



*Citation for published version:*

Walter, T 2009, Dark tourism: mediating between the dead and the living. in R Sharpley & PR Stone (eds), *The Darker Side of Travel: The Theory and Practice of Dark Tourism*. Aspects of Tourism, Channel View Publications and Multilingual Matters, Bristol, U. K., pp. 39-55.

*Publication date:*  
2009

*Document Version*  
Peer reviewed version

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## Chapter 4

### Dark Tourism: Mediating Between the Dead and the Living

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#### **Introduction**

Though I have written scholarly articles about tourism, including what is now termed dark tourism (Walter, 1984; 1993), I have spent most of the past two decades researching the social organisation of death, and it is there, rather than within tourism, that this chapter finds a framework in which to place dark tourism. In a sentence, dark tourism is one of a number of institutions which mediate between the living and the dead, and in this chapter I wish to introduce the reader to this family of institutions. Of course, dark tourism also belongs to other families – such as capitalism in general, and tourism in particular – with which readers are more likely already acquainted.

It is often argued that modern societies cut the living off from the dead. Death, along with madness and suffering, is in modern society sequestered (Giddens, 1991), hidden (Ariès, 1974), forbidden (Gorer, 1965), or denied (Becker, 1973). Stone (in Chapter Two of this book) and Stone & Sharpley (2008) start from this position. However, there are many channels through which even in modern societies the living encounter the dead. Harrison (2003: x) includes among these channels ‘graves, homes, laws, words, images, dreams, rituals, monuments, and the archives of literature.’ This chapter elaborates this alternative position.

In psychological studies of bereavement, the dominant western twentieth century paradigm was that mourners should ‘let go of the dead and move on’. Since the mid 1990s, however, this has been challenged by research demonstrating that some bereaved people successfully move on with, rather than without, the dead (Klass et al, 1996); or more paradoxically, they move on both and without the dead. The dead are not necessarily banished from the lives of individuals. Sociologists up to the 1990s have likewise written and theorised much about the absence of death and the dead from modern society, and are only just beginning to write about the channels through which death and the dead become present (e.g. Walter et al, 1995; Walter, 2005; Howarth, 2007; Mitchell, 2007). Sociologists still seem largely stuck with the idea that the dead are banished from society, producing theories in abundance about the sequestration of the dead and reactions to sequestration, but as yet little about mediations between the living and the dead. I suggest in this chapter that we need to theorise these mediations if we are to understand dark tourism. I also ask if these mediations are better understood in their own terms, rather than as a reaction by society against a presumed absence of death.

Le Rochefoucauld famously pronounced four hundred years ago: ‘Death, like the sun, is not to be looked at directly.’ Precisely. People need a filter. That is what mediating institutions provide. As well as Harrison’s list, the many ways in which, institutionally, death has been, and is, indirectly looked at include history, archaeology, religion, medicine, the mass media, and dark tourism. In an earlier article (Walter, 2005), I outlined a number of occupations that currently mediate between the recent dead and the living, arguing that the

contours of their apparently diverse jobs are remarkably similar; these occupations include pathologists, coroners, funeral celebrants, registrars, obituarists and spiritualist mediums. All are contracted to produce a story about the deceased which is ritually performed in public and which, in most instances, goes on the public record. In this chapter, I wish to focus on those who are rather longer dead, for it is largely (though not entirely) they whom visitors encounter in dark tourism – and arguably it is they, the longer dead, to whom the sequestration theory least applies. First I identify a range of mediators, then I enquire what kind of relationships dark tourists and others have with the dead, then I enquire what kind of encounters with death are involved, and, finally, I question the current trend to analyse dark tourism in terms of motives and demand. I suggest that a focus on relationships, functions and consequences may be more illuminating.

### **Media that relate to the dead**

A society that did not relate to its dead would be cut off from what a modern society terms its history, and what other groups may term their ancestry. There is no necessary relation between how people are expected to relate to their recent dead and to the long dead. Many western industrialised societies, for example, have embraced the notion, legitimated by Freud (1984) and Bowlby (1979), that mourners should let go of their attachments to the dead; secularism denies the possibility of meaningful relationships between the living and the dead whilst Protestantism has for centuries at best been ambivalent about praying for the dead. This combination finds greatest force in Britain (not Ireland) and much of north western Europe. Yet within the very same societies may be found a vibrant interest in history, a nostalgia for ways of life made redundant by technology, and a proliferation of heritage tourism. The ideology of progress that relegates old people and the recent dead to the scrapheap also generates nostalgia about the past and those who inhabited it (Lowenthal, 1975; Seabrook, 2007).

What institutions mediate for us the past, and those who inhabited the past? In pre-literate societies, it is mainly the family in which stories of the ancestors are told, and even with the coming of literacy families may still have an oral tradition of their ancestry (Taylor 1963: 85-108). A Shona friend of mine can name his forebears on the male side back seven generations, including the great, great grandfather who moved from Malawi to the area of Zimbabwe that the family now inhabit, and the great grandfather whose exploits in killing an elephant led to the family name by which my friend knows he is related to anyone with that name. The spoken word links him to his ancestors, through the institution of the family, providing him with a clear sense of identity unknown to me as a middle class Briton. Ancestry in such societies is, of course, strongly gendered, depending on whether they are patrilineal or matrilineal; whether or not you become an ancestor depends, in part, on your gender.

In literate societies, the written word enables the possibility of history, a written record that is available for anyone, with therefore the potential for the past to become detached from personal or family identity. I can read about or visit the Colosseum in Rome with little more than an academic sense that its history is a part of who I am, and no sense of any family connection. Archaeology has added the possibility of a pre-history, whose material remains are available for anyone to view or research – precisely the point of contention between archaeology and some aboriginal groups for whom such artefacts belong to their own group, not to a world community.

Of course, postmodernist historians and archaeologists today write volumes about how history and pre-history cannot be written without being influenced by the concerns of today and, therefore, may never be objective or detached. But my point stands: history and pre-history are not attached to any one specific clan or family group. Historians and

archaeologists from different societies and at different times argue with one another over the facts, which are open for all to uncover. That is not so of oral traditions about the ancestors, where only in-group members may participate in the ongoing telling of the stories.

Linking ancestry and history (oral or written), for some religious groups, is pilgrimage to the shrine containing the bones of a dead saint. Religion can link the living and the dead in numerous ways, not least through prayers for the dead. This has been discouraged by Protestant Christianity (Gittings, 1984), with one notable exception, Mormonism (Davies, 2000). Mormons are concerned to provide posthumous salvation for family forebears who had not believed while alive; to this end, the Mormon church has developed extensive genealogical records, which – especially with computerisation – have greatly enhanced the labours of non-Mormon genealogists.

In contemporary modern societies, characterised by diasporas, bureaucratic record keeping and information technology, genealogy has become a passion for many – leading for some to personal heritage tourism (Timothy, 1997; Meethan, 2004). Given the centrality of the nation state and of ethnicity to modern self-identities, those who have migrated from other nations, especially from other continents, may have more identity work to do than those – like myself – whose known forebears all resided within the same nation. For Afro-Americans in the USA, or for Caribbeans in the UK, feeling marginalised in the society in which they reside, genealogy may be about a search for roots, and may produce ancestors of a kind (Stephenson, 2002), though not necessarily of the kind expected (Nash 2002). For those without an international migrant history, genealogy could be about any number of things, from an obsession not dissimilar to stamp collecting (how many forebears can I collect), to a more personally meaningful way of studying history, to a search for roots. In so far, however, that it relies on written documents, it seems to be a very different thing from the stories told orally within families over generations that have typified non-literate societies. For many today, I suggest that doing genealogy does not produce ancestors; it produces genealogy.

The modern state creates and re-creates sacred ancestors, bestowing immortality on its heroes. This may occur through a state funeral, or at a later time when a changed political scene prompts the canonisation of certain figures, or even the canonisation of those previously disgraced. A century after the American civil war, for example, the US federal government restored citizenship to the southern general, Robert E. Lee (Kearl 1989: 305); totalitarian regimes are even more likely to create swings in which the dead shift from the status of disgraced to sanctified, or vice-versa.

As well as the written word, modernity has the photograph. The still photograph is both a vivid means by which we may encounter the dead, not least our own family dead; *and*, as Barthes (1993) observed, it is a memento mori. The picture of myself, fifty years ago as a child, or thirty years ago as a younger man, provide a memento of my ageing, a reminder that I will never again look like, or be like, that. The picture of me as a child with my now deceased uncle reminds me that I too will die. The photograph links us both with the dead, and with our own death (Beloff, 2007).

Music is a major channel through which death is present in contemporary society, linking us to the dead, primarily in the form of the crucified Christ and the deceased beloved. The requiem mass is a staple of even secular choirs (Walter, 1992), whilst from Wagner (Tristan and Isolde) via Puccini (La Boheme, final scene) and the Shangri Las (Leader of the Pack) to Eric Clapton (Tears from Heaven), both romantic opera and pop music (Clayson, 1997) express the grief that Ariès (1974) observed is the counterpart of romantic love: how can I go on living now my beloved has died? Spirituals evoke the slave's loss of home and hope of heaven. Meanwhile, as I write, Richard Strauss' meditation on peaceful death after a long life, his exquisite *Four Last Songs*, is being broadcast live from one of the highest profile concerts of the British classical musical calendar, the first night of the Proms. As it

ends, the commentator repeats the last line: ‘How weary we are of journeying – is this perhaps death?’ Death and loss have been central also to drama, novels, and poetry, and (consider Hamlet) not just in the romantic forms of these genres.

A further institution that links the dead to the living is the law. The last will and testament, read out by the lawyer to the awaiting family, may be the first and last, dramatic, way in which the deceased speaks formally and publicly to the living (Drake, 2007). The millionaire who transforms his or her wealth into a philanthropic foundation may affect many lives in generations to come, and – through the terms of the foundation - may indeed influence the actions of generations to come.

Clearly there are other mediators between the living and the dead. Gravestones and burial grounds have immediate relevance for some forms of dark tourism. Mourners themselves are situated between the world of the living and the world of the dead, a potentially dangerous location and hence one liable to societal policing, which I have discussed at length elsewhere (Walter, 1999).

So, archaeology, graves, genealogy, music, literature, law, the family, language (oral and written), photographs, history, these all mediate between the dead and the living. Indeed, in the period leading into modernity, more – not fewer – of these mediations have become available. But it is the last three – language, photography and history – that set the stage for two key institutions that mediate between the dead and the living in modernity: the mass media and tourism. It is often argued that religion and its rituals provided the main filter by which death could be looked at, now largely replaced by medicine, which provides both a mindset and practical measures by which death may be cheated, and in terminal illness, approached. But I have argued (Walter, 2006) that the *ideological* function of religion in mediating death, in making sense of mortality, and in linking us to the dead, has in large measure in late modern society been taken on not so much by medicine as by the mass media. When there is a disaster, it is not to the priest or the doctor that we turn for information and help in making sense of what happened, but to the newspaper and the TV news. In more ordinary deaths, we record formalised sentiments in *in memoriam* columns, and in North America obituaries are published in the local newspaper by family members (Starck, 2006). Soap operas and movies regularly highlight sudden death and consequent bereavement.

There is a close link between the media and dark tourism. I can visit Auschwitz, or I can watch a documentary about it on TV. I can visit First World War battlefields, or I can read a novel about their pity and their pain. I can visit the site of the battle of Culloden, or watch a re-enactment of it in a TV docu-drama. I do not need to dive to the bottom of the Atlantic, for I can watch the movie ‘Titanic’. Either, or both, or none, of these pairs may touch me. A few hundred thousand attended the funeral of Princess Diana, several thousand watched it on a huge TV screen in Hyde Park, many millions around the world watched it at home on TV. Mass attendance at executions, in past centuries a popular pastime, is now anathematised, yet in the twenty-first century certain executions in Iraq have been watched illicitly on the web, while in the UK teenagers have disseminated pictures on their mobile phones of fellow teens being beaten up, and occasionally, murdered. If physically going to witness an execution may be labelled dark tourism, may not turning on a computer or mobile phone to witness the same execution be similarly labelled?

If so, we may then of course ask a more general question, ‘Why travel, when you can see it all on the TV?’ But the fact is that tourism is booming: the TV or the brochure is no substitute for the sun on your skin, the waves lapping at your feet, or photographing the Taj Mahal to show you have been there. Likewise, there may be no media substitute for squeezing yourself down Vietcong tunnels, or actually visiting Auschwitz. And for the pilgrim, as opposed to the tourist, to a battlefield (see Chapter 10), there is no substitute for seeing a relative’s name carved in the stone on grave or memorial (Walter, 1993).

Nevertheless, the media and dark tourism are clearly in the same business: presenting and interpreting death and suffering to millions of people, and sometimes – as in witnessing an execution – the difference between the media and tourism is minimal. Sharpley is correct in Chapter One that the possibilities for dark tourism have been greatly increased by the advertising that the mass media can provide, but the link between dark tourism and the mass media is much closer than that. They both mediate sudden or violent death to mass audiences.

### **Relationships with the dead**

What kinds of relationships with the dead do the various mediating institutions enable? These too are various:

*Information.* Pathologists and archaeologists literally dig around the remains of the dead in order to discover information about the mode of their death, or their life, or both. This information is provided for medicine, for science or for the state. This kind of dispassionate excavation does not always sit well (in the case of pathologists) with the personal or religious needs of mourners, or (in the case of archaeologists) with ideas of ancestry held by aboriginal groups.

*Intercession.* At religious shrines, a major form of communication from the living to the dead is intercession: praying to the saint or spirit on behalf of the living. This is the case, for example, at Roman Catholic shrines, where the saints carry prayers from the living to God (Christian, 1971).

*Guidance.* At the same time, shrines are also places where the living are open to guidance by the dead. At the Yashukan war museum at Tokyo's controversial Yasukuni shrine, visitors are greeted by Fujita Toko's (1806-55) *Ode to the Righteous*, prominently displayed on the entrance wall:

Bodies may perish  
But spirits never die  
They remain in the realm  
Between the heavens and Earth for all eternity  
Valiantly guiding us along the path of righteousness.

Guidance from the dead may be had, of course, in all kinds of places (Marwit & Klass, 1995), but there are times and places where the lines of communication between the dead and the living are particularly clear; the reading of a will is one, spiritualist seances are another, shrines are another.

*Care.* A fourth form of communication is care for the dead. Mayumi Sekizawa, a Japanese folklorist researching French war memorials and Japanese shrines to its war dead, commented to me, 'You Europeans remember your war dead, we Japanese care for ours.' In Japan, there is the possibility of a mutual relationship of care between the living and their ancestors: the dead guide the living, and the living care for the dead. The rituals at a Japanese war shrine are all about this mutual care. In a sense, it is incorrect to speak of Japanese war *memorials*: certainly acts of remembrance go on there, but that is not what they are explicitly for.

Some sociologists and anthropologists of contemporary western death practices (e.g. Francis et al, 2005; Valentine, 2008) have shown that, though in the West there is no formal religion, ritual or language by which the living may care for the dead, they nevertheless do

this, for example by tending graves. Behaviour at Western graves may not be so dissimilar from that at Japanese household shrines, with conversations taking place with the dead, imparting the latest news from the world of the living, enquiring about life in the world of the dead, and seeking guidance from the dead.

*Remembrance.* If there is no formal way to care for the dead, all that is left is to remember them. If a shrine is where the dead are cared for, prayed to, and where guidance is sought from them, a memorial is more simply a place of memory. Memories may be internal to the individual visitor, or shared within the group, but a memorial is not designed to be a place of interaction between the living and the dead. Or at least, not officially. At British war cemeteries, the formal language is not that of care for, and guidance by, the spirits of the dead, rather it is of memory: 'Lest we forget.' 'At the going down of the sun / and in the morning / we will remember them.' At war graves, western veterans and families come to pay respect, to remember.

In the past two decades, memory studies have become a vibrant interdisciplinary research field, involving neurologists, experimental psychologists, psychoanalysts, literary theorists, anthropologists, philosophers, to name but a few; false memory and traumatic memory have generated much debate and research. This is not the place to review a vast and rapidly changing field, but we may here just sketch the different kinds of memory as the generations pass. First generation memory refers to events, places and people that were personally experienced, though such memories are not static; they are cobbled together anew each time the memory comes to mind (Olick, 1999). Second generation memories are those of my parents and their generation; who my parents are is shaped by what they remember, and through stories told in childhood this in turn shapes who I am, shaping my understanding of how the world is. The daughter of a Holocaust survivor remembers the Holocaust in a different way from the person for whom it is just history.

By the third generation and later, the past enters our consciousness in different ways. One is history. Early twentieth century children are as likely to learn about the Second World War from history classes at school as from a grandparent, and they almost certainly learn about the First World War from books and other such media. A second is genealogy, a personal search for the history of one's own family in which forebears are researched, but may remain essentially 'other'. A third is ancestry which, as I have suggested earlier, is rather different. Ancestors are family or group forebears who are used to frame one's current identity, as with my Zimbabwean friend or with Afro-Americans who construct an identity for themselves through their African origins, identities that have significance for everyday life.

The response of the visitor to a dark tourist site that presents deaths of several or many generations ago will depend in large measure on whether these deaths are perceived as those of historical figures or of ancestors. I am English and have visited Dunnottar Castle, on the tourist trail in the north-east of Scotland, a visually dramatic and highly photogenic, but for me only moderately interesting, historical site. Maybe not so for some Scots, as one fictional visitor described, visiting its dungeons: 'There the Covenanting folk had screamed and died while the gentry dined and danced in their lithe, warm halls, Chris stared at the places, sick and angry and sad for those folk she could never help now, that hatred of rulers and gentry a flame in her heart, John Guthrie's (her father's) hate. Her folk and his they had been, those whose names stand graved in tragedy.' (Gibbon, 1946: 101-2). Set in 1913, events of well over two centuries previously were, for Chris Guthrie, not history but a tragedy that befell her ancestors. I have not visited the slave forts of West Africa, but were I to do so I am sure my responses as a white Englishman would not be those of a black American of

slave ancestry. Feldman (2008) argues that Israeli youth pilgrimages to concentration camps are key to how Israeli collective identity is passed on to new generations.

The Dunnottar Castle example also shows that it is not possible to put a number on how many years or generations must pass before an event passes into history and loses its emotional and possibly traumatic hold on visitors. For many Protestants in Northern Ireland, the 1690 Battle of the Boyne remains part of their present day identity, as does the 1389 Battle of Kosovo for many Serbians today. For myself, the First World War has nothing to do with this kind of ancestry, but it holds some genealogical resonance; my uncle Arg was fell in battle in 1915 and we have some correspondence from him to my father, and letters written about his death to my grandmother. The Boer War of just a few years earlier is, for me, pure history.

Remembrance is not memory (King, 1998). Remembrance entails a commemoration of those whose suffering and death one may not have personally witnessed, but is not yet history. The veteran ‘remembers’ all who died in his war, not just those he personally knew. The civilian ‘remembers’ the soldiers who died, and the trials they suffered, even though these have to be imagined, for she did not experience them. At Arg’s memorial in Belgium, I can ‘remember’ an uncle who died thirty years before I was born.

When memory is not first hand, it turns into remembrance, or history, or genealogy, or ancestry... and doubtless other possibilities too. These are all ways of relating to the dead and/or of contemplating their deaths. At the same dark tourist site, all may be present, for different visitors.

*Education.* The dead may be encountered for educational purposes. Educational visits to the dead, whether in the classroom through books or at heritage sites through educational tourism, are the basis of the teaching of history. Sometimes the dead are physically present, as in exhibitions of mummies and bog bodies.

The dead have a significant educational role in science and medicine, notably in the dissection class or autopsy in which medical students learn about the living body through a hands-on archaeology of the dead body (Hafferty, 1991). Gunther von Hagens’ Body Worlds exhibition of plastinated cadavers, currently the world’s most visited touring exhibition, states that it aims to educate the public about their own bodies; von Hagens does not believe only doctors should have this direct knowledge of human anatomy (Burns, 2007). At the exhibition, and on its website, visitors may be observed interacting intensely with both the exhibited human remains and with each other (vom Lehn, 2006).

*Entertainment.* Body Worlds and its imitators also have an entertainment function, to von Hagens an essential part of getting the public (especially those who are not regular museum goers) to come and be educated, to his detractors (especially those who are regular museum goers) proof that he is ‘just a showman’. The exhibition, like all popular yet purportedly serious, exhibitions, museums and heritage sites, and indeed like comparable television documentaries, is edutainment. The dead, like much else from the past, are used to educate and entertain today’s masses. As they were too in eighteenth century public executions.

*Memento mori.* Seaton (1996) has very usefully charted the decline of the medieval *memento mori*, reminding people of their mortality even as they went about their everyday life, and its transformation (via the romantic movement) into modern dark tourism. Whether dark tourist sites actually remind visitors of their mortality varies. I have visited a number of historic cemeteries in the UK where the information leaflet reminds visitors of the cemetery’s many functions – as a green lung for city dwellers, as a haven for flora and fauna, as a historical site, as a demonstration of geology, stone carving and lettering, as a resource for genealogists



– but no mention of death or that this is a place where dead people lie! As Woodthorpe (2007) has shown, this focus on what is above ground to the exclusion of what is under the ground actually misses what it is that gives burial grounds their unique aura.

Interestingly, Body Worlds, though ostensibly edutainment, can also function as a *memento mori*. A number of visitors have commented that the exhibits bring home to them the frailty of the human body (Walter, 2004), while Body Worlds 4, currently (2008) showing in Manchester, UK, has on the walls large banners quoting Descartes, the Psalms, Nietzsche, Leibniz, Seneca, Epicurus, Kant, Shakespeare and St Augustine on body and soul, life and death. On entering the exhibition, the first two big posters are ‘Confrontation with death’ (describing earlier times) and ‘The censure of death in contemporary life’. Though all the plastinates are in lifelike poses, large banners display two of Vesalius’ classic sixteenth century drawings of skeletons pondering their own mortality. I have yet to see such *memento mori* displayed so prominently in the interpretation for visitors to any historic cemetery, or for medical students approaching their first anatomy class.

So, we may encounter the dead in a way that shields us from our own mortality, or the encounter may be liberally sprinkled with *memento mori*. I may visit a historical site of medieval slaughter that makes me feel good that people don’t do that kind of thing these days, or that appals me that this happened to my ancestors (and could yet happen again).

*Haunting*. The unquiet dead haunt individuals; they can also haunt society. Children (e.g. in the UK, Victoria Climbié in 2000, Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman in 2002) who have died at the hands of tormenters in an otherwise civilised society, haunt society. Those who have died in vain, in de-legitimated wars or meaningless causes, as a group of collective dead, haunt society. How can a modern society such as England incorporate Holly and Jessica into its collective narrative of itself? How did and do Jewish people incorporate the Holocaust into their collective narrative? How did the USA incorporate its Civil War (Schwartz & Schuman, 2000), how does it even now incorporate Vietnam (Wagner-Pacifi & Schwartz, 1991) into its collective sense of itself? How do Japan and Germany remember their twentieth century (Schuman et al., 1998)? If individuals repress memories of trauma because they are impossible to integrate into a personal narrative, collective traumas may be defined as those that cannot – or cannot at all easily – be integrated into collective narrative, even after individuals and their memories have died. (Olick 1999)

Such unquiet deaths are the very stuff both of the mass media and of dark tourism. It is precisely traumatic, difficult to comprehend, death and disaster that is newsworthy, providing rich pickings for national and international news (Walter, 2005). Why would the Estonia, a ferry belonging to Sweden, the safest country on the planet, sink? How can an innocent child be murdered by a young teenager? Why would anyone want to fly planes into the Twin Towers and the Pentagon? After Pearl Harbour, after 9/11, how can Americans incorporate vulnerability into their national narrative?

It is no coincidence that 9/11 is so far both the archetypal news story of the twenty-first century and its most visible site of dark tourism. The United States is haunted by 9/11 and what it means. Reconstructive work entails not just rebuilding Ground Zero, not just contentious military ventures in the Middle East, but also an ongoing attempt to incorporate 9/11 into a revised narrative of America and of the West. Dark tourism and the media are central to this process of revision.

To conclude this section of the chapter, basic questions in any culture are: Where are the dead? Are they accessible? How are they accessible? From such questions follow others: Where can we meet them? Are there special places - shrines, graveyards, novels - where we can meet them? When can we meet them? Are there special times when we can meet them? (In the Christian West, All Souls Day; in Japan, the O’Bon festival.) How are we to relate to

them? With care, with memory, with fear? Such questions have been asked throughout time, and dark tourism is just one particular medium through which the living may encounter the dead, and death.

I have argued that there are fundamentally different ways of relating to the dead. A shrine, for example, is not a memorial. This poses considerable linguistic problems, for there is no one word which covers both shrines and memorials. (I confronted this recently while teaching a course titled 'Funerals and Memorials'. When we got to the section on shrines, I realised with alarm that the course's very title had set students up for misunderstanding what shrines are.) Museums and heritage sites are different again. Put perhaps oversimplily, shrines are where care, guidance and prayer take place; memorials are where remembrance takes place; museums and heritage sites are where edutainment takes place.

Another fundamental distinction is between relating to the past in terms of history, and relating to it in terms of ancestors, which also causes terminological problems for those mobile western individuals who have no sense of a belonging that is rooted in and justified by stories of ancestors. Such individuals may engage in the family-focused history we call genealogy, but that is not the same as belonging to a family that defines itself, and is defined by others, through its ancestors. Of course, one kind of family that does define itself ancestrally, the aristocratic family, is at the heart of many British tourist attractions.

These theoretical concepts need operationalising to see how much light they shed on the real world of dark tourism. It may be that ideal types of ancestry, history and genealogy do not help us understand the empirical realities of dark tourism. And how clear is my distinction between shrines, memorials and museums? I myself have analysed the Body Worlds exhibition as a shrine to the human body (Walter, 2004); and Cooper (2006), who knows more about Japan than I do, refers to Japan's Pacific War battlefields as memorials rather than as shrines. Typologies are useful not if they can be found exactly in the real world, but if they shed light on complexity and change in the real world. The typologies I have developed above have not yet really been tried out.

That said, it seems likely that dark tourism can include any or all of the various kinds of relationships with the dead listed above, though there is a tendency for education and entertainment to dominate certain sites, and remembrance and haunting to dominate others. I do *not* claim that visitors to dark tourist sites are motivated by a wish for these relationships with the dead; I am simply demonstrating the kind of relationships that take place at such sites, and that they are relationships found in a range of settings as well as in dark tourism. Much of what I have written above concerns how we relate to the dead, rather than to their death – an educational visit to Stratford-upon-Avon may teach children much about Shakespeare's life but, even though his grave be visited, little or nothing about his death. This is reflected in much heritage and even cemetery tourism, in which visitors are regaled with information and stories about the lives of the cemetery's more noteworthy or interesting residents. But some of the above – notably *memento mori* and haunting – concerns not just the dead, but death itself, and this is reflected in the darker varieties of dark tourism.

It is to these two issues – death itself, and motivation – that I now turn in the final two sections.

### **Mediating death**

If there is a wide range of media through which the living may relate to both the recent and the long dead, the filters through which we perceive death itself are somewhat more limited. Traditionally, religions, their rituals and beliefs, have provided the filters. In the modern world, these have been supplemented and even replaced by medicine and the mass media. Medicine provides cures for diseases that once killed, prognoses for the terminally ill, socially legitimated accounts of why someone died, even the tools of psychiatric medicine to

help the grieving. The news media, like some religions, have a tendency to crank up the fear about death, and then to provide the theodicy, or meaning system, that makes sense of what had originally been presented as unthinkable, unimaginable, senseless. The child's murderer has been arrested, the black box found, the geoscience behind the earthquake explained (Walter, 2005).

Dark tourism, as suggested earlier, has much in common with the mass media. But does it adopt the news media's strategy of first scare, then comfort? This is a question that only empirical research can answer. It seems quite likely that dark tourism will not always comfort. Visitors may leave Auschwitz or the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington DC with their questions answered, or dazed and troubled, or looking for an ice cream and the next destination on the tourist trail. Even when no kith or kin are involved, such places can be profoundly troubling. Though I know no-one killed in this particular conflict, visiting the Vietnam memorial in the late 1980s I was deeply moved by the sorrow of all wars, as indeed I was in Amsterdam's Anne Frank house. Indeed, the power of such places is precisely that the particular is made to stand for the universal – Anne Frank can represent not only all who died in the Holocaust but also all children, all civilians, everyone whose lives are destroyed by war and racism. And yet the design of such places offers some comfort. My exit from Anne Frank's house was through an exhibition that looked at the work of anti-racist organisations which I was invited to join. The very design of the Vietnam memorial, and the involvement it invites alike of veterans and those against the war, itself provides some measure of healing.

That said, the deaths that dark tourism sites record are not the everyday deaths from cancer, stroke and dementia that characterise peaceful modern western societies. So, like the news report of the next disaster, dark tourism sites confront me with mortality and suffering, but not *my* mortality or suffering – unless, that is, I identify those who suffered as my group's ancestors, or unless I am remarkably sensitive. I have argued elsewhere (Walter, 1994) that the reality of death today is not so much that it is taboo or denied, but that in modern medicine there is a disjuncture between the objectified, medicalised body that the medical staff treat, and the me that is dying. Medicine does not model my own experience in the way that, arguably, religions can and did. So with the news media and dark tourism: they portray human suffering and mortality in some, though never anything like all, of its ghastliness, and yet this is not the death that I am likely to have to endure. Dark tourism confronts us not with human suffering and mortality, but with certain kinds of human suffering and mortality.

The deaths that the more disturbing kinds of dark tourism deal in are not those that may come to disturb me – I know of no tourist trips, for example, to the psycho-geriatric hospital wards or nursing homes where I may well end up dying. The suffering that dark tourism deals in is not the suffering of cancer or dementia, but of slavery and racism. The darker forms of dark tourism deal not in those deaths that challenge the affluent white middle class individuals who comprise the majority of visitors, but in those deaths that challenge the collective narratives of nation and of modernity. As with the media reporting of disaster (Walter, 2006), the more challenging of dark tourism sites challenge not individuals, but culture. Despite the work of Baumann (1989) showing otherwise, in the popular mind the Holocaust challenges modernity's metanarratives of progress and rationality – how, we ask, could this have happened in the twentieth century? Far more Americans are likely to die of cancer than of terrorist attacks, but it is Ground Zero, not cancer hospitals, to which tourists flock, for it challenges much of what Americans believe about their culture. The restorative work that has to be done, therefore, is not to comfort the individual visitor in the face of mortality, but to reconstruct the narratives of modernity, or of nation. As argued above in my discussion of haunting, this is not easily done, and loose ends are inevitably left. Hence the variety of moods in which visitors may leave.

### **Deficits and motives: a critique**

We may not need a deficit model, of the kind proposed by Stone in Chapter Two, to explain people's participation in dark tourism. In dark tourism, visitors encounter the dead, and in the darker varieties become aware of certain unusual kinds of death. Such encounters have been available in various forms, and using various media, throughout human history. It just so happens that in the world that citizens of affluent and peaceful societies inhabit today, one of the media that offer these encounters is dark tourism. Children find themselves being taken to battlefields by teachers and parents, just as children in this and other cultures find themselves being taken to church or temple. Dark tourism is a given element of our culture, just as religion is a given element of many cultures.

The comparison with religion is instructive. Theories of religion include deficit models, for example, individuals are religious because of the lack of a father figure, or whole classes are religious because of being oppressed; religion thus provides a compensation for such lacks. But there are several other theories of religion, about which scholars argue; deficit/compensation is not the only kid on the block. Likewise with dark tourism, we may not need to hypothesise that a personal or societal deficit (for example, lack of ontological security) motivates individuals to visit such sites.

My observations suggest, though this needs to be tested empirically, that most dark tourism, like much heritage tourism, is not specifically motivated. Let me mention the chief occasions I can recall on which I myself have visited dark tourist sites. On a walking holiday in the Alps, I found myself in the resort of Zermatt on a rainy day; having little else to do, I was window shopping on the main street and came across the town's museum; on entering, I discovered it was largely about death and disaster, its prized artefacts comprising tattered clothing, frayed ropes and broken ice axes recovered after fatal falls, not least on the nearby Matterhorn (Walter, 1984). Strolling around Amsterdam, I found myself in the vicinity of the Anne Frank house, and entered. Likewise the Vietnam memorial was for me one of a number of tourist sites to be visited on Washington's mall. I would be very surprised if many visits to Ground Zero are not similar. Many of those who laid and photographed flowers for Princess Diana at Buckingham Palace or Kensington Palace in the week after her death were tourists who happened already to be in London; the mourning for Diana just happened to become the biggest attraction in town that week. Visits to dark tourism sites are often side trips, excursions of just a few hours, within a bigger trip. Like the medieval castle, the dark tourist site is just one more site to be 'done'. Whether the site is visited or not does not depend heavily on individual motivation; rather it is contingent on whether the guidebook mentions it, whether it is chanced across on the way to other sites, whether it fits your schedule, and so on.

A major exception is personal heritage tourism (Timothy, 1997), where there is a clear individual motive, such as genealogy, mourning or remembrance, for visiting a site of personal significance. But even this kind of tourism rarely comprises an entire holiday, more frequently being part of a larger vacation, or a side trip from a business trip. With the exception of battlefield tours and pilgrimages (Walter, 1993; Feldman, 2008), I can think of few holidays whose main *raison d'être* is dark tourism – and even with battlefields, many family or individual visits occur because the site is on the road to somewhere else.

So, individual motivation explains only a very small minority of visits to dark tourism sites. This is also true of many other forms of tourism, which are not, at least initially, motivated. I was dragged up hills in the Lake District as a child, eventually discovered I liked it, and have gone on hill walking holidays ever since. Other children go on a school skiing trip; some do not take to it and never return to the slopes, others love it and it becomes their passion. A young couple go on a city break as a change from the seaside, and get hooked.

The activity comes first, the motivation may follow later. But dark tourism is not like most forms of specialised tourism. Whereas the addict may regularly take hill walking, skiing or city break holidays, few – apart from some battlefield addicts – take an entire holiday of dark tourism, still less return year after year for another week’s dose of darkness. And apart from battlefield tours, dark holidays (as opposed to specific dark trips or tours as part of an otherwise light holiday) are generally not offered by the tourism industry.

It may not tell us much, therefore, to enquire into the motives of dark tourists.<sup>i</sup> We are likely to learn much more by carefully documenting and contextualising what they do at such sites, and how it subsequently affects them. Lantermann’s (2007) model, reproduced in Chapter Two of this book, has a significant place for consequences, but none for motives.

The trend among dark tourism scholars to emphasise motives, even in the case of Seaton (1996) to *define* dark tourism by the presence of particular motives, loses sight of the character of most dark tourism. It does not seem likely that investigating the *demand* for dark tourism will shed much light on the phenomenon. Rather, in this chapter I have suggested that considerable mileage may be gained by, firstly, investigating the kind of relationships that the living have at dark tourism sites, not just with each other but also with the dead; secondly, locating dark tourism within the large family of institutions in which the living relate to death and to the dead; and thirdly, looking at the functions such sites may play for society as much as for individuals.

One task of social science is to make problematic the everyday, investigating why and how we do things we take for granted – that has been the calling of ethnomethodology (e.g. Garfinkel, 1967). Another task of social science is to demonstrate the normality of practices that we might have thought exotic or strange – that has been the calling of anthropology, at least in the old days when anthropologists did fieldwork in ‘exotic’ tribes. The dominant approach among scholars of dark tourism has been the latter – how can we explain why tourists do something so peculiar as to pay to visit a concentration camp? I am suggesting the other approach, namely to look at a range of activities we take for granted – like reading a novel, going to the movies, watching the TV news, taking a photograph, visiting a tourist site – and to suggest they all may involve things we thought modern societies didn’t do, namely encounter the dead and remind people of their mortality.

So we have two different models of dark tourism, and two programmes for research. Stone, Sharpley, Seaton and others, not least in the first two chapters of this book, focus on demand and motives; I suggest instead that we research what relationships are engaged in at dark tourism sites, the consequences for individuals and the functions for society. Some aspects of death certainly are sequestered in modern society, but it is also true that there have always been institutions that link the living and the dead – even, and perhaps especially, in the modern world. Both approaches need empirical testing. I may be wrong that most dark tourism visits are typically contingent rather than motivated. Other scholars may be right that visitors to dark tourist sites come with a demonstrable sense of detachment from issues of mortality that such sites do something to remedy. We need to know.

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<sup>i</sup> Not that I am against researching motives per se. In Walter (1993) I look in detail at the motives of war grave pilgrims and battlefield tour enthusiasts, but as I have noted above, in this case there is clear evidence of specific motivation.