Dark tourism as ‘mortality capital’: The case of Ground Zero and the significant other dead

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The case of Ground Zero and the Significant Other Dead

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Introduction

During the Middle Ages, a journey to gaze upon relics of the saints offered the only valid excuse for leaving home (Rufus 1999). However, while religious pilgrimages to view the sacrosanct dead or sacred places associated with their life or death have been common over the centuries, in an age of (western) secularisation, a new ‘secular pilgrimage’ is emerging (Hyde and Harman 2011; Margry 2008b). Arguably, these new types of secular pilgrimages involve the ‘darker side of travel’ (Sharpley and Stone 2009a), or what has commonly become known as ‘dark tourism’ (Lennon and Foley 2000; Stone 2005, 2006). From visiting Auschwitz-Birkenau, to the Killing Fields of Cambodia or to Chernobyl – the site of the world’s worst nuclear accident – dark tourism is ‘the act of travel to sites of death, disaster or the seemingly macabre’ (Stone 2006: 146). Accordingly, dark tourism as secular pilgrimage is an activity that can constitute ceremonies of life and death which, in turn, have the capacity to expand boundaries of the imagination and to provide the contemporary visitor with potentially life-changing points of shock. Indeed, dark tourism may be perceived as a rite of social passage, given its transitional elements and its potential to influence the psychology and perception of individuals (Biran et al. 2011). Furthermore, dark tourism occurs within liminal time and space and, as such, locates the activity within constructivist realms of meaning and meaning making (Sharpley and Stone 2009a). Therefore, dark tourism provides a lens through which life and death may be glimpsed, thus revealing relationships and consequences of the processes involved that mediate between the individual and the collective Self.

Noting the distinction between dark tourism and the processes of (secular) pilgrimage, Reader (2003: 2) suggests ‘the dynamics through which people are drawn to sites redolent with images of death … and the manner in which they are induced to behave there … [mean] that the topic calls out for discussion’. As part of that discussion, and despite the diversity of sites across the world, dark tourism has been advocated as not presenting death per se, but representing certain kinds of death (Walter 2009). Hence, dark tourism has been referred to as a contemporary mediating institution between the living and the dead (Walter

Conclusions

As the literature about tourism grows and as more researchers explore tourism-related issues, sub-groups of tourism have emerged. As indicated here, the definitions of these sub-groups appear to rely on fairly descriptive and superficial characteristics. Such simplified definitions do not contribute to the understanding of the enormous variety of tourism experiences. In light of the current fragmentation and theoretically loose conceptualisation of dark tourism (Jamal and Lelo 2011; Stone and Sharpley 2008), this chapter has identified the need for a type of conceptualisation which will differentiate it from other types of tourism experiences, particularly heritage tourism (which often presents death and violence). We propose that dark tourism should be defined based on the relationships between the visitor and the site attributes, namely the tourist experience. Specifically, it is argued here that the conceptualisation of dark tourism should be based on visitors’ perceptions of the experience as deviance, such as that which involves a sense of social risk in one’s home environment.

The focus on the social context of one’s home environment suggests that other behaviours which are not necessarily associated with death should also be perceived as dark experiences. Thus, we suggest that dark tourism is the purposeful movement to spaces displaying acts and sights, which the viewing of or participation in may lead to negative social consequences for the tourist if such activities were revealed to those in his/her home environment. While Sharpley (2005: 226) argues that dark tourism ‘is a relatively rare phenomenon’, the proposed conceptualisation suggests that this may not in fact be the case; that is, dark tourism may also include more communal mass tourism activities and behaviours.

Finally, the current reconceptualisation raises several lines for future research. First, it highlights the need to understand dark tourism in different socio-cultural contexts. Moreover, the current conceptualisation of dark tourism presented here is not empirically supported. Further studies should aim to clarify whether dark tourism really exists or, as we claimed at the beginning of this chapter, it is the same old wine in a new bottle.
Moreover, within a thesis of death sequestration, Stone (2011b: 25) suggests that ‘dark tourism provides an opportunity to contemplate death of the Self through gazing upon the Significant Other Dead’. Whilst this hypothesis may form an integral part of a complex jigsaw of consumption, there is limited empirical evidence to support such a claim (but see Stone 2011b). The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to address this gap in dark tourism knowledge and to augment the dark tourism literature by examining new times/new dark tourism sites and studies (Stone 2011c). In short, focusing upon the thanatological condition of society, that is, secular society’s reactions to and perceptions of mortality, this research examines tourist experiences within the confines of a specific ‘dark shrine/dark exhibition’ (Stone 2006) and in particular, visitor experiences at Ground Zero and the Tribute WTC Visitor Center, in New York, the site of the former Twin Towers that were attacked on 11 September 2001 (9/11). In so doing, it critically evaluates the location as both a cognitive space and a contested place to explore contemporary death and dying. Ultimately, the chapter sets out empirical evidence to suggest visitors to Ground Zero may mediate death and dying as well as life and living and, thus, formulate a personal and contemporaneous ‘mortality capital’ whereby contemplative experiences of the Significant Other Dead provide an existential mortality saliency. First, however, an overview of Ground Zero and its touristification provides a context for the study.

The (dark) touristification of Ground Zero

Immortalised by artists, filmmakers and photographers, the twin towers of the World Trade Center had dominated the Manhattan skyline since the early 1970s. Officially opened in 1973 as part of a skyscraper complex of office buildings in New York’s financial district and, at the time, the world’s tallest buildings at 1,368 and 1,362 feet respectively, the towers soon became pivotal in New York City’s iconography. As Glanz and Lipton (2003: 234) point out:

The twins had become one of New York City’s most popular postcards. It was not just CNN that featured the towers. Almost every time movie and television directors need an embellishment shot [original emphasis] of New York, it was to the Twin Towers that they turned … these steel boxes, in all their severity and grandeur, had become a shorthand symbol for New York.

The atrocity on 9/11 not only resulted in mass murder, but also confirmed a semiotic loss of the iconic Twin Towers for both New York as a city and for the wider country of America. Yet, the attack on the World Trade Center on 9/11 was not the first assault on the buildings. On 26 February 1993, a terrorist car bomb exploded in the underground car park beneath the World Trade Center’s North Tower, killing six people and injuring over a thousand. Ironically, a broker, Bruce Pomper, who worked in the World Trade Center complex at the time, described the 1993 attack ‘like an airplane had hit the building’ (Pomper, quoted in BBC 2009). In 1995, a granite memorial fountain honouring the victims was unveiled, located on the Austin J. Tobin Plaza, directly above the site of the explosion. Along with the names of the six victims, the memorial inscription simply read:

On February 26, 1993, a bomb set by terrorists exploded below this site. This horrible act of violence killed innocent people, injured thousands, and made victims of us all.

The memorial was later destroyed in the 9/11 attacks. These are well documented and do not need to be reiterated here. Arguably, however, of all the images of 9/11, it was the catastrophic structural failing of the Twin Towers and their disintegration, transmitted instantaneously and repeated ad infinitum through television and Internet media, which ensured the event became indelibly imprinted into the collective consciousness. Conceivably, however, if the World Trade Center towers had remained standing and the fires had been extinguished, with a much-reduced loss of life, especially amongst emergency personnel, the (western) cultural reaction to 9/11 and the American political-military response – ‘The War on Terror’ – might well have been less parochial. Nevertheless, the attack on the Twin Towers, as symbols of a (western) capitalist system and as icons of America’s hegemonic power, up to the buildings’ collapse, meant that America’s hegemony, or at least its hegemonic image, was wounded. Crucially though, and speculation aside, the buildings did fail and the televised spectacle of the massive Twin Towers, constructed and maintained from modern techniques, disintegrating into dust amounted no less to a mortal wounding to the hegemony of the United States of America. Within a very short period of the buildings’ collapse, creating a perception that America was under attack (Sturken 2004), the term ‘Ground Zero’ was extracted from history and appropriated by the media as an idiom to describe the former World Trade Center as a site of devastation and (attempted) annihilation (Tomasky 2003). Of course, the term Ground Zero has its origins inextricably linked to the destructive power of nuclear weapons and their point of detonation. Nevertheless, the term has now entered a contemporary lexicon to mean destruction and the mortal wounding of (American) supremacy, pride and assumed innocence.

However, the term Ground Zero also conveys the idea of a starting point, or a blank canvas, which allows not only a rebuilding of the physical edifices, but also a restructuring of local, national and global narratives. As Kaplan (2003: 56) notes, ‘we often use ground zero colloquially to convey the sense of starting from scratch, a clean slate, the bottom line’, a meaning she goes on to suggest ‘resonates with the often-heard claim that the world was radically altered by 9/11’. Similarly, Sturken (2004: 311) suggests the idea of Ground Zero as a blank slate that enables a set of narratives about 9/11 to be formulated: ‘both the narrative that the site of Lower Manhattan is the symbolic centre of that event and the narrative that September 11 was a moment in which the United States lost its innocence’.
Therefore, in the decade since the attacks, the iconography of Ground Zero as a site of destruction has been (re)constructed in political, religious and commercial imaginings as a sacred site. Consequently, the site has been imbued with immense emotional and political investments. In turn, this has resulted in a highly contestable space. Indeed, it has become a space inscribed with numerous meanings and roles: as a neighbourhood of New York, as a commercial district of Lower Manhattan, and as a site of national and international memory and mourning. Hence, Ground Zero is a complex space, multilayered with diverse political agendas and intertwined with notions of grief, memorialisation and commerce. At the local level, there is contestation on how to maximise the space in a compact metropolitan environment, especially in relation to commercial interests and urban design (Hajer 2005). Moreover, Ground Zero, from a heritage that hurts’ perspective (Sather-Wagstaff 2011), is influential in projecting and affirming national identity, certainly within the global context of exporting revitalised hegemonic images of the United States of America. Crucially, however, since 2001, the ‘traumascape’ of Ground Zero (Tumarkin 2005) has evolved into a place where tensions in the practice of memory and mourning have become apparent, especially in relation to the aesthetics and tourist consumption of death and disaster.

Indeed, (dark) tourism that has emerged and continues to evolve at the site often, but not always, takes the form of a secular pilgrimage in which prayers are uttered, votive offerings (for example, photographs, messages or gifts) are left on fences, and relics in the form of ‘kitsch’ commercialised tourist souvenirs are purchased (Sturken 2007; Frow 2008; Sharpley and Stone 2009b). However, many people, including locals, scholars, cultural critics and journalists, have lamented the commercialisation of the site and of the millions of tourists who have visited the site since 9/11— even though the Twin Towers pre-9/11 were a major tourist attraction in their own right. For instance, in the early years after the atrocity, Blair (2002: 1) writes:

Remember when it was just hallowed ground? Ground Zero is now one of the most popular tourism attractions in the city... The hustle of commerce hawking to the crush of sightseers has prompted some to call it September 11 World.

The attachment of reverence to the space through a mixture of media alchemy and Hollywood simulacra means that touristic consumption of tragedy at Ground Zero is perceived, to some at least, to be of questionable social value. Moreover, pre-text 9/11 narratives (i.e. the mounting factors leading up to the attacks) and post-text 9/11 narratives (i.e. the consequences of the resultant geopolitical response) are largely lost within current tourism interpretations at the site (Stone 2010). Hence, Ground Zero has been exploited, perhaps, for mercantile advantage as well as for the creation of a national memorial and mythology. Within dominant paradigms of tourism studies, this commodification and consumption are often considered deficient in social value, meaningfulness and authenticity. Indeed, the very terms ‘tourist’ and ‘tourism’ often denote a negativity of a highly consumerist and commodified social practice (Tribe 2009). Thus, numerous media commentaries articulate tourists at Ground Zero as incidental outsiders within a persistent discursive construction of the tourist as the savage Other (for example, see Kendle 2008). As Jan Seidler Ramirez, chief curator at the September 11 Memorial Museum, which is due to open in 2012, points out:

people have forgotten already. Everyone has heard of September 11; they don’t have a sense of it... [for many tourists coming to Ground Zero now] September 11 is a just a bumper-sticker word to them, and that’s pretty scary.

(Ramirez, quoted in Luongo 2011)

Evidently then, this perspective positions tourists at Ground Zero within a rudimentary framework of serendipity or just another sight to see on the tourist itinerary (Lennon and Foley 2000). Indeed, tourists have been portrayed as merely curiosity seekers who passively gaze and consume other peoples’ tragedy and pain (Cole 1999). Yet this rather naive suggests that tourists are idle spectators of sites of death and tragedy, and that dark tourism at Ground Zero is highly questionable, if not socially inappropriate. Moreover, despite problematic protestations by Sather-Wagstaff (2011) of whether tourism at Ground Zero is actually ‘dark’ or not, Jamal and Lelo (2011) argue the conceptual and analytic framing of ‘darkness’ within dark tourism is socially constructed, not objective fact. Furthermore, ‘it is hardly an exaggeration to suggest that in the midst of many tourism forms of life, we are in death’ (Seaton 1999: 132). Therefore, tourists at Ground Zero assume a central function in constructing ‘dark’ tourism and, as such, play a key role in both the literal and the symbolic creation and maintenance of the (death) site. Indeed, tourists at Ground Zero are integral participative agents in the socio-cultural production, consumption, performance and, ultimately, construction of a post-9/11 narrative.

For that reason, Ground Zero is a dark tourism site in the sense that historical saliency or, in other words, an event that witnessed brutality and death as well as heroism and selflessness, perturbed a collective consciousness and, subsequently, has been touristically produced and consumed. Of course, many tourists will have particular motivations for visiting Ground Zero, not least those that revolve around seeing the site for real rather than through the lens of the media. However, what is more important, perhaps, and regardless of the initial motivation to visit, is the sense of feeling and meaning that such visits can engender, particularly that which focuses upon a consequential deliberation of life, death and, ultimately, mortality. The idea of thanatopsis — that is, the reflection and contemplation of death and dying — and its role within dark tourism consumption is well rehearsed within the literature (Seaton 1996, 1999; Stone and Sharpley 2008; Stone 2009c, 2011a, 2011b). Yet, Sather-Wagstaff (2011: 74), in her ethnography of Ground Zero, argues that ‘thanatopsis as the acceptance of death and dying is infrequently the result that visitation to such sites engenders’.
However, and rather perplexingly, she appears to contradict her own claim that contemplation of mortality is seldom engendered by dark tourism experiences. Particularly, she comments that one of her research interviewees did indeed reflect upon his life and death after visiting Ground Zero:

He reflected on how his life and possible death were so closely linked to the events, not only making the World Trade Centre a national historical site and the events of 9/11 an important moment in his nation’s history but also marking the event and the aftermath as having an even deeper emotional significance to him.

(Sather-Wagstaff 2011: 75)

The contradiction is continued when Sather-Wagstaff states that ‘tourists are [emphasis added] engaging in the contemplation of death and dying and memorialising the dead, and through doing so, they are situating emotional and politicalised selves in an ongoing narrative of local, national, and international tragedy and its aftermath’ (2011: 76). Therefore, in order to add much needed clarity as to whether tourist experiences at Ground Zero engender a degree of thanatopsis, this chapter now turns to empirical evidence. Particularly, the chapter now reveals dark tourism at Ground Zero does indeed allow a spatial and cognitive opportunity – at least for some visitors for some of the time – to contemplate, however briefly, mortality of the Self through consuming the Other dead. First, a brief discussion of the research methodology provides a framework for subsequent empirical findings.

Research methodology

This research arises from a simple yet fundamental interest in the social reality of death, and how mortality is not only manufactured within contemporary society but also how modern death and dying are contemplated. Thus, this study adopts an inductive phenomenological research philosophy with the overall aim of better understanding the consumption of dark tourism within contemporary perspectives of death. Using ethnographic methods of (covert) participant observations and semi-structured interviews in a progressive and sequential manner, the research was conducted between 17 and 23 February 2009 within the Tribute WTC Visitor Center – located at 120 Liberty Street, Lower Manhattan, New York City – as well as in and around Liberty Street (i.e. the area known as Ground Zero). The Tribute WTC Visitor Center, a project of the September 11 Families Association, is opposite the original Twin Towers and adjacent to ‘Ladder 10’ fire station, which sent the first wave of fire-fighters to the World Trade Center on 9/11. The Center houses a series of exhibitions depicting the events leading up to, during and after 9/11 (Table 5.1). Additionally, the Center organises guided walking tours around the perimeter of Ground Zero, culminating in a dedicated viewing platform area that provides tourists with a panoramic view of the construction site.

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<th>Gallery title</th>
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<td>Gallery 1</td>
<td>Experience the memory of the lively community that was lost</td>
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<td>Gallery 2</td>
<td>Journey through the events of 11 September 2001</td>
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<td>Gallery 3</td>
<td>Rescue and recovery</td>
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<td>Gallery 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gallery 1</td>
<td>Examines the World Trade Center pre-9/11 attack, including retail, residential and commercial communities of Lower Manhattan.</td>
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<td>Gallery 2</td>
<td>Outlines a timeline of the events leading up to the attacks on the World Trade Center, and depicts the actual attacks themselves.</td>
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<td>Gallery 3</td>
<td>Highlights the initial rescue efforts by the uniformed services on 9/11, as well as subsequent recovery operations post-9/11. Includes hundreds of missing person flyers which friends and family posted in the area in an attempt to locate victims in the aftermath.</td>
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<td>Gallery 4</td>
<td>Exhibits symbolic objects of victims donated by family members, as well as photographs of the dead and a multi-media projection of the names of the deceased.</td>
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<td>Gallery 5</td>
<td>Dedicated space for visitors to enter into a dialogue with the Tribute WTC Visitor Center, with an opportunity to write thoughts and opinions on postcards. Additional gallery space promotes narratives of tolerance and generosity, as well as highlighting experiences of people who were present in Lower Manhattan on 9/11.</td>
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Participant observation is an ethnographic method that seeks to understand context of everyday life and proved particularly effective for this research by highlighting tourists in relatively unstructured social interactions. Furthermore, by directly, and covertly, experiencing the activities under observation – what Scott and Usher (1999) identify as ‘direct experiential value’ – the participant observations provided opportunities to inductively build or guide explanations on the behaviour of people within a specific dark tourism environment. Meanwhile, the second stage of the research utilised semi-structured interviews which drew from a convenience sample of 16 adult respondents, all of whom were visitors to the Tribute WTC Visitor Center. Respondents were from the UK, USA, France, Australia, Ireland, Finland, Canada and Chile, with a ratio of four males to 12 females. Interviews were conducted within the spirit of ‘co-authored narratives’ and characterised by an appreciation for the interviewee’s responses as a ‘joint social creation’ (Kvale 1996). In short, interviews were conducted within a context of narrative conception and flexibility, which sought to understand key informants within a complex social and cultural situation.

Of course, this research has particular limitations, not least that of a relatively limited female-centric sample size, as well as issues of respondent life stage,
health status or religious/cultural nuances. Moreover, because of research design constraints, this study does not generalise its findings to all dark tourism experiences. Rather, the research suggests emergent findings be used as a context to frame future phenomenological research within a variety of socio-cultural environments, and to illustrate the level of support of dark tourism as a contemporary mediating institution of mortality. The research at Ground Zero highlighted a number of significant issues that have been translated under two broad themes. First, the theme of 'space, place and a mediation of mortality' suggests a contested sacred space at Ground Zero and its emergent restitution as a place of mediation between dead Others and the living Self. Second, the theme of 'semiotics: signs of life (through death)' reveals a semiology of Ground Zero which individuals consume to construct meanings of past death in order to comprehend present life and future living. Hence, it is to these two ethnographic themes that this chapter now turns.

Space, place and a mediation of mortality

Whilst Ground Zero is a location of mass murder, the actual site and its vicinity are largely a collection of analogous commercial buildings, or buildings under construction, that will serve as integral components of a broader service sector economy. Arguably, therefore, Ground Zero as an area is slowly evolving from a space of tragedy and destruction that is occupied by mourners, into a place of trade and construction that will be (re)occupied by merchants. Currently, however, a multitude of people coexist at Ground Zero, all with differing reasons for consuming and occupying the space at any particular time. Moreover, these disparate groups intertwine with one another within the geographical confines of Lower Manhattan: shoppers, tourists, office staff, relatives of the 9/11 deceased, emergency workers, street vendors, vagrants, commuters, and so on. Yet, this is a space designed not only for the living but also as a site of homicide, a place of commemoration. Thus, it is not only a space of death but also a place for the living.

Hence, an evident theme to emerge from the fieldwork data related to how the space, particularly the sense of scale of Ground Zero, appeared to act as mediator between the dead and the living. Particularly, the research revealed how consuming the place mediates between the past and the present, as well as providing a narrative for the future. Indeed, evidence emerged about how visitors triangulate their experiences between what they had previously heard, seen or read through media narratives of 9/11 with that of a 'feel for the place'. Consequently, emotional encounters within the public space of Ground Zero allowed individuals to construct private meanings. As a French male interviewee states:

We've come to the Twin Towers, and really we didn't expect the site to be so big ... its massive!! ... it looked much smaller on TV ... it is not until you get here [referring to the Tribute WTC Visitor Center] that you get a feel for the place. It's an extraordinary feeling, we went on the audio tour around Ground Zero, and listening to that and those recollections of that fateful day and the days that followed, you really get a sense of the sheer scale of the devastation and the amount of people killed that day ... I have found the whole experience deeply moving.

(GZ Interviewee 1: Interviews 2009)

Ground Zero as an 'empty space' appears spatially great, perhaps not only because of potentially deceptive imagery of the original Twin Towers, but also because of the compact design of New York City generally. Obviously, urban planners have maximised the geography of Manhattan Island to include as many skyscrapers and other buildings as possible, yet this provides individuals, especially those visitors who are not from New York, with an ostensible perception of an overwhelming sense of 'structural dominance' (Observations 2009). Once the visitor enters the Ground Zero landscape which, at the time of writing, was a large cordoned-off construction site, the sense of scale and area of destruction in such a built-up and urbanised space are seemingly more pronounced than, say, in a more open-planned urban environment. Thus, an Australian female interviewee (a member of a group of four females) states:

We're on a five day shopping trip, and we must admit we haven't visited this place on purpose [referring to Ground Zero] - we were actually going to Century 21 [a large retail department store on the east side of the Ground Zero site], but we walked out of the subway station and this vast space in the middle of the other skyscrapers just hits you ... it's a very chilling and surreal experience.

(GZ Interviewee 2: Interviews 2009)

Of course, there is a notion of serendipity for the visit for this individual, as well as the spatial influence of the site, yet an American female interviewee suggested the (dead) space had to be formalised and reconstructed for the visitor:

I have not been down here since last year [2008], and I heard on the radio the other day that the site is still a big hole in the ground. I know as a New Yorker that the authorities are pressing forward to see the construction completed as quickly as possible ... I know it looks a big mess now, but a place has to be built for the millions of us who want to see it and where those poor people were murdered.

(GZ Interviewee 3: Interviews 2009)

It is here where the spatial (dis)junction of life and death becomes evident. Indeed, Ground Zero and its array of contested narratives may arbitrate between those who survived 9/11, or who witnessed the events unfold, and those who perished in the attacks. Consequently, the construction of a place for the untimely but significant dead, or in any case a place to remember their fate, must follow destruction (that is, death) of the living. Arguably, therefore, Ground Zero as a space is as much about mediation, contemplation and reflection of life
It is impossible to come here and not feel overwhelmed – by both the place and the actual size of it. My entire family fought back the urge to just stand in there [referring to the Tribute WTC Visitor Center] and sob as we read the names – we looked at the photographs and all those little personal items of the victims. ... We've come out here [outside the Center and across from Ground Zero] and took turns to peek through the holes in the fence at the building site. ... We’ve also been peeking inside the fire station doors [referring to Ladder 10 fire station adjacent to the WTC Visitor Center] and looking at the memorials inside the fire station. ... Then we walked around and looked at the bronze mural on the wall and all the names and photos of the firemen who died ... got to say, we leave New York on Friday [20 February 2009] with an eternal imprint on ourselves. ... It's a really sad place, and it's made me think what I would have done if I had been stuck up there [referring to the Twin Tower buildings].

(GZ Intervieweew 4: Interviews 2009)

Of course, peeking inside the perimeter of the construction site or inside the fire station is, perhaps, simply a way of attempting to access the space and comprehend what was before, what is now, and what will follow. Conceivably however, Ground Zero for this individual and her attempt to access it intercedes with her reflective account of what she would have done if she had been faced with a similar fate as those trapped in the Twin Towers on 9/11. It is here that her spatial experience of Ground Zero arbitrates in her own life-world reflections, in her own sadness of the event, and her personal pondering of a hypothetical mortality moment – that is, if she had been in the World Trade Center on 9/11.

An Irish male interviewee also indicates this reflective theme by suggesting an attachment of the sanctity narratives to Ground Zero which are generated by a sense of spatial awareness and locational authenticity:

It’s really interesting being here ... it certainly worth a look just to see how horrible 9/11 really was, and the Center [referring to the Tribute WTC Visitor Center] really put things into context for me ... but out here [Ground Zero] I can’t believe how many buildings are still under renovation. I guess if people are interested in seeing the site, then they had better hurry, because I imagine this place will soon be full of skyscrapers again. ... Our guide said that they are not rebuilding on top of the World Trade Center directly since its now sacred ground.

(GZInterviewee5: Interviews 2009)

Whilst the redesign of Ground Zero has been protracted, especially during the planning stages in 2003 and 2004 (Jacobs 2008), the so-called footprints of the former Twin Towers, that is, the actual ground space of the original buildings, have taken on extra significance. Indeed, the September 11 Families Association campaigned for the actual footprint space not to be commercially developed because to them this constituted a gravesite and, thus, sacred ground. Consequently, as part of the official WTC Memorial 'Reflecting Absence', which partially opened on 11 September 2011, and is due to be fully open by mid-2013, the footprints of the original Twin Towers will be filled with water. Hence, the artistic rendering of the memorial will create a symbolic and reflective mediating space where individuals may reconcile the events of 9/11 within their own psycho-social life-world and where the dead, or at least a commemoration of the dead, are interfaced with everyday living. Importantly, however, it is this notion of sanctity of space that allows, for some individuals at least, the process of arbitration between the dead and the living. In short, the public space of Ground Zero allows for the private contemplation of relationships between a 'dark legacy' and its transformation into a 'dark heritage' within the confines of (dark) tourism. However, at the time of this research, there appeared to be a sense of frustration amongst some visitors generated by restricted access to Ground Zero and a desire to 'get up close and personal' to the actual site of death – that is, the actual building footprints. The mitigation of any potential mediating effects is noted by a female Finnish interviewee:

We've come here [Ground Zero] expecting to see the imprint area of the Twin Towers, but didn't realise that the entire area would be fenced off ... it's pretty difficult to see anything through the fences [that surround the perimeter of the building site] ... this is such a historic and hallowed place and we really haven't experienced the impact of the site, which is a bit disappointing ... I think it will be better to visit the site again when they've completed the building work ... and will be more suitable to pay your respects when it's completed.

(GZ Interviewee 6: Interviews 2009)

Thus, perceptions of the space as a 'hallowed place' and subsequent notions of sanctity are again apparent. Yet, also evident are frustrations at the current state of the (building) project and disenchantment amongst some visitors at being denied access to the actual 'traumascapes', that is, the actual site of destruction, the point of collapse, the 'true' ground zero (Obs 2009). As a Canadian female interviewee noted:

I know we cannot get to the actual site, but to be honest, this is close enough for me ... I think we'll return when the Freedom Tower [the main building currently under construction] is completed and see the water features ... but, today it's been great being here just to soak up the sadness of the whole place and reflect on what happened ... it is really put my life and my own mortality into perspective ... I know we all have to go to some point someday, but the way these guys died is just horrible ... horrible ... I would hate to be faced with the same fate.

(GZInterviewee 7: Interviews 2009)
Evidently then, the spatial aspect of Ground Zero does provide a contemporary mediating place to contemplate and reflect upon how people were killed, why they died and what their deaths may mean, both individually and collectively. Additionally, visitors appear to be locating themselves within the imagination of the tragedy and, consequently, pondering their own mortality and life-worlds. Ultimately, however, the present condition of Ground Zero, both as a physical place of (re)construction and also, and perhaps more importantly, as a psychosocial space with attached emotional and contested narratives, is a site of mediation between the dead and the living. However, it is a site currently in flux through its emergent restitution, both as a mercantile place for the living, and also as a memory space for the dead.

Semiotics: signs of life (through death)

The issue of various emotional, cultural and political narratives invested in 9/11 as an historic event, both individually and collectively, together with a great deal of available ‘signage’ of the atrocity, either through a variety of texts, audio accounts or images, ensure a particular semiology of Ground Zero. Thus, an evident theme emerged from the ethnographic data that focused on how individuals seemingly both provide and are provided with ‘emotional markers’ in order to utilise a tourist site of death. In short, visitors appear to consume Ground Zero and its inherent symbolism to construct meanings of past death in an attempt to comprehend present life and future living. Related to the theme of Ground Zero as a place of mortality mediation, as previously discussed, the theme of semiotics revealed how visitors reflect upon touristic signs and heritage interpretations of death and tragedy. These interpretations have largely been formalised by the Tribute WTC Visitor Center, though what is important for this study is how the visitor experience at the Center engenders a sense of life and death by gazing and consuming the macabre and mass murder.

For instance, a particular exhibit at the Tribute WTC Visitor Center which depicts heroism and courage, especially from the emergency services who attended the 9/11 attacks, also narrates tales of gallantry from ordinary civilians who were caught up in the events. Specifically, in Gallery 2, which takes the visitor through a timeline of 9/11 events, visitors are provided with evidence of how ordinary people helped and supported one another in an extraordinary situation. Consequently, the Center offers emotional markers to visitors through its (re)presentation of tragedy. Moreover, the visitor experience engenders a sense of embodiment by accounts of valour and intrepidness, especially by those ‘ordinary’ people who faced adversity and death. In turn, these tales of tragedy inspire a sense of munificence, as an American female interviewee who lived in New York states:

My son has just graduated from the fire academy here in New York… so for me, this place is very emotional. My whole family and I were down here last anniversary… and all day people kept coming up and thanking my son for being a fire-fighter … the people of New York City are wonderful … they come up on the street or in the subway while he [her son] was in his uniform and wanted to shake his hand… I think this place [Tribute WTC Visitor Center] is such an important reminder, and I’m glad we can come and recover … it’s important to have a place set up to pay tribute to all the lives lost and never forget.

(GZ Interviewee 8: Interviews 2009)

To help construct a sense of tribute, images and memorabilia of the Fire Department of New York (FDNY) are strategically deployed within the Tribute WTC Visitor Center to invoke a sense of gallantry of those who directly confronted the atrocity. Whilst visitors do undoubtedly want to pay respect to the uniformed emergency services, there are also indications that images of the disaster and subsequent narratives of heroism are manipulated to provoke (national) pride and a sense of duty. Particularly, the widely publicised photograph of three FDNY fire-fighters raising the USA flag on rubble at Ground Zero in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, which echoed the famous photograph of American marines planting the USA flag on Mount Suribachi on Iwo Jima in 1945 after defeating the Japanese, is displayed prominently within the Tribute WTC Visitor Center. Consequently, the iconic image that has become metaphorical of a contemporary stoic American spirit plays a central role in (re)constructing official representations of (national) grief, hope and recovery from acts of terrorist atrocity and murder.

It is here, encapsulating in celluloid the moment when ‘ordinary heroes’ reclaim Ground Zero by planting a flagstaff, a ritual often observed for marking the capture of enemy terrain, where triumph or, at least the notion of a future victory, is signified. Thus, the Tribute WTC Visitor Center describes narratives, displays symbols through various artefacts, videos and photographs, and, overall, recites tales of a group rescue effort on 9/11. However, the emphasis of American military might is transferred to the ‘common man’ (to a large extent, the fire-fighter) who works in concert with his neighbours and where ‘victory’ will ultimately prevail. As an American female interviewee stated:

the presentation [referring to the Tribute WTC Visitor Center] did a beautiful job of telling the story of 9/11 through its videos, photos, the recovered articles and all those personal stories… I really feel sorrow for all the families who lost loved ones and for the rescue people who had to endure such horrific conditions to do their job… I tell you, I will sleep more soundly in my bed tonight knowing those guys [referring to the emergency services] are out there.

(GZ Interviewee 9: Interviews 2009c)

As well as providing emotional markers of those who survived the events, which are essentially an assimilation of real-life (heroic) stories of people who faced death, or had to deal with the dead, the Tribute WTC Visitor Center also offers
signage of the actual dead. Specifically, the Center displays hundreds of ‘missing person’ posters and flyers that relatives and friends spontaneously put up around Lower Manhattan in the immediate aftermath of the attacks in an attempt to locate missing individuals (Figure 5.1). In particular, Gallery 3 displays a montage of amateur flyers, clearly compiled in haste, all with various photographs of the victims, contact information and details of their last known location. The visitor is not only provided with symbolic signs of hope (of finding the missing), but also real signs of anguish from loved ones and friends whose purpose in originally displaying the flyers was to help locate missing people. Invariably, however, many of the missing person flyers, which now have morphed into a collective epitaph, allow the visitor to gaze paradoxically upon despair and desperation, yet also hope and optimism of those who sought those missing.

However, it is in Gallery 4 which is simply entitled ‘Tribute’, where visitors realise that many of those who are depicted in the missing person flyers are in fact dead. The Gallery comprises a wall inscribed with almost 3,000 names of people killed on 9/11, as well as those killed in the earlier attacks in 1993. Additionally, a roll call of victims’ names, ages and occupations is presented on a large television screen on a continuous four-and-a-half-hour loop, paying a perpetual tribute to the victims. Solemn piped music is also played quietly in the background which creates a reverent atmosphere, and with tissue boxes strategically placed around the gallery space, the visitor/viewer is essentially ‘emotionally invigilated’ into sentimental reflection of those who died (Figure 5.2).

Perhaps the most striking feature of Gallery 4 is the hundreds of photographs and personal items of the victims donated by their families and displayed against two walls. The photographs portray the dead in routine day-to-day activities and ordinary situations. For example, there are images of a father playing ball with his son, a young woman in her graduation gown, a family on holiday on a beach, and a grandmother posing next to a Christmas tree. Additionally, tangible items belonging to the victims, such as baseball gloves, football shirts and other personal trinkets, add to a sense of loss. One of the most poignant ‘emotional markers’ displayed in the Gallery is a small hand-made heart-shape card which had been designed and coloured with crayons by a pre-school boy called Kevin Hagg. His father, Gary Hagg, aged 36, was Vice President for Marsh and McLennan, a US based professional services and insurance brokerage company, located in the North Tower of the World Trade Center. Marsh and McLennan offices suffered a direct hit when American Airlines Flight 11 crashed into the building. Gary Hagg died instantly. The emotive message on the card from his young son simply reads:
To Daddy, I hope you are having a great time in heaven. I Love You. Love, Kevin.

It is this sense of the ordinariness of the victims, that is, ordinary people in ordinary situations who faced an extraordinary event, and of victimhood and innocence, that provokes sentiment in the visitor. Indeed, the average age of those who were killed on 9/11 was just 40 years old. While the majority of visitors viewed the Tribute Gallery in a sombre and respectful silence, there were visitors who were crying, some openly, whilst they looked at photographs and read personal messages, although whether these particular individuals had a relationship with the deceased was not clear. Nevertheless, whilst emotional responses from a diverse range of people will invariably be different, the representation and signage of the ordinary but significant dead, in this particular exhibit at least, does seemingly engender some reflection of mortality, as well as reactions and responses to personal life-worlds. As a female British interviewee states:

This place [referring to the Tribute WTC Visitor Center] is both heart-warming and heartbreaking at the same time ... it's very informative and seeing all the visual stuff of debris, memorabilia and photographs of the many people who passed away made me appreciate more the Ground Zero site, and I must admit of my own family.... But those missing person flyers and pictures of those who died with the names did it for me ... I couldn't look at the missing person flyers on the walls for some reason. It was too hard for me and brought tears to my eyes. I had to turn away. To see that many people die was too hard ... I kept thinking of what I would have done if my husband went missing - would I put a flyer up? I don't know, but it makes you wonder, which perhaps is the hardest part of it.

(GZ Interviewee 10: Interviews 2009)

Similarly, another female interviewee (from Chile) suggested her visitor experience reminded her of the recent death of her father, who had not been killed on 9/11, but simply died of natural causes. She goes on to state:

The whole thing, all those photographs and trinkets and that, just reminded me of my father; I don't know why, but looking at the people who died, I just kept seeing his face.

(GZ Interviewee 11: Interviews 2009)

While official interpretations provide 'memory markers' of the deceased, visitors locate and imagine themselves in the same or similar situations as those ordinary people who have died, or moreover, reflect upon general mortality within their own psycho-social life-world. This reflection is formalised in Gallery 5 where an official space is provided to record visitors' own 'signage' in the form of individual comment cards. These postcards, in turn, have come to represent a kind of 'moral marker'. Specifically, once the visitor leaves Gallery 4 and its portraits of the dead, they descend downstairs through a plethora of origami paper chains, donated by the Japanese government as symbols of healing and peace. The origami chains and their inherent symbolism valorise Gallery 5, which is entitled 'Voices of Promise', and, consequently, the space is officially opened up to promote peace and understanding. Thus, whilst the dead are left behind in the galleries upstairs, the living descend to begin the act of communication of moral tales about the 9/11 atrocity and its consequences.

Once inside Gallery 5, visitors are invited to read a collection of postcards left by other visitors that provide a brief indication of personal views and opinions. To contribute and continue the 'moral conversation', visitors are invited to write down their own views, to express how they feel and, ultimately, to leave personal moral markers for other visitors to read (Figure 5.3). Indeed, since 2006, 72,000 cards in 46 languages from 118 countries have been left at the Center. Approximately 200 of these cards have been 'selected' by the Center and are displayed on a wall against an official message of tolerance and peace (Figure 5.4).

It is here that moral conversations are not only sanctioned but encouraged as the living attempt to come to terms with life through death (and the dead). As a result, personal messages litter the gallery space, signifying and anticipating a better future. During observations, an opportunity presented itself to undertake

Figure 5.3 Visitors gather in Gallery 5 inside the Tribute WTC Visitor Center, New York, to record 'moral judgements' on postcards (Photograph: © P. R. Stone (2009)).
a rudimentary content analysis of 50 individual comment cards, located in a file in Gallery 5. Out of the 50-card sample, all written in English, 11 keywords were extracted against a simple criterion that a single word had to appear at least five times in order to confer a greater sense of validity through its repetition. The frequency of these keywords, as they appeared within the sample of comment cards is illustrated in Figure 5.5, whilst Figure 5.6 shows the percentage of keywords utilised.

Of course, this content analysis is limited in its design, simply due the opportunity discovery of the comment cards during covert participant observations and the fact that the cards were bundled and presented in a file for public viewing, thus providing ease of access. Hence, the researcher only had concealed scrutiny of them for a very limited period. Despite these limitations, the results do indicate a majority of comments are positive in nature. In particular, words such as ‘hope’ (82 per cent), ‘peace’ (74 per cent) and ‘love’ (54 per cent), used in a visitor centre which showcases the murders of thousands of people, suggest visitors are constructing a meaning of mortality that focuses not on the actual death itself, but on life, and on future aspirations of both individual and collective harmony. Of course, visitor comments illustrate a great deal of ‘sadness’ (72 per cent), but ‘anger’ (30 per cent) as a corresponding feeling is less pronounced.

Additionally, comments that commemorate the dead through the word ‘remember’ (80 per cent) offer a paying of respect to the deceased and their families. However, the term ‘remember’ also suggests, perhaps, the notion of remembering events pre-tragedy and post-tragedy, subsequently informing cultural and political responses, not only of how to deal with the atrocity but, importantly, for the atrocity not to occur again. Significant, however, and certainly within this
theme of semiotics, are the positive words that provide signage for other visitors which, consequently, allow a conveying of messages that signify broader concepts of peace, hope and understanding. Despite potential issues of censorship or moderation of visitor comments cards by the Tribute WTC Visitor Center, what is apparent is the Center’s interpretative philosophy of communication, commemoration and education of (tragic) death. Evidently then, individual visitors play an engaging and performative role through emotional embodiment with official representations of 9/11. Ultimately, this sense of embodiment ensures that the significant dead (victims) provide signs for the ordinary living (visitors), which, in turn, allows for aspirations of hope, peace and tolerance, as well as brief but important thanatopic contemplations of death, dying and mortality.

Ground Zero and dark tourism: mediating mortality moments

Death is a fundamental underpinning to life and to the order of life. As Metcalf and Huntington (1991: 2) aptly note, ‘life becomes transparent against the background of death’. In other words, death (and its thanatological analysis) can reveal the most central social and cultural processes and values and, consequently, becomes a catalyst that, ‘when put into contact with any cultural order, precipitates out the central beliefs and concerns of a people’ (Kearl 2009: 1). On an individual level, however, exposure to death events, especially events such as 9/11 that create a collective effervescent moral conversation about mortality moments, can crystallise and invigorate the Self’s own life pathway (Kearl 2009; Stone 2009a). Hence, for the purpose of this chapter, it is assumed that individuals’ death anxiety and experience of grief are strongly structured by their own social environment and personal life-worlds (Tercier 2005). Thus, the logic moves from the cultural order, that is, the broad realm of social reality that augments and shapes our collective cognitions, emotions and behaviours, to that of the institutional orders, such as religion, politics, mass media or indeed dark tourism. It is these institutions that (indirectly) filter and mould our mortality experiences and actions and directly influence the individual order.

With this in mind, Ground Zero and the Tribute WTC Visitor Center as an institution of dark tourism display death and dying: the ‘dark legacy’ of 9/11 and its dead are recreated and packaged up within a ‘dark heritage’ exhibitionary memorial experience and consumed within socially sanctioned confines of ‘dark tourism’. Hence, a number of significant themes have emerged from this study. These themes address how the dead co-habit a world with the living through their continued exhibitionary existence and how the space of Ground Zero acts as a reflective place where visitor experiences are inextricably connected with mortality moments. However, the research also revealed how the exhibited dead take on significance, giving consequence to the reality of 9/11 which surfaces when visitors consume the ordinariness of the dead and, in turn, reflect upon broader conceptions of life and living as well as death, and dying. Consequently, this brings up notions of mediation and the Significant Other Dead.

The role of the Significant Other Dead

Throughout history, religious rituals have provided an ontological link between the dead and the living. In turn, religion, which has evolved from ancient practices of praying to ancestors and gods, has constructed ecclesiastical mechanisms that promote public and spiritual ‘traffic with the dead’ (Walter 2005). In particular, mourning rituals and subsequent prayers for the deceased provide intercession, for many, between those who have passed away and those who are yet to pass away. A Christian perspective suggests God ‘is not the God of the dead, but of the living (Matthew 22: 32); ‘for there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus’ (1 Timothy 2: 5). However, an increasingly prevalent secularised ideology suggests the ‘dead have no spiritual existence, so communication with the dead soul is not so much wrong as impossible’ (Walter 2005: 18). Thus, secularism, as a feature of contemporary society, may be considered a ‘barrier ideology’, cutting the living from the dead soul (Walter 2005). Indeed, Stroeb and Schut (1999) argue that the contemporary (western) individual has little choice but to reconstruct a life without the (their) dead. This is particularly the case when the institutional sequestration of death is taken into account, whereby an apparent ‘absent/present’ death paradox exists within the public realm (Giddens 1991). In short, real death of the Self has been sequestered (or made absent) from the public gaze during the past 60 years or so, through processes of medicalisation, professionalisation of funerary practices, and a reduction in the scope of the sacred that has given rise to privatisation of meaning (Mellor 1993; Mellor and Shilling 1993; Willmott 2000). However, in its place is (re)created death, where the Significant Other Dead co-habit the living world (or are made present) through a plethora of mediating channels, including literature, architecture, monuments, the media, and so on (Harrison 2003). Stone (2011b) augments this sequestration thesis, advocating that mortality has been relocated from the family and community gaze to a back region of medics and death industry professionals to create a bad death (also Kellehear 2007). However, the modern Self still hopes for a ‘death with dignity’ or a good death, as depicted by quixotic ideals of Romanticism, which, arguably, still pervade a consciousness of modern-day mortality (Howarth 2007). Consequently, this apparent institutional sequestration of death raises notions of dread and potential issues of ontological security and personal meaningfulness for the individual Self within secular society (Giddens 1991). By way of ‘de-sequestering’ death, and making absent death present within the public realm, Stone and Sharpley (2008) suggest that (significant) modern-day death is revived through a substitute of recreated situations and memorialisation, including those found within dark tourism (re)presentations (also Stone 2009c).

Therefore, to suggest contemporary western society is wholly cut off from its dead, with no traffic between the two domains, is not entirely accurate. Indeed, Walter (2005) advocates there is considerable traffic, with several professions making a living out of the dead. In his ‘mediator death-work’ analysis, Walter examines those who work within the death, dying and disposal industry, including
spiritualist mediums, pathologists, obituaries, funeral directors, and so on. Arguably, those who produce dark tourism (re)presentations may join this mediator death-work, list, such as, for example, the Tribute WTC Visitor Center. Walter goes on to note Philippe Ariès' claim of modern unfamiliarity with the dead and states, 'if Ariès is right that it is lack of familiarity that makes death dangerous and wild, then mediator death workers re-tame it and enact this taming in public ritual' (2005: 19; also Ariès 1981). It is this notion of mediation/mediator and the 'taming of death' within public spaces, making absent death present, and its relationship with dark tourism consumption that this chapter has revealed. Indeed, the empirical research at Ground Zero suggests, albeit to varying degrees, evidence of a meaning of mortality for individuals, or at least the construction of mortality meaning within a dark tourism context. The empirical analysis also indicates mortality meaning was mediated by dark tourism (re)presentations of Other death, either through spatial and locational authenticity or specific symbolism that take on particular levels of significance to individuals.

Hence, the Other of Death as a defining feature of dark tourism (Seaton 2009) is important in the role of mediating between the living and the dead. Consequently, consuming dark tourism provides a potential opportunity to contemplate death of the Self through gazing upon the Significant Other Dead. As Harrison (2003: 158) notes:

The contract between the living and the dead has traditionally been one of indebtedness. ... The dead depend on the living to preserve their authority, heed their concerns, and keep them going in their afterlives. In return, they help us to know ourselves, give form to our lives, organise our social relations, and restrain our destructive impulses. They provide us with the counsel needed to maintain the institutional order, of which they remain authors...

Thus, the 9/11 dead take on a level of significance bestowed on them by the living and, in turn, the Significant Other Dead help maintain an institutional order of death that can mediate contemporary mortality moments. Therefore, dark tourism becomes a mediating institution within secular death sequestered societies, which not only provides a physical place to link the living with the dead, but also allows the Self to construct contemporary ontological meanings of mortality. Ultimately, dark tourism experiences at sites such as Ground Zero allow the Self to reflect and contemplate life and living, as well as to engender a sense of mortality through consuming the Significant Other Dead.

Conclusion

To be faced with a mortality moment is not necessarily the same as facing imminent death. Mortality moments exist whenever we have a sense of enquiry affecting our existential being; from learning of health maladies, to the loss of a loved one or the (tragic) demise of ordinary, but faraway people with whom we develop a pseudo connection with our own life-worlds. For many, the events of 9/11 created such mortality moments, not only for those who were caught up in the tragedy but also for those who consumed media images of the atrocity. The evolution of the event from a global live televised spectacle to a touristically produced sight allows for mortality moments to be relived and for our sense of being and finitude to be brought back into focus. Of course, to live is to die, yet within a secularised contemporary society many of us have become divorced from the social reality of death and dying. Instead, we have become enveloped with an almost ubiquitous (re)creation of death, where Other death is consumed at a distance and mediated through popular culture and the media. In lieu of traditional religious structures that offer guidance, control and, ultimately, a social filter to our sense of finitude, contemporary mediating institutions of mortality now offer (re)presentations of tragedy and death that have perturbed our individual and collective consciousness. Dark tourism is such an institution, and Ground Zero and the touristic consumption of the 9/11 atrocity has become part of dark tourism.

As such, the visitor experience at Ground Zero can engender a sense of thanatopsis and subsequent meanings of ontology, whereby visitors may reflect and contemplate both life and death through a mortality lens. Of course, it remains to be seen whether dark tourism experiences invoke a greater or lesser extent of ontological (in)security, and whether packaged-up death provides reassurance or threatens an individual's life-world. Moreover, as the space of Ground Zero matures into a memorial place, this study has simply captured the evolution of dark tourism at a particular 'product life cycle' stage. Nevertheless, individuals may formulate a personal and contemporaneous 'mortality capital' whereby contemplative experiences of the Significant Other Dead at Ground Zero provide for an existential mortality salience. In other words, against a contemporary secular backdrop of death sequestration, the 9/11 dead have brought death, or at least a certain kind of death, back into the public domain. In turn, the touristic production and consumption of the 9/11 dead have become significant in allowing the Self a socially sanctioned mechanism in which to explore death and dying, both the death of others and the mortality of oneself. Consequently, this mediated mechanism provides a capital from which the Self may draw on to aid thanatopsis. Therefore, dark tourism experiences as mortality capital allow for the construction of a contemporary social filter, in which the dead communicate with the living, but the living are protected from the dead.

Inevitably, dark tourism as a mediating institution of contemporary mortality raises further questions and, thus, future research avenues, about the role it plays in broader social practice and cultural dynamics, as well as in the ideation of tourism ethics, authenticity and identity of place. Specifically, future research should address dichotomic social scientific-religious tensions of how dark tourism not only provides for mediation of mortality for the individual Self, but also can cast a critical reflection upon the collective Self and how secular societies deal with death. This is particularly so if the resurrected Significant Dead Others are conceived to represent various dichotomous
socio-cultural or technological relations that may collide within secular society and, thus, contest narratives of both living and dying. Nonetheless, this particular study has specific implications, not least for the management and governance of 9/11 memorials and museums in particular, but dark tourism sites in general. Crucially, those who are responsible for the management and (re)presentation of ‘Other death’ at dark tourism sites need to recognise the role of particular sites as potential receptacles of mediation between the lives of visitors and their perspectives of mortality. This is particularly important considering the institutional sequestration of death, which to some at least, may instil a sense of ontological insecurity. To that end, dark tourism, which makes absent death present, is not so much about presenting narratives of death, but about representing narratives of life and living in the face of inevitable mortality. Ultimately, these narratives form the crux of a mortality capital in which the Significant Other Dead play a central role in our existential saliency.

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Participant observation and interview data cited in this chapter may found in Stone 2010b.

Dedication
This chapter is dedicated to all those who perished on 9/11 and to the families who still mourn their tragic loss, and to all visitors to Ground Zero who feel that 9/11 ‘made victims of us all’.

6 Towards an understanding of ‘genocide tourism’
An analysis of visitors’ accounts of their experience of recent genocide sites

Richard Sharpley

Introduction
On 6 April 1994, the president of Rwanda, as well as the president of neighbouring Burundi, died when the plane in which they were travelling was shot down above Kigali airport in Rwanda. To this day, it remains uncertain who was responsible for the rocket attack that brought down the aircraft. Some claim that it was the rebel Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a group of Tutsi refugees who were seeking to overthrow the president, a Hutu; others suggest it was Hutu extremists seeking a pretext to exterminate the Tutsi community. What is certain, however, is that the death of the Rwandan president almost immediately triggered a campaign of mass murder across the country, the great majority of victims being Tutsis and most of those who perpetrated the violence being Hutus (BBC 2008; Alluri 2009). In the 100 days that followed, an estimated 800,000 Rwandans were killed, the genocide only coming to an end when the Tutsi-led RPF captured Kigali, the capital of Rwanda, and established a multiethnic government. Subsequently, some two million Hutus, fearing retaliation, fled into neighbouring countries.

Since then, the country has remained relatively peaceful and, as a consequence, has experienced, amongst other things, the remarkable revival of its tourism industry. Indeed, it is has been suggested that the redevelopment of tourism has in fact made a significant contribution to the benefits the country has experienced from post-genocide peace and reconciliation, (Alluri 2009). Prior to the events of 1994, Rwanda had become an established tourist destination but the economy in general and the tourism sector in particular were devastated by the genocide. However, in the years that followed, tourism grew rapidly; receipts increased from just USS6 million in 1995 to USS202 million by 2008 (Nielsen and Spenceley 2010) whilst total tourist arrivals amounted to 826,374 in 2007, increasing to 980,577 in 2008 (NISR 2010). Moreover, whilst its contribution to Rwanda’s GDP remains limited, tourism has become the country’s largest source of foreign exchange earnings. For international non-African leisure tourists, mountain gorillas have, as they were prior to the genocide, once again become the main attraction.