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Rust and dust: materiality and the feel of memory at Camp des Milles

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Keywords:	memory, materiality, sensory ethnography, minor gesture, lieux de mémoire
Abstract:	<p>In this article we explore the potential of state-sponsored memory sites to engender multi-chronological and sensorial accounts of the past, and create new meanings for visitors in doing so. We do so through recounting first hand experiences of the Camp des Milles, a Second World War internment and deportation camp in the south of France, near Aix-en-Provence. Inaugurated in 2012, in addition to being an official lieux de mémoire, Camp des Milles also has an explicit pedagogical function in seeking to raise awareness of racism and anti-semitism, and how to combat it. The article hinges on oral accounts of a visit to the site, and accompanying photographs, which together provide an empirical starting point for a series of linked concepts that frame our arguments. Beginning with Manning's (2015) notion of the 'minor gesture', we build on recent work on more-than-representational approaches to memory and place, and draw in explorations of materiality and industrial ruins. Overall, we call for a more subtle and atmospheric understanding of state-sponsored memory sites, one that attends to the emergent experiences people have in them, that can allow us to understand their affective impact much more clearly, and thus their potential to promulgate and intensify their messages.</p>

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Rust and dust: materiality and the feel of memory at *Camp des Milles*

Shanti Sumartojo, Matthew Graves

Introduction

In this article, we attend to the experience of one state-sponsored memory site, exploring how it gives rise to affective intensities that emerge through combinations of its spatial environments and the sensory perceptions and personal thoughts and memories of visitors who encountered them. We approach the site by way of embodied and subjective experiences that augment and exceed the narrative and representational understandings of museum and memorial sites. Instead, our more-than-representational approach opens the possibility of perceiving and making sense of memorial sites in much richer and more intimate ways, revealing how such sites work to stimulate visitors' senses and invoke their memories to craft new ways of understanding the past.

We ask how memory sites work on us and what potential for alternative and complex readings of the past may be possible. To do so, we link a series of concepts to help make sense of the intense and affecting entanglement of the built environment, materiality, memory, history and sensory perception in such places. Our approach highlights the past not as tidy or linear, like an archive to be accessed, recalled or considered in direct relationship to the present, 'available for instant replay in the mind or recountable as seamless, demystifying narratives' (Edensor 2005a: 845). Instead, we will discuss the experiential, dynamic and multi- or

1
2
3 achronological potential of the past, as it erupts into, pierces and frames the
4
5 present, and is called to the foreground of attention by the sensory perceptions and
6
7 material encounters that occur as we move through our surroundings. As such, these
8
9 emergent and sometimes disruptive intrusions of the past become part of how we
10
11 perceive and come to understand our environments, a rich resource not only to
12
13 make meaning, but to intensify and deepen it, to help it stick. This occurs as the
14
15 more-than-representational, affective and atmospheric aspects of space bubble up
16
17 by way of apprehensions of smell, light, sound and texture in unpredictable but
18
19 powerful ways. As Crouch (2015: 177) calls for, in this article we attend to the
20
21 'energies, feelings, affects and emotions wrapped up or available in our encounters
22
23 with heritage' seeking to peer into the intimate tangle of feeling, place and the past.
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25 Our intention, however, is not so much to unpick this skein as to begin to account for
26
27 how it can make the experiences of such sites meaningful, powerful and lasting.
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35 Such an approach is on the increase at the intersection of memory and cultural
36
37 geography, and new work that explores how memory might contribute to or conjure
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39 spatial atmospheres ripe with affective intensities is emerging rapidly. This includes
40
41 calls for memory to be more regularly attended to in non- and more-than-
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43 representational approaches (Jones 2011, Jones and Garde-Hansen 2012,
44
45 Drozdowski et al 2016a, 2016b), with new research in empirical settings in
46
47 museums (Waterton and Dittmer 2014, Witcomb 2013), memorials and
48
49 commemorative ceremonies (Sumartojo 2015, 2016) and everyday settings where
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51 memory might linger or unexpectedly reimpose itself on our consciousness (Muzaini
52
53 2015, Halilovich 2016, Edensor 2005a, 2005b). In this work, a subtle and atmospheric
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3 rendering of memory sites, one that attends to the emergent experiences people
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5 have in them, allows us to understand their affective impact much more clearly, and
6
7 thus their potential to promulgate and intensify their messages. It also connects to
8
9 scholarship in memory studies on the ‘intersections of sensation, experience, and
10
11 meaning that arise through our interactions with material forms’ (Freeman et al
12
13 2016: 4). This orientation to materials and the senses recognises that ‘we rarely
14
15 remember through ideas only, but rather through our encounters with things and
16
17 through embodiments and disembodiments collected in material traces and
18
19 objects’ (Freeman et al 2016: 3-4). With this in mind, we begin by describing our
20
21 research site and then present two accounts of experiences of the site, through
22
23 which we then trace a number of conceptual threads.
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30 ***The Camp des Milles***

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35 Camp des Milles is a French national memory site in the village of Les Milles, on the
36
37 southern outskirts of the city of Aix-en-Provence. It was a tile factory until 1939,
38
39 when it was transformed into an internment camp for ‘enemy aliens’ (including
40
41 German anti-fascists who had sought refuge in France). Following the Armistice of 22
42
43 June 1940, it became a holding and transition camp for foreign nationals and other
44
45 ‘undesirables’ seeking to leave the Vichy ‘free zone. The lengthy bureaucratic
46
47 processes meant that some people were detained here for up to two years, but in
48
49 this early period, it was still possible to leave France via processing at the camp. By
50
51 1942, however, its purpose had changed to the deportation of Jewish people, who
52
53 were arrested and detained by French officials, and sent by rail to Auschwitz via
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1
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3 Drancy. Despite the deportation of more than 2,000 people, including over a
4
5 hundred children and adolescents, after the war this history was voluntarily
6
7 forgotten and by 1947 it was a tile factory again, an industry that continued until the
8
9 early 1990s. After a decade-long fundraising and design process, the memorial site
10
11 was inaugurated in 2012 in a national ceremony led by Prime Minister Jean-Marc
12
13 Ayrault, and officially opened to the public. It is the only Second World War
14
15 internment camp preserved in France. It enjoys official status as a national 'haut lieu
16
17 de mémoire Français' and is a UNESCO Chair, in recognition of its pedagogical role at
18
19 an international level (Camp des Milles, n.d.).
20
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25

26 Camp des Milles seeks to create 'a link between the past and the present' in three
27
28 distinct sections dedicated to 'knowledge, emotion and reflection' (Camp des Milles:
29
30 32). These distinct spatial zones are explained in a short introductory film that begins
31
32 most visits. The first, historical section presents the local, national and international
33
34 context of the site, provides a timeline of the events preceding the war and also
35
36 displays artworks produced by internees alongside testimonies of survivors – we
37
38 have written about aspects of this area elsewhere (authors, *under review*). The
39
40 second section is designed as a memorial, where visitors have 'access to the traces
41
42 left by the prisoners' (Camp des Milles: 32). This takes the form of a walking route
43
44 through the different rooms and levels of the building itself, with explanatory text
45
46 showing the remaining graffiti on the walls, the use of different spaces and the
47
48 conditions that internees endured. The final section is dedicated to 'reflection', and
49
50 invites attendees to consider personal and collective responsibility for resisting
51
52 violence and discrimination. In text and some photographs of individuals, it gives
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2
3 examples of forms of resistance to official discriminatory policies and discusses how
4
5 such violence can become normalized and ultimately lead to genocide. Here, in
6
7 addition to its role as a site-specific museum and memorial, Camp des Milles also has
8
9 an explicit pedagogical mission beyond the chronology of the Second World War and
10
11 the Shoah, using the site's history to educate groups of schoolchildren and local
12
13 officials about racism, anti-Semitism and earlier and later genocides in Armenia and
14
15 Rwanda. This is intended to help build understanding of contemporary immigrant
16
17 groups and guard against the repetition of large-scale racial or religious
18
19 discrimination and violence.
20
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26 In this article, we focus on the experience of the middle section of the museum, the
27
28 passage through the partially restored factory that places visitors in an atmospheric
29
30 spatial environment and invites them to consider first-hand the sensory and material
31
32 experiences of internees. It centres around the large room that visitors encounter at
33
34 the beginning of this section. The photographs and accompanying short first hand
35
36 description from Shanti's fieldnotes make an introduction to the space.
37
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41

42 **Account 1**

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44
45

46 *As I step through the glass doors into the large, open space, the first thing I notice is*
47
48 *the cold. The room is unheated and the sunlight slicing in through the roof windows*
49
50 *does nothing to warm my chilly body, although the sun is bright and high. The light*
51
52 *plays along the walls, casting shadows of beams and hanging fixtures that crosscut*
53
54 *their mottled and pocked surfaces. The objects and equipment dotted around the*
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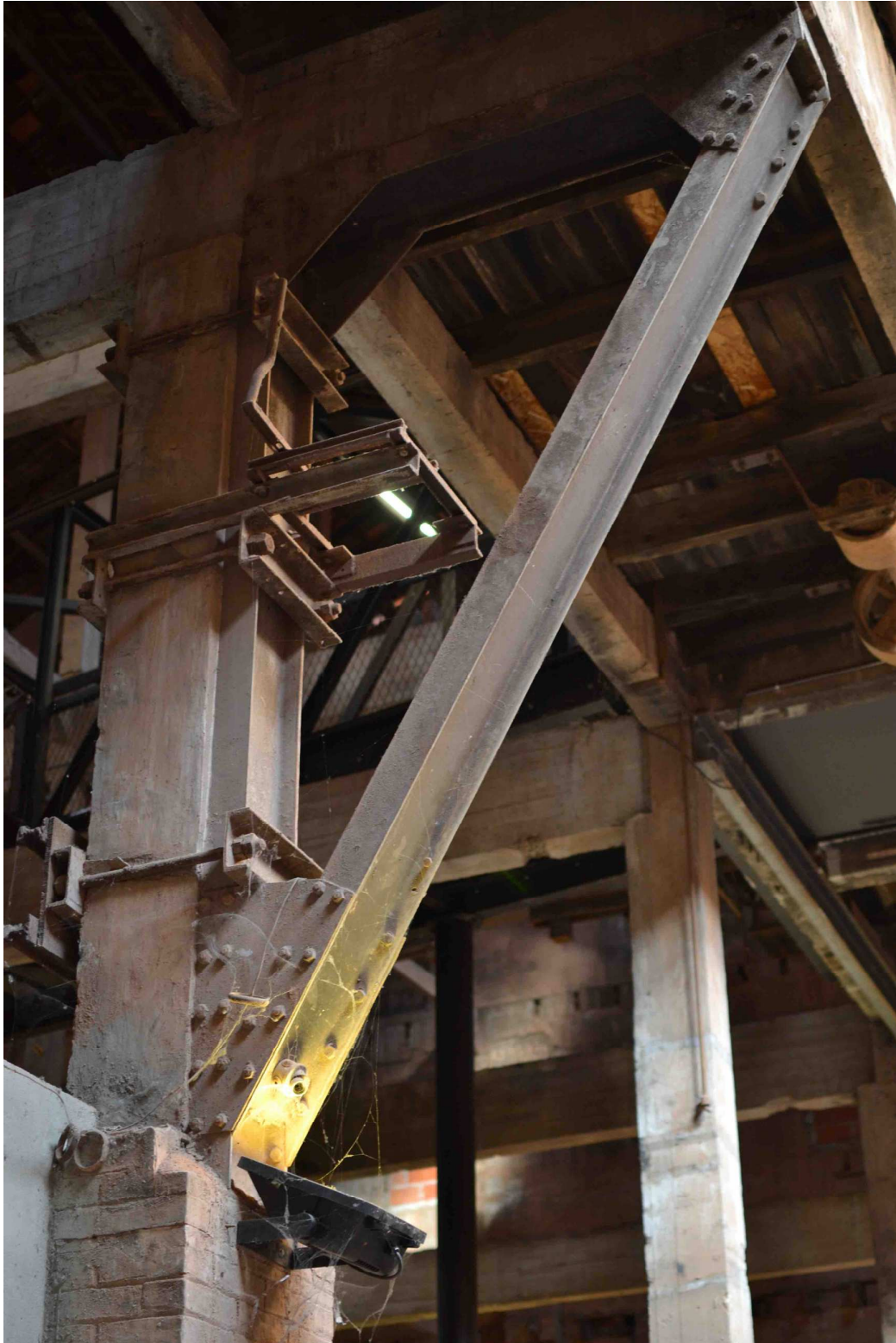
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3 *room – vaguely industrial, old-looking but difficult to actually place in time – appear*
4
5 *to have been arranged as a careful tableau, their materiality of iron and wood a*
6
7 *complement to the dusty ochres, browns and sandy tones of the walls and floor.*
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12 [INSERT IMAGES 1-4]
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Figures 1-4: The main room in the memorial section of Camp des Milles. Photos:
Shanti Sumartojo.

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5 In the atmospheric environment of this room, history and memory were thickened
6
7 through the sensory quality of the light, the cold, stinging touch of outside air, the
8
9 materiality of the built structures, the tones and patina of the walls and the dust,
10
11 feathers and pigeon droppings accumulated on the floors. The passage of time was
12
13 perceived, understood and reinforced in particular ways through the author's
14
15 material surrounds and sensory perceptions. This recalls Gillis' (1994: 5) comment
16
17 that 'memories are not things we think *about*, but things we think *with*' and begins
18
19 to show how memory *feels* in such a site, treating it as an imaginative, affective
20
21 category of experience, a result in part of how we are attuned to our surroundings.
22
23
24 In this sense, time has rendered place as affective in particular ways, which as we
25
26 will show, is not chronological, but mixes and melds different moments of
27
28 experience.
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35 The study we undertook at Camp des Milles was a digital sensory ethnography (Pink
36
37 2015) that sought to understand how our research participants experienced the site
38
39 by reaching beyond what they might simply describe using more conventional
40
41 methods. Instead, we sought to account for their sensory perceptions and embodied
42
43 responses, which included their own recollections of the past. Conducted in the
44
45 autumn of 2016, it was focused towards 'sensory perception and forms of embodied
46
47 knowing that are not necessarily understood through cognitive categories' (Pink et al
48
49 2016). We invited nine people – two men and seven women – to visit the site with
50
51 us, where we also made our own notes and photographs. Apart from one of the
52
53 authors, all the participants were either local to the area or had lived there for many
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1
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3 years. We all took photographs on our smartphones of the aspects that most drew
4
5 our attention. Because one aspect of the project was focused on digital technology,
6
7 we requested that participants try to represent some of these elements of the site in
8
9 their photographs, but otherwise left the choice of subject matter open.
10

11
12
13
14 A few days later, we video interviewed the participants individually, asking them to
15
16 explain why they took each photograph and the thoughts, feelings and sensory
17
18 perceptions they recalled from taking them.¹ In many of these interviews, stories
19
20 from participants' own pasts were used to interpret or frame their experience of the
21
22 site and their choice to photograph what they thought were its most striking
23
24 elements. Some participants had family histories that meant they related strongly to
25
26 the experiences of internees; others appeared to relate to physical aspects of
27
28 survivor testimonies in intimate ways; yet others felt connected because of their
29
30 local, regional identification. In all of these cases, the ways they experienced,
31
32 perceived and understood the site mixed the representational and more-than-
33
34 representational. In the analysis below, we focus on one account that exemplified
35
36 most strongly this mix, as well as the layering of time, the senses and the spatial
37
38 experience that other participants also reported. We also include an accompanying
39
40 digital image, made by participant Ben, a man in his mid-twenties who grew up in
41
42 the local area. We use his account and photograph to investigate three aspects of
43
44 the experience of the site that was also present in other participants' accounts, but
45
46 that he articulated most clearly.
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56 ¹ The study received RMIT university human ethics approval.
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3 As a way into this material, we begin by considering the movement of his hands as
4 he explained his photograph and the room it depicted, taking a starting cue from
5 Manning's (2016) notion of the 'minor gesture'. We then connect this to recent work
6 on memory and the sensorial, in an attempt to make sense of the multi-
7 chronological nature of Ben's account and its entanglement in a specific sensory
8 encounter. Finally, we grapple with the materiality at the heart of his experience,
9 attending to the perception of industrial decay to which he was particularly attuned
10 and that triggered his memory and imagination. We conclude with some comments
11 on how our approach can shed light on the politics and potential of state-sponsored
12 memory sites in general. First, however, we turn to Ben's photograph and
13 description of his reaction to the room that he related when we asked him to explain
14 the choice and subject matter of his panoramic photograph.

32 Account 2

37 [INSERT FIGURE 5]



55 Figure 5: B's panorama image of the same room.

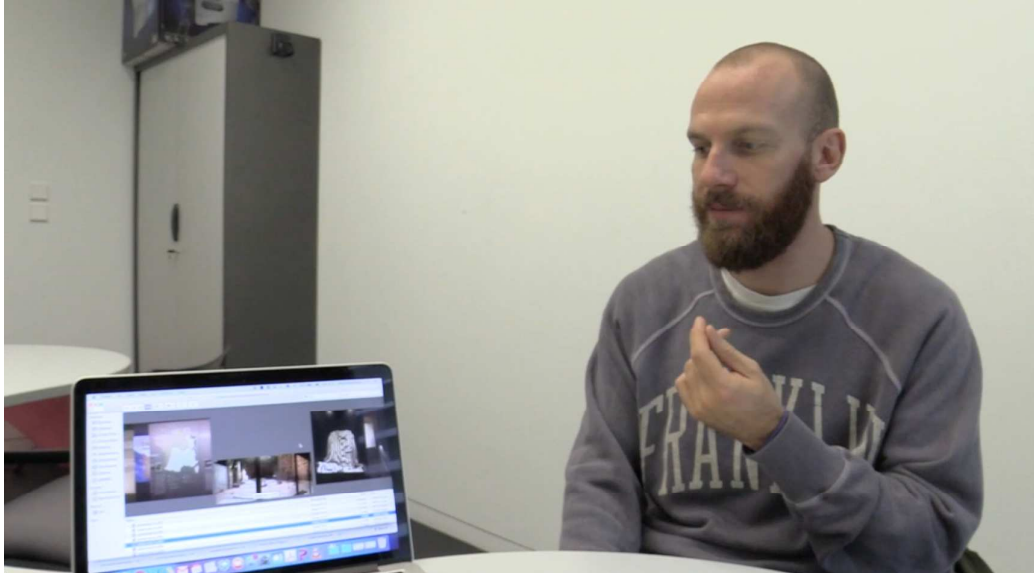
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5 *My father used to be a blacksmith...I always had the smell of rust, it's something I like*
6
7 *because sometimes I helped him working on it when I was younger, so to me it's*
8
9 *something that connotes with something positive. But in this context it's, yeah, I*
10
11 *don't think I could bear being in so much rust and dust because it feels very dry and it*
12
13 *dries up your nose and your fingers, fingertips and everything. So, to me there are the*
14
15 *two notions that clashed in my mind...I know how dirty it can make you, the rust, and*
16
17 *I just understood that people in this environment, they didn't have any choice but to*
18
19 *be dirty all the time, and it just made me realise how dire the conditions were for*
20
21 *people being imprisoned there...It must have made people feel so dirty...it's really*
22
23 *hard to fathom...That was one of the issues in my father's workshop...we had to open*
24
25 *one door here and another door there so that the air would go through and get us rid*
26
27 *of the cloud of either smoke or dust or whatever. So when I looked at that [room], I*
28
29 *was like, that must have been pretty tough, you know.*
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The minor gesture and atmospheric attunement

42 Ben's account turns on a small manual gesture, a rubbing of his fingers against his
43
44 thumb that he used to demonstrate how he imagined the dusty air in the room that
45
46 he photographed (Figure 5) and described above. In the video interview his hands
47
48 added a haptic, gestural element to his description of the scent of rust in the air and
49
50 the drying effect of dust (Figure 6). Apparently unwittingly, his fluttering fingers
51
52 demonstrated a sensory mix of the smell in the room, the recollection of the feel of
53
54 dust (whether he actually felt this as he stood in the room, or if it was a recollection
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3 of his childhood, was not clear) and the raspy, dry sensation that experience had
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5 taught him could be produced by exposure to such particles.
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10 [INSERT FIGURE 6]



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31 Figure 6: A still from Shanti's interview with Ben, when he described the smell and
32
33 feel of the dust he sensed in the room in his photograph by rubbing his fingers and
34
35 thumb together. He is glancing at the photograph of the room on the computer
36
37 screen.
38
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41

42
43 The movement of Ben's hand finds a conceptual reflection in Manning's notion of
44
45 the 'minor gesture'. Drawing on her work with Massumi, Manning explores the
46
47 potential of the 'minor key' that 'does not have the full force of a pre-existing status,
48
49 or a given structure' (2016: 2), but that can unmoor or problematise the major
50
51 structures that it courses through. As she describes it, the minor has a sort of
52
53 freedom and unpredictability that although 'narrated as secondary' has the scope to
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3 'initiate the subtle shifts that [create] the conditions for...change' (1). It therefore
4
5 holds the political potential to unsettle, divert, or enable new ways of being and
6
7 doing. To explain how this might work, she uses the trope of the 'minor gesture' that
8
9 is 'everywhere, all the time' (2), 'the force that makes the lines tremble that
10
11 compose the everyday' (7). The minor gesture can thus redirect us because: 'It
12
13 moves the nonconscious towards the conscious, makes felt the unsayable in the
14
15 said, brings into resonance field effects otherwise backgrounded in experience' (7).
16
17 Although Manning uses the word gesture to signal a range of actions far beyond the
18
19 manual, it allows us an analytical frame for the movement of Ben's hands, which
20
21 appeared to occur unconsciously as a way to tell his story. Indeed, it only emerged in
22
23 the video interview encounter, and could have passed unnoticed if not for the video
24
25 trace of this motion (Pink 2007).
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32
33 Connecting Manning's concept to Ben's physical 'minor gesture' prises open ways of
34
35 thinking about memory sites that move far beyond official narrative, archival capture
36
37 or even personal engagement with the past. It allows us to see the emergent
38
39 possibilities of experience, to conceptualise such places beyond the historical
40
41 narratives that might frame them. It can begin to explain how such a room might
42
43 engender experiences or events with a resonance that shimmers in time and space,
44
45 that emerges and dissipates, that 'punctuates the in-act, leading the event
46
47 elsewhere than toward the governant fixity of the major' (Manning 2016: 7), the
48
49 major in this case being the state-sponsored history represented at Camp des Milles.
50
51 In Ben's case, the 'minor' was part of a personal memory that made the experience
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3 of the space more intense and connected him, through his own past, to the
4
5 experiences of others in the same space, at least as he imagined them.
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8
9 The smell and feel of the site also placed him in the memorial's past as an
10
11 internment camp (by way of his own less distant childhood) as he imagined the dire
12
13 conditions and inescapable grime that internees endured. The materiality of the site
14
15 thus worked to engender a form of empathy with people who had been there before
16
17 him that imbricated his own experiential memory with how he imagined the
18
19 experiences of others. As such, it went beyond simply *thinking about* what the site
20
21 could have been like to *feeling it* in both a corporeal and affective sense. In this way,
22
23 the minor gesture can take us beneath the official narrative, whilst still responding
24
25 to it, bringing to the fore an everyday memory that intensified Ben's experience. This
26
27 is worth attending to because it allows us to think about the politics of such as site in
28
29 ways that move beyond official intentions and state-sponsored narratives. Instead, it
30
31 opens up ways of understanding *lieux de mémoire*, sites often understood as closely
32
33 linked to official ways of representing the past (Nora 1989), as much more diverse,
34
35 personal, emergent and experiential, recalling but moving beyond Connerton's
36
37 appeal to attend to the embodied memory implicit in collective commemorative
38
39 ritual (1989).
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49 Such a site can also be imbued with 'atmospheric' qualities that visitors identify even
50
51 if they cannot always precisely describe them. Indeed, Stewart (2007) argues that
52
53 these powerful combinations are pulled into being by way of attunement to our
54
55 surroundings and their affordances. In the case of this study, attunement was an
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3 active process, foreshadowed by anticipation (Edensor 2012, Sumartojo 2016) as
4
5 participants imagined and prepared to visit Camp des Milles. In asking participants to
6
7 make note of and photograph those aspects of the site that most attracted their
8
9 attention, the research task encouraged them to attune to their surroundings.
10
11 Attunement emerges here as closely related to how we might conceptualise places
12
13 as imbued with particular atmospheres, something that emerges clearly in B's
14
15 account. Edensor and Sumartojo (2015) argue that atmosphere does not simply
16
17 sweep people up, hapless or mute, but that instead we are co-constituents of the
18
19 feel of place, 'perceiving subjects' (Anderson 2009) complicit in blending the
20
21 material and immaterial through our spatialised experiences. In attending to the
22
23 sensory and affective aspects of our surroundings, 'we perceive atmosphere through
24
25 our emotional sensibility - a form of perception that works in credibly quickly'
26
27 (Zumthor 2006: 13). Spatial attunement here is manifest as affective intensities
28
29 suffuse and course through our bodies, by way of how we feel, and as we will show,
30
31 what we may remember. McCormack (2008: 413) similarly describes spatial
32
33 atmosphere as a 'quality of environmental immersion that registers in and through
34
35 sensing bodies whilst also remaining diffuse, in the air, ethereal'; as such it emerges
36
37 and exists in the combinations of people with places and their representational and
38
39 more-than-representational qualities. Attuning to space in this way foregrounds the
40
41 senses, and their subtle but insistent and vital contribution to how we understand
42
43 our surroundings. As we discuss next, this is entangled with personal memory,
44
45 revealing the past as dynamic and contingent, even in the face of official narrative.
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56 **Memory and the senses**

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5 Ben's account was triggered in large part by the smell and feel of the air in the room
6
7 to which he became attuned in part by the research exercise of taking a photograph.
8
9 It also emerged as a result of the subsequent discussion with the author about the
10
11 image and the experience it represented. As discussed above, the memory as Ben
12
13 experienced and discussed it came together in the motion of his rubbing fingers. This
14
15 gesture calls us to attend to the *experience* of memory as it occurs, and the
16
17 importance of the senses in both the moment of memory and in the recounting of it.
18
19 Indeed, recent work on memory and experience (Sumartojo 2015, Drozdowski
20
21 2014, Muzaini 2015, Sturken 2016) foreground the role of the experiencing body at
22
23 memory sites, and the way it can compel us to attend to 'everyday' concerns
24
25 alongside official or discursive aspects of such places: 'their sensory cues provoke
26
27 remembrance; they install pauses and digressions in our normative thought
28
29 processes; and they transport us, however momentarily, to different times and
30
31 different places' (Drozdowski et al 2016a: 447). The accounts above show how the
32
33 sound, smell, look, taste and feel of memory sites are a vital aspect of how we
34
35 encounter and make sense of them. It follows that these sensory aspects can
36
37 heighten or diminish the narrative content, making it feel more (or less) personal,
38
39 proximate and relevant. In this vein, Sather-Wagstaff (2017: 18) encourages us to
40
41 'make polysense' of memory, an approach centred on 'the dynamic relationship
42
43 between the senses, feeling, emotion, cognition and memory as continually in
44
45 process.' She urges attention to the purposeful use of 'affective, polysensory modes
46
47 of encounter' (2017: 19) at heritage sites, and although she focuses on objects and
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1
2
3 material culture, the same could be said of rooms and other spaces with distinctive
4
5 lighting, smells, sounds and temperatures.
6
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9
10 The capacity of our surroundings, and notably the built environment, to trigger
11
12 memory in unexpected ways and cause it to erupt into the present, is also a feature
13
14 of Muzaini's (2015) recent study of forgetting amongst war veterans. He focuses on
15
16 the involuntary and unexpected return of those memories, prompted in part by
17
18 material and sensory surroundings. He points out the importance of the
19
20 'manipulation of the material' (2015: 104) in shaping how and what groups
21
22 remember or purposefully seek to forget, including through museums and
23
24 monumental structures. However, visitors complicate this narrative with their own
25
26 experiences and memories that can spring unbidden to their attention, at times
27
28 because of 'encounters with the material' that can 'incite even what has been
29
30 consciously relegated to history' (Muzaini 2015: 105). For example, a drive past a
31
32 school that had been used by Japanese occupying soldiers for the interrogation and
33
34 murder of civilians unexpectedly invoked unwanted and distressing memories in one
35
36 of his research participants. The material presence of the school itself was enough to
37
38 spark memories that shaped how the buildings were then perceived in the present.
39
40 Muzaini builds on Edensor's (2005a: 837) work on industrial ruins (discussed in more
41
42 detail in the next section) that draws together material surroundings with the
43
44 working of 'involuntary memories', prompted by sensory experience:
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53 Involuntary memories, in contrast to the conscious use, transmission,
54
55 and representation of the past, are unpredictable and contingent, and,
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3 given that they are enmeshed in sensation and vague intimations of
4
5 previous atmospheres, they are slippery to describe and represent. Not
6
7 deliberately sought, involuntary memories come upon us, rekindling the
8
9 past through unexpected confrontations with sounds, 'atmospheres',
10
11 and particularly smells - largely nonvisual sensual experiences.
12
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17 This can be extended to include memorials or state-sponsored memory sites such as
18
19 Camp des Milles that tell a story of the past in very particular ways. It helps to
20
21 account for Ben's story about his childhood memory, a recollection that was
22
23 prompted by the look, smell and feel of his material surroundings, but that was out
24
25 of step with his empathy for the suffering of internees. A notable aspect of this
26
27 account was how it moved through different periods of time, drawing together his
28
29 own spatial encounter with the room, with his childhood memory of his father's
30
31 workshop, with how he imagined internees' experiences during their detention. His
32
33 account jumped around, mixing and layering his own immediate experiences with
34
35 his imagination, memories of different times of his life and diverse relationalities
36
37 with others as he remembered or imagined himself in the past. As he explained, this
38
39 set up dissonance, as with *'the two notions that clashed in my mind'*: the smell of
40
41 rust prompting both a positive memory of helping his father as a child, and invoking
42
43 the inescapable grime and dirt, the 'dire conditions' that he imagined internees must
44
45 have endured. This dissonance is implicit in the site itself, where the narrative of
46
47 internment is privileged, despite the blend of incarceration and industrial heritage in
48
49 the material environment of the site, the same environment that evoked Ben's
50
51 complex response. The dust that he remarks on is a result of the industrial processes
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3 in the site that ended in the 1990s, activities which largely (but not completely)
4
5 erased its wartime use. In a sense, it was as if time was frozen in 1942 and then
6
7 flowed inconsequentially afterward, even though the material remains of this more
8
9 recent period penetrated the nostrils and rubbed onto visitors' fingertips, making it
10
11 difficult to ignore sensorially.
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16 Ben did not know what he would encounter at Camp des Milles, what he would
17
18 photograph, or what that activity would make possible. For him, memory was not a
19
20 disembodied process of recall or remembering, but rather an emergent, embodied
21
22 and emplaced way of making sense of the world, an aspect of ongoing everyday life
23
24 that was not somehow separate from it in time or space (Ingold 2011, Pink 2015).
25
26 This helps to explain why Ben's encounter with the memory site, precisely because it
27
28 was emergent and experiential, did not adhere to a linear or predictable chronology.
29
30 His account showed how his own memory was part of how a state-sponsored
31
32 memory site was made meaningful, as he mixed and grafted it together with sensory
33
34 experience past and present, including those of others as he imagined them. Put
35
36 another way, 'Memory renders our relationships with others, timespace,
37
38 information and materiality complex, multidimensional and non-linear' (Jones 2011:
39
40 877). The sensory aspects of memory, revealed through the 'minor gesture' of Ben's
41
42 'feeling' the air and the attention to it that the gesture represented, disrupted time
43
44 in a way that built a rich, engaged experience of the site, one that moved away from
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46 the historical events it represented and pulled the place directly into his own
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48 subjectivity.
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Dust and materiality

The final aspect we discuss here is the particular materiality of the room where Ben and Shanti took photographs, a spatial quality that Muzaini (2015) and Edensor (2005b) both address. As the images (Figures 1-5) and descriptions that begin this article hint, the setting of Camp des Milles is remarkable. The industrial implements and fittings that have been retained attest to its former purpose as a tile factory, whilst the traces left by internees speak to an interruption of this purpose, when its kilns, rooms and corridors were used to house thousands of people. The middle, memorial section of the museum is dusty, dirty and exposed, with feathers and bird droppings thick in some areas, walls unpainted, windows covered with grime and no heating or cooling in the most open parts of the building. The rusting fittings, walls streaked with damp and derelict interiors nevertheless combine in a sensorially rich environment, with a very particular aesthetic that is beautiful and haunting. This effect is heightened by the visitors knowledge that many people held at the Camp des Milles were later murdered at concentration camps.

In their call for an orientation to materiality, Coole and Frost (2010: 1) make the case that 'we live our lives surrounded by, immersed in matter. We are ourselves composed of matter. We experience its restlessness and intransigence even as we reconfigure and consume it' even as we take it for granted (see also Bennett 2010). This rendering of matter as all around us, and as something we might absorb into our bodies, can frame Ben's description of the 'smell of rust and dust', the drying of his nose and fingertips, and the smoky, dusty interior of his father's smithy that

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3 required airing out. As he rubbed his fingers together, he appeared to feel the
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5 imagined particles in the air that entered his nostrils or settled on his skin. There was
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7 a sense of porosity between Ben's body and the matter that surrounded it, of the co-
8
9 composition of himself and the elements in which he was immersed. Sturken (2016:
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11 16) identifies the peculiar qualities of dust in her research on the 9/11 museum in
12
13 New York City, arguing that 'dust makes visible the continual material existence of
14
15 substances of the past – a 'not-going-awayness'. She argues that dust is a
16
17 transformed material form that carries the past with it, literally into the bodies of
18
19 people who encounter it. Furthermore, Ben's account also showed how such an
20
21 experience can include and engender memory and imagination. The materiality of
22
23 the room and his sensory apprehension of it worked to fold time and memory into
24
25 multiple intersections that overall prompted a fecund and powerful encounter.
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32 Several different periods of the site's history are marked in the material and sensory
33
34 environment through its different areas. This occurs explicitly through the
35
36 presentation of its use from 1937 to 1942 in the museum displays and information
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38 panels, and is also evident in the retention of industrial fittings and implements and
39
40 in the accreted grime that appears more recent. As one walks to the entrance of the
41
42 main building from the car park, unused tiles are stacked in the adjoining yard,
43
44 presumably for use for on-site repairs, and these recall the function of the factory
45
46 that had closed only in the early 1990s. One can easily imagine the presence of
47
48 internees, and this is actively encouraged through text, photographs, and the
49
50 retention of graffiti and other markings. But the former factory workers are also
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52 readily imaginable, even if their activities and experiences of the building were
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3 drastically different from people imprisoned there. Thus, the lives of very different
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5 workers and inhabitants in time are present in the contemporary layering of dust,
6
7 artful dilapidation, contemporary renovation and museum fixtures. Ben responded
8
9 to this with his own memories of an industrial setting, albeit with emotional
10
11 associations that are positive and even pleasant.
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16 As he described, one effect of the material and spatial aspects of the site is to call to
17
18 mind previous workers or inhabitants of the building, as one imagines other bodies
19
20 experiencing the same temperature changes and dusty, still air, or speculating on
21
22 the use of unfamiliar industrial implements. This is an aspect of how Edensor (2005a:
23
24 842) draws together matter and the embedded work of those who fashioned,
25
26 manipulated or managed it, through his work on industrial ruins. He describes such
27
28 abandoned places as:
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35 an intersection of the visible and the invisible, for the people who
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37 managed them, worked in them, and inhabited them are not there. And
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39 yet their absence manifests itself as a presence through the shreds and
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41 silent things that remain, in the objects we half recognise or surround
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44 with imaginings.
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49 In the case of Camp des Milles, however, the presence of previous inhabitants or
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51 workers is not left entirely to the imagination. The displays explaining camp life,
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53 artworks created by internees and testimonies of survivors all lead visitors to
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55 particular ways of visualizing it, particularly in the 1939-42 period. While the built
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3 environment and material objects invoke absent people and long-past activities, the
4
5 museum displays represent these thoroughly and organize them as an official
6
7 archive. For this reason, the layering of Ben's personal memories, and their multi-
8
9 chronological nature, introduce a more intimate and visceral quality to the site, one
10
11 that is at once in the 'minor key' (Manning 2016) and powerfully affecting.
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16
17 At the same time that it may appear ruined or crumbling, however, the memorial
18
19 section of Camp des Milles has been carefully designed and meticulously
20
21 maintained. Indeed, the site underwent a long development process that saw
22
23 multiple design teams attempt to find the suitable balance between the 'artistic', the
24
25 historical and the pedagogical, to capture a sense of the distressing and difficult
26
27 experiences of people held there without repelling visitors from the environment in
28
29 they occurred. Despite the personal and even intimate nature of Ben's story, it is
30
31 important to recognize that Camp des Milles presents a very clear narrative about
32
33 the Second World War that is deployed to overtly pedagogical ends. The last section
34
35 of the museum reinforces this in is a text-rich area that links the Holocaust with
36
37 previous and subsequent genocides in Armenia (1915) and Rwanda (1994). This area
38
39 includes a multi-screen film that immerses the viewer in the audiovisual material and
40
41 invites them to consider the steps by which societies can come to condone large-
42
43 scale killing. Visitors are also urged to imagine what they would have done to resist
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45 such large-scale, targeted violence and reminded that even small forms of resistance
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47 have social and personal validity.
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3 The route through the memorial section in the main factory building is also carefully
4 choreographed. It shows visitors where internees slept, the scant toilet facilities and
5 locations of paintings, signs and graffiti made by prisoners. The subtle but careful
6 lighting of these features pull the eye towards them, and combined with the
7 apparently deliberate placement of antiquated equipment and the unscrubbed
8 patina on the structural surfaces, the hand and eye of the designer can be discerned.
9 This demonstrates the complexity of such sites, the interwoven nature of the state-
10 sponsored and official with the intimate and personal; the appearance of decay or
11 ruin and the artful curation and maintenance of those spatial qualities; and the
12 layering of the sensory and experiential with the explicitly representational. As we
13 discuss in the final section, this unveils a politics of state-sponsored memory sites in
14 which sensory perception might open memory up to new, disruptive possibilities.
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32 **Conclusions: possibility and the 'feel' of memory**

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37 The materiality of Camp des Milles is attuned to a ruined aesthetic that buttresses
38 the affecting official narrative about the people held there, an atmospheric politics
39 of the aesthetic that recalls Rancière's 'distribution of the sensible'. As he argues,
40 'politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has
41 the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the
42 possibilities of time' (Rancière 2004: 13). In the case of the Camp des Milles (and
43 indeed many other state-sponsored memory sites), the careful design, controlled
44 narrative and purposeful aesthetics help shape both the messages of the site and
45 the sensory terms in which they are apprehended.
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5 As we have argued, however, as visitors are immersed in such spaces, their own
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7 memories can intrude by way of the senses, introducing new temporal layers that
8
9 can complicate and intensify the emerging experience. Insisting on the value of
10
11 including memory in non-representational geographies, Jones (2011: 875) remarks
12
13 that 'We are conglomerations of past everyday experiences, including their *spatial*
14
15 *textures and affective registers*'. Here, memory's spatial and affective qualities shape
16
17 how we understand and make sense of our surroundings, and memory is revealed as
18
19 a quality of the ongoing present and contingent future as much as it is an aspect of
20
21 the multifarious past. As we have shown, one implication is that personal memories
22
23 can help to make state-sponsored memory sites more powerful, and we have
24
25 described how this was triggered by sensory and atmospheric impressions that
26
27 moved far beyond the representational nature of conventional museum or memorial
28
29 displays.
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37 In doing so, we have traced some of the connections between memory, materiality,
38
39 and the 'minor gesture', to arrive at a way of conceptualizing the 'feel' of *lieux de*
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41 *mémoire* that attends to the experiential and emergent beyond the narrative and
42
43 representational. With its location in 'the welling event', rather than the field of the
44
45 representational, the minor gesture makes possible the 'articulation...of new modes
46
47 of being' (Manning 2016: 7). This resonates with Nora's (1989) differentiation
48
49 between memory – the lived experience of the past passed down in vernacular
50
51 traditions – and history – the official and linear record of the past that overtakes
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53 memory as individual stories fade or die. *Lieux de mémoire* such as Camp des Milles
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3 are commonly understood as official sites that present the past in terms of history
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5 that 'binds itself strictly to temporal continuities, to progressions and to relations
6
7 between things' (Nora 1989: 9). Nora's seminal definition of such places locates
8
9 them at a moment in which vernacular memory, reinforced and reiterated through
10
11 the ongoing, repetitive patterns of lived experience, has been fatally eroded:
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16 *Lieux de mémoire* originate with the sense that there is no spontaneous
17
18 memory, that we must deliberately create archives, maintain
19
20 anniversaries, organize celebrations...because such activities no longer
21
22 occur naturally. (Nora 1989: 12)
23
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28 Our research goes beyond this, however, by allowing us to attend to spaces of the
29
30 past in a way that moves beyond the two poles of memory and history. Indeed, our
31
32 research participants showed how spontaneous memory does emerge in officially
33
34 organized sites, and furthermore that these exceed and complicate the chronological
35
36 progressions represented in them.
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42 Accordingly, we argue that a better understanding of the political heft and potential
43
44 of memory sites can come into focus by attending to the minor, by rehabilitating the
45
46 emergent, and from an understanding of the concomitant subtle and unpredictable
47
48 slippage of multiple pasts into the perception and experience of the present. We
49
50 also contend that the embodied experiences that visitors have in such sites remain
51
52 vitally important in communicating about the past – that matter matters, and should
53
54 not be abandoned or neglected in favour of virtual or digital replacements. In this
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3 sense, the actual places and objects of memory are irreplaceable in forging the
4
5 affective encounters that not only allow memory to perdure, but also to connect
6
7 feeling to narrative. Prompted by the senses, and by the material environments that
8
9 nudge them into being, intimate memories return, the past becomes imaginable
10
11 through the perceptions and feelings (including those of invisible others), and
12
13 empathy and other affective intensities can be both fostered and turned to political
14
15 and official ends. Edensor's (2005b: 145) work on industrial ruins expresses this
16
17 sense of destabilizing possibility, the unexpected nature of involuntary memories
18
19 and the powerful and unpredictable charge they carry:
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26 The anarchic intrusions of involuntary memory act to destabilize that
27
28 which has been recorded and classified as significant, and therefore
29
30 worthy of remembrance. The variegated atmospheres, aggregations,
31
32 textures, sounds and smells of ruin mean they are places in which to
33
34 remember otherwise, realms rich in potential for the evocation of
35
36 involuntary memories.
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42 Ultimately, our account of the feel of memory, in both the haptic and affective
43
44 sense, hinges on the potential the minor gesture offers to disrupt or recraft the
45
46 official as represented in state-sponsored memory sites by way of how they are
47
48 experienced. This includes the involuntary but powerful emergence of the past into
49
50 the present. Manning (2016: 24) celebrates this as a generative quality of the minor
51
52 gesture, insisting it is 'defined by its capacity to vary, not to hold, not to contain'. It
53
54 opens possibility, allows us to think differently, to make time slippery and memory
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3 multi-chronological, and to thereby intensify experience and enrich meaning.
4
5 Entangled with the affective, it represents potential. It thus undermines singular
6
7 narrative and official historical representation and is vital in making possible new
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9 ways of thinking about the past as multiply layered, and our individual and collective
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11 relationship to it, by way of how memory feels and the environments which make
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13 these feelings possible.
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For Peer Review

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Figures 1-4: The main room in the memorial section of Camp des Milles. Photos: xxx.

390x260mm (300 x 300 DPI)

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Review

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390x260mm (300 x 300 DPI)

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Figure 5: B's panorama image of the same room.

1921x881mm (72 x 72 DPI)

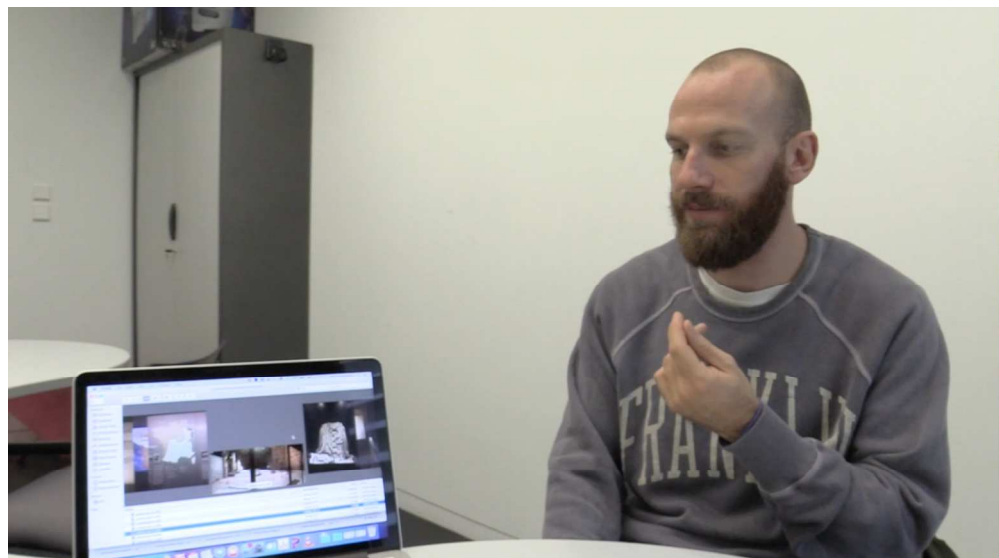


Figure 6: A still from xxx's interview with B, when he described the smell and feel of the dust he sensed in the room in his photograph by rubbing his fingers and thumb together. He is glancing at the photograph of the room on the computer screen.