Spatialities of Exception, Violence and Memory

Veranstalter: Researchs Groups „Narratives of Terror and Disappearance", Universität Konstanz; „Philosophy after the Holocaust"; „The politics of memory in contemporary Spain" (CCHS/CSIC)
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The International conference 'Spatialities of Exception, Violence and Memory' was held from 1–3 February 2012 at the Residencia de Estudiantes and the Centro de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales of the Spanish National Research Council (CCHS/CSIC) in Madrid. It was jointly organised by the ERC funded research Group „Narratives of Terror and Disappearance" (Universität Konstanz) and by the research groups „Philosophy after the Holocaust" and „The politics of memory in contemporary Spain" (CSIC), with the support of the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation, the European Research Council, and the Max Planck Research Prize/Geschichte+Gedächtnis. Concept and coordination were undertaken by Estela Schindel (Konstanz) and Pamela Colombo (Madrid). The concept behind the conference was to provide a framework for international and interdisciplinary reflection about the problematic of space in relation to trauma and memory, with an emphasis on the spatialities of exception, exclusion and state violence. A key aim of the conference was to explore the significance of critical space theory for developing an understanding of the workings of terror and exception in authoritarian regimes, and in relation to the traces of trauma and its remembrance. The papers presented addressed a variety of related themes and issues from historical, philosophical, literary, forensic, architectural and cultural perspectives.

ALEIDA ASSMANN (Konstanz) opened the conference with an inaugural lecture reflecting upon the 'bottom-up' emergence of 'involuntary' places of memory in post-war Germany. Describing a series of initiatives in which local communities have reclaimed unacknowledged historical sites as places of memory, Assmann stressed the lingering presence of the past even in the face of official amnesia, and the significance of new, localised spatial practices for enacting the transformation from forgetting to remembrance. JAY WINTER (New Haven) continued the opening session with his lecture on the gradual effacement of the face in artistic representations of terror in the 20th Century. As the nature of war changed, he suggested, so did its representation, with 'facelessness' becoming part of the language of post-holocaust art. This was accompanied by a turn, more generally, to auditory memory and the ethics of voice; a move from figuration to auditory configurations personified in the figure of the Holocaust witness.

Day two of the conference began with a series of reflections upon the spatialities of terror and its remembrance. Applying the Bakhtinian concept, KIRSTEN MAHLKE (Konstanz) spoke of 'chronotopes' of terror under the former Argentine dictatorship and their narrative reconfiguration in survivor memories. Narration allows survivors, as the architects of memory, to reconstruct the time-space of political violence, delimiting terror previously experienced as invisible, unbounded and all-pervasive. JAMES TYNER (Ohio) and ZUZANNA DZIUBAN (Poznan) both addressed the politics of memory and the construction of spaces of both remembrance and forgetting/silencing in post-genocide societies, with Tyner giving a critical account of selective memorialisation in Cambodia, and Dziuban returning to the chronotopic frame in her analysis of the construction of landscapes of traumatic memory at the sites of the former extermination camps at Belzec and Sobibor in Poland. Both papers emphasised the need to historicise memory and its absences, drawing attention to political and aesthetic framings and their effects for visitors to memorials.

In the second panel of the day, the speakers were concerned with the use of the forensic to (re)construct cartographies of terror and trauma in the context of forced disappearance and clandestine graves. The subject of ALE-

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JANDRO CASTILLEJO CUÉLLAR's (Bogotá) paper was the reconstruction of the scenes of massive crimes in Colombia, within the context of the so-called 'Justice and Peace Law'. His presentation of ethnographic observations from the field provided a framework for the discussion of three general themes: the kaleidoscopic nature of truth; the inscriptions left upon landscapes by violence and war; and the paradox of violence made invisible, present only in the absences it leaves behind. GABRIEL GATTI (Basque Country) continued with the theme of forced disappearance, asking how one lives in and among the material ruins and empty spaces that mark the absence of victims. Contemplating the possibility, through forensic archaeology, of constructing narratives in the suffix 're-' (reproduction, re-construction, re-cuperation, return), Gatti argued for an 'archive of absences' and empty spaces that would in turn reflect narratives in the suffix 'de-' (destabilisation, de-construction, de-integration). FRANCISCO FERRÁNDIZ (Madrid) spoke about the exhumation of mass graves in Spain, and the emergence over the last decade of a public debate about historical memory of the Spanish Civil War and what forms this remembrance should take; forms which could include the judicial, ritual, narrative, and artistic.

EYAL WEIZMAN (London) closed the day's proceedings with an analysis of 'forensic architecture' as a tool for better understanding the workings of violence. Using the example of the Occupied Territories, Weizman demonstrated how apparently benign decisions regarding the allocation and the engineering of space can in fact act as 'weapons', aiding and abetting the violation of human rights. The targeted bombing of Gaza was, he suggested, a form of architectural violence, the workings of which can be understood through the forensic testimony of objects and spaces, in ways that the testimony of the living cannot achieve. Forensic architecture, Weizman argued, turns objects into witnesses, with the forensic scientist acting as translator. Weizman's lecture launched a debate, which was to continue into the following day, about the usefulness of the Agambean concept of the 'state of exception'. For Weizman, it was less useful to speak of states of exception that describe certain situations as existing outside of the law, rather we should speak of thresholds between different judicial frameworks; law, he argued, offers no real protection.

The motif of the state of exception reappeared in different forms over the course of the final day of the conference, with the speakers in the first panel focusing on theatrical representations of spaces of exception. The Spanish playwright and philosopher JUAN MAYORGA (Madrid) spoke about three of his plays, each of which dealt with spaces marked firstly by violence and, secondly, by the tension between memory and forgetting. MARIANA EVA PEREZ (Konstanz) presented her analysis of the different dramatic spaces in theatre, and drew attention to the destabilisation of the space of the family home in two Argentinian plays dealing with the theme of the forced disappearance of children through State terrorism. The aesthetic and moral choices associated with dramaturgy were the subject of discussion in this panel. For Mayorga, the role of art was to 'fill in the gaps' of the official archive, to be attentive to these, and to create an artifice that itself helps spectators to be attentive, also.

SILVANA MANDOLESSI (Konstanz/Leuven) was similarly concerned with literary representations of violence and its remembrance. Her analysis of recent Argentinian novels about the dictatorship drew attention to the use of two spatial motifs of the ghostly and the gothic to represent political violence and its lingering effects: that of the 'haunted house' and the disappeared city. While the motif of the haunted house features in the novels' thematisation of the tension between the 'closed space' of inside and the perceived threat of outside space, as well as of the intrusion of the violent past into the space of present, that of the disappeared city draws attention to the dialectic between absence and presence in a society marked by forced disappearances. As such, Mandolessi argues, the fantastic is an attempt to articulate that which exceeds signification. MELTEM AHISHKA (Istanbul) explored the theme of monstrosity within a different cultural context in her analysis of the politics of monuments, memory

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and countermemory in Turkey. Through her discussion of a vandalised workers' monument in Tophane – a former industrial area of Istanbul, recently gentrified with a complex of art galleries – Ahiska revealed the web of discursive meanings that can attach to a single, apparently excluded, site or object. 'Monstrous' in its disfigurement, when threatened with removal this partially destroyed monument was revealed to be an important site of memory for the local – largely disenfranchised – migrant community living around it. In this sense, she argued, the 'monstrous' can also be seen to speak, and, in its own way, to remember.

In a recorded contribution, DAVID HARVEY (New York) reflected upon the relationships between daily violence, power and space within economies of exploitation, in particular in relation to the policing of urban space. For Harvey, the analysis of class struggle in this context provides a more useful framework than the concept of states of exception, a position not shared by STAVROS STAVRIDES (Athens) in his account of urban protest in the Occupy Syntagma Square movement in Greece. Stavrides extends Agamben's concept to understand the state of exception as a mechanism based in the continuous effort to justify the suspension of the law. For Stavrides, the urban landscape is increasingly made up of enclaves, such as the sweatshop, the shopping mall or the gated community, each of which are characterised by normalised states of exception in which general law or rights are suspended and distinct administrative rules apply. The Occupy movement not only represents a (re)appropriation of urban space, it is also a redefinition of public spaces as common space, a space of negotiation and of thresholds: a space 'in between' that belongs to everybody and to nobody. The collective improvisation involved in creating such spaces emerges as a form of opposition against controlled public spaces, and against normalised states of exception. The final paper of the conference, by PILAR CALVEIRO (Puebla) offered a comparative analysis of three concentrationary models that serve as paradigms of the state of exception: the Nazi concentration camp, clandestine detention centres in Argentina, and Guantánamo Bay and other 'black sites' of the so-called 'War on Terror'. Analysing how spatialities were constructed and controlled in each context, Calveiro traced the ways in which such spaces of exception have served, by both physical and auditory means, to create scenarios of radical isolation and alienation, constructing otherness in order to exterminate it.

The conference 'Spatialities of Exception, Violence and Memory' brought together scholars from all over the world and from many distinct disciplines. The papers were connected, however, in their explorations of the complex cartographies of violence and its remembrance. The spatialities of power and resistance, examined here in their historical, political, geographical and cultural manifestations, propose new ways of understanding human experience as well as, potentially, hope for new and utopian forms of spatial politics in which exception is no longer the rule. The rich and varied papers, as well as the lively discussions following each panel emphasised the current relevance and significance of space theory both in the examination of the structures of violence and exclusion, and in explorations of memory and trauma studies.

Conference overview:

Inaugural Lecture
Aleida Assmann (Universität Konstanz): Framing places of terror in postwar Germany

Jay Winter (University of Yale): Faces, voices, and the shadow of catastrophe

Introduction
Kirsten Mahlke (Universität Konstanz): On spaces of terror and how to narrate them

Panel I - The traces of annihilation in landscapes: inscriptions and absences

James Tyner (Geography. Kent University, USA): Violent erasures and erasing violence: Making the Cambodian genocide visible

Zuzanna Dziuban (Adam Mickiewicz University): Landscapes of Traumatic Memory in Contemporary Poland: The Politics of Framing

Panel II - Actors, territories and spaces in pro-

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cess of political violence

Gabriel Gatti (Universidad del País Vasco): The overwhelming spatialityof the victim. Notes to countercurrent thinking of a weak identity

Alejandro Castillejo Cuéllar (Universidad de los Andes): Towards thebody traces: space, confession and the places of law

Francisco Ferrándiz (CCHS - CSIC): Mass graves, landscapes of terror

Eyal Weizman (Goldsmiths, University of London): Violent surfaces: the texture of the laws of war

Panel III - Spatial representations of disappearance and exception

Juan Mayorga (CCHS-CSIC): Theatrical representations of spaces of exception

Mariana Eva Pérez (Universität Konstanz): The 'family' home in the dramaturgy about the disappearance of children in Argentina

Panel IV - Space and monstrosity

Silvana Mandolessi (Constance University): Haunted houses, horror literature and the space of memory in Argentine Postdictatorship literature

Meltem Ahiska (University of Istanbul): Monumentality, monstrosity, and countermemory: A case study from Turkey

Panel V - Spaces of exception: power and resistances

David Harvey (City University of New York): Memory, that powerful political force (videorecorded contribution)

Stavros Stavrides (National Technical University of Athens): Emancipating spatial practices in struggle against the urban „state of exception": Towards the „city of thresholds"?

Pilar Calveiro (Universidad Autónoma de Puebla): Spaces of exception

A video projection of „In between" by Silvina Der Meguerditchian was screened during breaks.

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