

Death, Memorialization and Deviant Spaces

Matthew Spokes, Jack Denham and Benedikt Lehmann

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In *Death, Memorialization and Deviant Spaces* Matthew Spokes, Jack Denham and Benedikt Lehmann are interested in the intersection of difficult heritage, spatial theories and death. They use three cases studies: The Tyburn Gallows in York, Number 25 Cromwell Street in Gloucester and the Neumarkt in Dresden ‘to explore how three scalar case studies can assist us in understanding the memorialization of the difficult dead’. The book is a collective work, yet each author has taken the lead in exploring a particular case study; Spokes discusses Tyburn, Denham 25 Cromwell Street and, lastly, Lehmann takes us to the Neumarkt.

One of the things that drew me to this book was the term ‘difficult dead’, which the authors note is ‘their term for the situating of the dead in problematic spaces’. The authors use three different case studies, which I will discuss in more detail below, ‘to test the adaptability of Lefebvrian theory in relation to the memorialization of the difficult dead’. The book is indeed an in-depth engagement with spatial theory as proposed by French philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre, and while the authors take care in explaining Lefebvre’s spatial theories, little is done to unpack and explore the concept of difficult dead. The authors make great use of Lefebvre’s spatial triad and his theories concerning the production of social space. The three cases studies show in different ways how the representation of space (conceived space), representational space (lived space) and spatial practice (perceived space) work together in the creation of social space and how this is important in spaces with a difficult heritage. Given the clear theoretical interests of the

authors, I was disappointed they did not lend their analytical lens to the development of the concept of ‘difficult dead’. Beyond noting that the case studies are examples of difficult dead in the introduction, the term is not used again until the conclusion. And even there, there is no theoretical engagement with the term. Instead, the authors repeatedly refer to ‘difficult heritage’ throughout the book, which begs the question why they even mention difficult dead at all.

Matthew Spokes takes us to Tyburn, York, a place where for hundreds of years executions took place and thereby served as a ‘functional space of death, of spectacle, for an audience’. While not a place of hanging anymore, Spokes suggests this difficult heritage still lingers. There are complex dynamics in spaces with a difficult heritage, and how the purpose and the usage of a space changes over time. Spokes blends the present and the past, and spends time observing, recording and photographing the space in present day. Spokes argues that Tyburn is a ‘place of transit’, and this might be due to its difficult history. One of the observations he puts forward as proof of the transitionality of the space is the following: ‘My presence, replete with notebook, and AV equipment for taking photos and collecting short films, disrupted their leisure pursuit, and was met with confusion and tacit hostility as noted in the exchange *‘dog walker eyes me suspiciously as she downs the steps’*’. I was missing the gendered dimensions of space in his analysis, as I would not have taken this observation to mean that people are uncomfortable sitting down on the benches or stopping at Tyburn. Spokes implies that he is simply a neutral entity in the space, silently observing. But I would also be wary if a man with a lot of random equipment was suddenly sitting on a bench in my daily dog walk. Spokes seems to forget that while there might not be any executions taking place, this space can still very much be a dangerous space in the present day.

Number 25 Cromwell Street is the residency of serial killers Fred and Rose West. Where Spokes’ chapter focuses on lingering presence, Denham plays with the notion of a lingering absence. The house of Fred and Rose West no longer exists and is ‘a totally conspicuous attempt at removing memory from the physical space it occupies’. Denham did not visit the place, and has

based his analysis on archival research. Where Spokes' chapter was filled with photographs of Tyburn, there is not a single image in the chapter written by Denham. This adds to the sense of uncanny absence. In this chapter we see the challenging dynamics between forgetting and remembering. Has the absence of the house made it a more powerful place to remember the atrocities that took place there? The West residency (or the lack thereof) can be seen as an anti-memorial and is like Tyburn used to outline how conceived space, lived space and perceived space work together in challenging spaces. Denham notes that 'infamous places of death often suffer these contradicting performances, and the result is a highly contested lived space' which is particularly true for local residents.

The last example takes us to Neumarkt, Dresden, Germany. Since 2010, the remembrance of the Bombing of Dresden in World War 2 is accompanied by a protest against Neo-Nazi marches. Thousands of people form a human chain around the historic town centre so far-right marches cannot enter this space. Lehmann urges people in this chapter to 'think more carefully about the contemporary political landscape, what concern it deems appropriate and how this dynamic might manifest spatially'. This human chain is a pertinent example of how different layers of history, and different political beliefs systems all cohabit the same space. This chapter prompts important questions on who is allowed in what space, and what kind of protests should and should not be allowed. Lehmann keeps his analysis on a macro-level, and the anthropologist in me wished he had taken a more micro approach; throughout the chapter he continuously talks about the 'human chain' as a singular physical entity, but I would have wished to learn more about the individuals that make up the chain.

Death, Memorialization and Deviant Spaces is an interesting theoretical and analytical exercise. The authors build on the purposely unfinished theories laid out by Lefebvre and through three cases studies show how these theories can be applied to practical examples. Like Lefebvre's theories, the book is experimental and invites readers to be experimental in their future works. It is a

great starting point for people interested in difficult heritage, and will appeal to readers of the special issue 'Death and the Screen'. Furthermore, this analytical framework can be more broadly applied to spaces of the uncanny, supernatural and weird and thus might interest readers of *Revenant* more generally.