Crime Scenes

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Crime has long kept law and its public enthralled, and the heartland of crime in contemporary culture is the crime scene. This is a place where the coordinates are continually mapped and, whether a minor or lead character in our social topographies, the crime scene inevitably, repeatedly, steals our attention. Representations pepper our television screens in police and forensic procedurals; Luc Sante's (1992) collection of New York crime scene photographs inspired a fervent generation of local and international efforts to excavate archives, loosening the crime scene from relative archival obscurity to increasingly preoccupy the public; and — as readers of contemporary crime fiction know — the 'crime scene' has become as ubiquitous a feature in crime fiction as the haunted house in the horror genre. The crime scene is thus *de rigueur* a feature of any modern examination of crime.

In addition to their more popular cultural allure, crime scenes are also the proper object of law. Law treads through the aftermath, rehearsing injury and revisiting death: this stretches through police work to trials, where jurors are enlisted to make 'views' and counsel adduce evidence and arrange its features. And as the crime scene is washed over by history, law retains its records of streets and buildings, back lots and seascapes. Crime scenes are spaces that have been witness to murder, mass murder, natural disasters with an imprimatur of criminal neglect, violent offences and great suffering. As if to acknowledge the importance of crime and *place*, memorial culture

builds itself upon physical histories of crime — which in its turn accommodates the mourner, the witness and 'thanatourist' who travels to 'dark' destinations.

As these variations reveal, the dimensions of crime scenes need not be fixed in time or discourse — crime scenes are *of* and *for* law, but also have a rich and deep extra-legal life; as such they mark a distinct point of convergence for law, society and cultural practices and so it is fitting that the topic of 'crime scenes' undergoes examination in *Law Text Culture* (see Scott Bray forthcoming 2010). In the articles assembled for this edition, the crime scene stretches from the streets of Toronto, 'The Gap' and cliff tops at Sydney's ocean edge, the mortally polluted city of Bhopal, the cyclone ravaged city of New Orleans, the outskirts of Naples in Campania, the vast fields of Auschwitz-Birkenau, a former prison in suburban Adelaide, Italy's terror spots of the 1970s and 80s, the war ravaged city of Srebrenica, a museum in New York, an 'imagined' crime scene exhibition about sex trafficking, the rich repository of a Sydney forensic archive, to the entire post-colonial nation of Australia. These critical reflections draw attention to a multitude of sites and in their individual efforts collectively recognise the ways in which crime reverberates in communities, and is dredged up carefully, haphazardly, tastelessly or carelessly, and repeatedly. Often what is being negotiated is the porous boundary between the past and the present — a labour which engages the work of memory, questions of responsibility, acknowledgement, witnessing and the response of law.

The volume begins with the work of Ross Gibson and one result of his 15-year experience with photographs from the NSW Police Forensic Photography Archive at the Justice & Police Museum in Sydney. Gibson's work with this archive appropriately heralds the beginning of this edition and the first section — 'Crime Scenes' — and also introduces the archive as a distinct character in our volume. Collected into a distinct rhythm of text and image, Gibson's aesthetic efforts show us what else these photographs can do when matched with alternative scripts. Gibson's artwork and essay illuminate the visual practice at the heart of law's attention to the aftermath of crime and

enables the viewer, long after these Sydney sites have been purged of their immediate criminal signifiers, to spy the haunting productivity of law's looking and the probative value of aesthetic practice for history.

The relationship of law to crime is expanded upon in Kirsty Duncanson's piece, where she reads this troubling liaison through film. Her article explores the depiction of the landscape as a crime scene that rehearses traumas that remain unresolved in contemporary Australia. Drawing on debates about the problematic nature of sovereignty and the vexed doctrine of *terra nullius*, Duncanson's reading articulates the substance of a recently emerged popular anxiety concerning colonial violence in Australian law. Her writing juxtaposes the subtle ways that the *smaller* contained crime scene within the film (a female body entangled in a lantana bush) speaks to the *larger* crime scene that hovers outside the cinematic frame (the dispossession of Indigenous people occasioned by the imposition of the doctrine of *terra nullius*), and in so doing, she implicates law's instrumentality in crime itself.

Central to Duncanson's writing is the law and the landscape. H V Bonar Buffam further takes up the notion that everywhere our social and legal life is littered with crime scenes. Buffam immerses the reader in the city of Toronto and its numerous crime scenes pertaining to gang related shootings and the case of the shooting of a young white woman. Shifting his attention slightly, Buffam argues that the media plays a foundational role in promoting and perpetrating a violent fantasy — one in which the streets of inner commercial Toronto are haunted by the phantasmic presence of 'black' gun toting shooters in a racialised criminogenic fantasy. Central to understanding the crime scene here are the media that both invest and deride deaths along racial lines.

The media are not yet 'excused' in our volume — Katrina Clifford and Glenn Mitchell explore Sydney's eastern cliff and ocean-side topography, known as 'The Gap', and its transformation from suicide spot to crime scene following the death of Caroline Byrne in 1995. Clifford and Mitchell move beyond a legal framework to posit that a crime scene like The Gap challenges and complicates the conventions of crime scene representation as a result of its multiple histories. Central

to their examination is the regulation of meaning by the mainstream media and its role in the reimagination of The Gap, and here the reader is reminded that a crime scene is never just one thing and that the media too distils crime scenes for the public.

The very consideration of 'crime scenes' is at issue in Valerio Nitrato Izzo's article. Where Clifford and Mitchell highlight the scene as a space of design and framing, Nitrato Izzo further notes the multiple faces of scenes and challenges the conventional understanding of a crime scene. Using the catastrophes of hurricane Katrina, the Bhopal industrial explosion and the urban and toxic waste dumps in Naples as case studies, Nitrato Izzo explores how crime scenes that arise from such occurrences can enlighten not only the response of law and legal system to extreme events, but also the hidden logic and significance of the relationship between law, crime scenes and the catastrophes themselves.

Where Nitrato Izzo questions the very nature of how we define crime scenes and how the 'crime scene' can be passed over in the context of catastrophe, Marinella Marmo draws our attention to an initiative that seeks to bring the crime scene into full view. She explores a United Nations sponsored exhibition which aims to raise public awareness of, and instil empathy for, the plight of women trafficked for sexual exploitation. Marmo explores a particular aspect of this exhibition: an installation (*The Bedroom*) which recreates the squalid and oppressive conditions in which trafficked women live and 'work'. Visitors who roam through the space are invited to imagine the innumerable crimes that are perpetrated in similar spaces (*rooms*) around the world; hence the room becomes the imaginative crime scene. It thus functions as an imaginative conduit — a space for contemplation — and Marmo documents the powerful effects 'the room' has on those who visit it, safe in the knowledge that their experience is only a vicarious one, at the same time that she questions the affectivity of art which has a social purpose.

Of importance in viewing crime scenes then, is the impact on the viewer. Where Marmo explores the social utility of art to move or

spur the viewer (into action, or empathy), the final contribution to the first section, 'Crime Scenes', returns us to the NSW Police Forensic Photography Archive at the Justice & Police Museum in Sydney, and changes the nature of our reflection on viewing practices. We shift, therefore, from a *moment* of viewing and its residual effects, to a more prolonged encounter with crime scenes. To do this our attention moves 'behind the scenes' to hear from Caleb Williams, Head Curator of the Justice & Police Museum in Sydney, whose essay negotiates the contemporary place of historical forensic photographs via ruminations on his own experience with the archive. Under Williams's stewardship, the archive has altered: it is now being carefully preserved and has contributed to a number of aesthetic projects (such as that by Ross Gibson offered at the head of this volume). Williams routinely participates in public activities and forums concerning the archive and his contribution to this volume offers a meditation on this role intermingled with personal insights on working with the images. As another custodian of the past, Williams presents a unique calibration of his life with the archive.

In the second section of this volume — 'Dark Tourism' — the question of impact, mediation and effect takes a detour of sorts — an excursion to explore those places where crimes were perpetrated that now attract interest. The first article by Derek Dalton meditates on the power of filmic images, Holocaust narratives and the remnants and relics of what remains at Auschwitz-Birkenau to coalesce and mediate the dark tourist experience of visiting the former concentration camp. Here he argues that our out-of-wartime temporality compromises our ability to fully fathom the horrors enacted at Auschwitz, and yet his article signals that the dark tourist experience is one laden with many enriching possibilities — as one encounters powerful exhibits and memorials that rehearse afresh 'remembrance' of the terrible crimes located there.

Dalton's exegesis of his longtime call to travel to Auschwitz is not the only response to crime scenes, and from his deep reflections the volume moves to consider the seemingly frivolous or 'tasteless' products

that have emerged in the aftermath of the Holocaust. Katherine Biber's piece explores the New York Jewish Museum's *Mirroring Evil* exhibition of 2002 in which contemporary artists represented the Holocaust. Engaging closely with various controversial artworks from this provocative exhibition, Biber prompts us to question the motivations, justifications and cultural value of art that directly invokes the Holocaust. Biber asks us to consider: what are the limits or boundaries of the representable in relation to the Holocaust? Should anyone make art about the Holocaust? Is this a crime scene that ought not be visually represented? Are the crimes that occurred here unimaginable? In exploring these questions, she touches upon notions of silence, transgression and disgust in trying to help us determine what 'good' Holocaust art might look like and how we might differentiate it from 'bad' Holocaust art.

The question of appropriateness echoes in dark tourism, and Heather Brook approaches this issue via a personal and moving reflection on the nature and suitability of prisons as venues for dark tourism — a form of dark tourism that is expanding as many prisons from a century ago are gradually being decommissioned the world over. Brook situates her discussion by way of a poster inviting law students to attend a Law Ball at the Old Adelaide Gaol in 2004. Drawing on her compelling memories of visiting her brother in this prison when it was functioning and a tour she took after it was closed, she pauses to question the ethics of exhibits and dark tourist gimmicks that ultimately trivialise and downplay the traumas enacted in prison space. As with Dalton's piece on Auschwitz-Birkenau, Brook's personal dark tourism draws on memory interlaced with the trope of sight to help elucidate something tangible and meaningful about the dark tourism experience to match grief and loss. Her piece makes a valuable contribution to the burgeoning literature on dark tourism and will challenge readers to consider the ethics of this particular branch of dark tourism.

The significance of appropriate remembrance and memorialisation lies at the heart of Olivera Simić's article on the Srebrenica-Potočari Memorial Room in Srebrenica. Simić engages artwork, personal

photographs and dark tourism theory to interrogate the blurring of voyeurism with educational enlightenment at memorial sites and juxtaposes this in her article with an examination of the legal and ethical disputes around the Srebrenica Cemetery complex. Here Simić encounters a paradox — that despite the fact that the law was intended to secure both reconciliation of ethnic tensions and a respectful remembrance of the dead, its operation ultimately proved to be vexatious; raising more issues than it resolved. For Simić, the dark tourist is offered difficult itineraries to follow in a country where the legacy of genocidal violence is still so fresh and vivid.

David Brown's piece reminds us of the incidental and conversational aspects of crime; where thanatourism is not always about the strict hierarchies of trauma and sites of mass death, but where crime is a daily matter that marks the landscape of suburbs and cities. Brown recalls his coastal walk with two friends from Maroubra to Bondi in Sydney's eastern suburbs: a site steeped in the history, myth and violence of its crime. Brown reads aloud his thoughts which are a rich fusion of legal and criminological insight — the legacy of holding consciousness of crime close. As Brown and his companions skirt the eastern shores we are reminded that crime is not always a nocturnal affair but that such events rupture the light of day. In many ways Brown's article echoes the beginning to our volume and the accidental music of Ross Gibson's reflection on crime and the everyday. The efforts of all our contributors illuminate the transformative labour of working on crime as scholars, artists, and curators where crime assumes its particular face.

And this question of the everyday is where our volume finds its rest — in the work of Italian photographer Eva Frapiccini. It is suitable that Eva Frapiccini's work was discovered in the happenstance of daily life; as our Managing Editor Rick Mohr, visiting the Museo d'Arte Moderna at Bologna (MAMbo) in early 2009, came face-to-face with Frapiccini's work 'Muri di piombo'. For this work Frapiccini travelled around Italy to photograph crime scenes that are the products of the 'season of terrorism' or 'anni di piombo' in Italy (1976-1982) (Guadagnini 2008: 10-11). The volume closes with an interview with the artist and details

how Frapiccini pulls us up to the present in direct dialogue with the past — her work teaches us of the incessant need to revisit and learn of the past, often many years after the fact, and in interview reveals that these sites are far from dead. Significantly, Frapiccini visited crime scenes as a first time visitor — her eye attuned to the place and time of crime — and produced fresh work from time spent in places where terrorist violence has receded but which nevertheless haunts communities, cities and nation-states. Old crime, new images; this is what our volume offers the reader. We invite you to lift the cordon and step inside.

References

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