for tourists, as Foote notes is the case at John Dillinger's death site, Bonnie (of 'Bonnie and Clyde') Parker's grave, Lee Harvey Oswald's grave, and the site of the shootout in Waco, Texas, at the Branch Davidian complex (1997: 212–13).

### *Performing embodiment*

Paying attention to bodies and our sensual experiences is involved in every performance studies approach, and an interest in embodied experiences is becoming more prevalent in tourist studies (Franklin and Crang, 2001). Part of the dehumanization process that occurred at World War II concentration camps and that continues to affect prisoners (of war or otherwise), as well as survivors of other forms of disaster, is the denial of basic bodily functions. Few experiences feel more demeaning than having one's biological needs – to urinate, to defecate, to menstruate, to eat, to sleep, to orgasm – policed by another. Doing any of those acts on an imposed schedule or through compulsory demands undoes a person's humanity in profound ways. Further, as Douglas (1968) points out, these biological needs are inextricably intertwined with cultural norms, such that people's pollution beliefs or taboos are shared by their cultures and identities in profound ways. Thus, an attack on the body undoes not just our physical selves, but also our subjectivities (Scarry, 1985).

Knowing this, touring places where memories of torture, dehumanization, and death are invited has an ethical obligation to interweave what may appear to some as banal signs of commodification with what otherwise might feel spectacularly tragic. Bus tour operators, for example, routinely schedule toilet or snack breaks at regular intervals of a trip. Tourists of commemorative museums often have a chance to eat on site or nearby, as well as use toilets, drink from water fountains, or visit vendors. Rather than imagining

these acts as merely superficial or somehow extraneous to the tour experience – or, worse, as ‘obvious’ signs of the site’s ‘commodification’ – one might explore how they can serve as ethical counterpoints, whether as political reclamations of spaces or as heterogeneous spaces of play. To take embodiment at tourist sites seriously, as some have suggested (Veijola and Jokinen, 1994; Desmond, 1999; Edensor, 2001; Franklin and Cragg, 2001; Crouch, 2002; Franklin, 2003; Pezzullo, 2007), seems to require us to consider how bodily practices at different sites take on different meanings.

Consider, for example, tourist destinations that continue to risk one’s health or life, such as war zones and toxically polluted attractions (Lippard, 1999; Brin, 2006; Pezzullo, 2007). These tensions concern not just the tourists, but also the bodies of those being toured. As Lennon and Foley (2000) raise the important ethical question of whether or not to rebuild concentration camps as they decay in order to preserve them for the sake of tourists and history, Linenthal (2001) notes one of the most contentious issues in constructing the US Holocaust Museum was the debate over whether or not to display hair of the victims and survivors of the Holocaust. Such dilemmas inevitably will entail further research on embodiment and materiality.

## Conclusion

Benjamin (1969: 256) argued: ‘There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.’ The converse also is true: every document of barbarism is a document of civilization. Touring sites of death, therefore, may exceed acts of mourning in order to illuminate the artistic, scientific, and political values of a culture’s past, present, and future. For this reason alone, it is encouraging that more tourist research is engaging the complexity of motives and practices animating such sites.

In this essay, we have established that ‘dark’ labels present a framework in which tourists appear to be delimited in specific ways: as ‘mere’ tourists, as tourists drawn to ‘dark’ sites, and as individuals who are likely to behave in a way some deem inappropriate. In light of such negative connotations, we suggest that it may be time to abandon the term ‘dark tourism’ insofar as it may present an impediment to detailed and circumstantial analyses of tourist sites and performances in all their mundane or spectacular particularity and ambiguity. At minimum, we aim to recover an intellectual and political space for those of us who do not wish to use such a label to classify our research because we believe this label is more than a topical move. With Löfgren, we believe it is born of ‘an unhappy marriage between marketing research and positivist ambitions of scientific labeling’ (1999: 267) that, ironically enough, is part of the same commodification process that Lennon and Foley find so disturbing in contemporary tourism.

Although we don’t find their label useful for our own work, we do believe the project Lennon and Foley have undertaken is worth engaging because it underscores important questions about the relationship between tourists and death. Given the inevitability of death and the popularity of touring as a mode of acting in the world, the possibilities for future research in this nexus appear fertile and significant. In an attempt to theorize a more productive framework, we have revisited five key turns that a performance studies approach to tourist studies offers: ritual, play, identity, everyday life, and embodiment. This list does not aim to be exhaustive, but generative, in the hopes of encouraging further research on the messy and complicated relations that occur at the nexus of touring and death.

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## Author Biographies

**Michael S. Bowman** teaches performance studies at Louisiana State University where he is Associate Professor of Communication Studies. He is former editor of the journal *Text and Performance Quarterly* and his current research focuses on volunteer tourism in post-Katrina New Orleans and historical tourism in Scotland.

**Phaedra C. Pezzullo** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Communication and Culture, as well as adjunct faculty of Cultural Studies and American Studies at Indiana University. She authored *Toxic Tourism: Rhetorics of Pollution, Travel, and Environmental Justice* (University of Alabama Press, 2007), co-edited *Environmental Justice and Environmentalism: The Social Justice Challenge to the Environmental Movement* (MIT Press, 2007), and edited a special issue of the journal *Cultural Studies* on the environment (Routledge, 2008). She currently is writing about touring disaster sites and social movements against toxic pollution. Address: Phaedra C. Pezzullo, Department of Communication & Culture, Indiana University, 800 East Third St., Bloomington, Indiana, 47405-9700, USA. Email: [pezzullo@indiana.edu](mailto:pezzullo@indiana.edu)