

RW 07 SUM

Dear All:

Thanks.

... Back now from the trip, which began for some at Auschwitz, continued through the International Association of Genocide Scholars conference in Sarajevo, on through Rwanda (where we partner with Jean-Pierre Karegeye and the Interdisciplinary Genocide Studies Center), and Uganda (based at the Ndere Center, with visits to/workshops at Makerere University and Hope North).

The experience this year was marked by clarification of mission, an opening out of the structures of participation, and, concretely, the opening of a library/community meeting space in Kigali. We were able to travel to Bisero in the west of Rwanda (a genocide site by Lake Kivu, where an adamant resistance was mounted); we were able to extend our stay at Hope North, a community and school for orphans and refugees from the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda.

Testimony, as always, was indelible.

We were a group of 50 plus at our largest incarnation, representing five countries (Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania, the U.S., and Canada).

*

This is the third year of an ongoing project at CalArts called More Life. More Life is the umbrella for a range of arts-and-civics initiatives at the Institute, including the Africa Exchange (reported below, with annual summer trips to Rwanda/Uganda), an October gallery show (highlighting documentation of the summer trip – photos, short films, presentations...), the Arts in the One World conference in January (on themes deriving from the Exchange and amplified by the gallery show), and a class on genocide and culture in the spring (in preparation for the Exchange).

*

The Mission of the Exchange:

We're enacting/expanding a conversational community focused on the study of the Tutsi genocide in Rwanda '94, and on exploring the uses of art in peace-building. From this point of origin, work radiates out to consider links between the esthetic and the civic at large.

Premise:

In a genocidal and post-genocidal situations, trust is broken and representation is repressed or distorted. Authentic relatedness (and therefore creative culture and counter-culture) becomes dampened or impossible. This distrust of one's ability to make or interpret meaning extends genocide beyond physical extermination. One lives a labeled life in a world where labels sanction the death of change.

The arts, and especially ensemble-based performing arts, are built on trust and representation. Just as the potency of the arts can be used as a tool against society, so can they be instrumental in healing.

At the heart of genocide recovery and prevention is authentic metanoia. Denotation (proper historical research, carefully wrought legislation) will only shift labels if not rooted to a radically

new foundation. As we observed at a previous AOW conference – genocide is the product of powerful narratives; we require equally powerful narratives to unknot them. Essential changes in the ways we make and organize meaning need to be made.

Potential outcomes, summer program:

New art is generated about the Rwandan genocide.

Art practices in themselves can be useful to peace-building; liberated expression helps create paths past trauma.

Artists' practices deepen in light of interdisciplinary genocide studies; the interdisciplinarity affords new frames, the subject of genocide is the utmost challenge to arts capacity for representation, and guided, demanding research and study fortify the synthetic mind.

We believe that the spaces art makes are civic and historical, and so we attend to the overlap of testimony, witness, and poesis.

*

Some additional reflections, based on the '07 trip:

1. Auschwitz/not Auschwitz via Strecker.
2. Hands above the head, Srebrenica.
3. Universal language.
4. Problematic peace.
5. Post-political.
6. Small – stable/unstable – weak/strong.
7. To predict Lucifer, look to the angels.
8. Survivor support and the fight against negationism.
9. Equiprobablism.
10. Adjacency, mediation.
11. The study center.
12. The shape of next year's program.

1. *Auschwitz/not Auschwitz*. [Edited from Catherine Strecker's journal.] Notes commingled with reflections from IAGS Auschwitz Seminar 2007

After taking some time to appreciate our fine hotel accommodations, we don our nametags and head downstairs for the walking tour. In the lobby we reunite with fellow Calartian John Kern, meet the magnificent Morgan Blum, and begin mingling among the scholars of the IAGS. A motley crew, we step out onto the streets of Krakow.

Our guide asks us if we want the extended tour and the scholars nod in agreement, yes we want it the whole package. We wander through the streets stopping at synagogues and other significant sites. Things that were rebuilt with tips on how to know what part of the architecture is original, and when it was built. The structures amaze me, rebuilt or not, but somehow the specifics fly beyond me and I watch a group of teenagers practice tricks on fancy BMX bikes. They are riding up and bouncing over things that have been there longer than my country's current political institution.

Day 2... The lectures begin.

In the morning, after a hearty buffet breakfast, the entire crew walks to Jagiellonian University. No one is really sure who is leading the group but we arrive at the correct building in spite of ourselves. We pile into a classroom and take our seats in neatly arranged rows of seats, the kind with tiny writing platforms attached. Introductions are made, formalities are attended to and people are thanked. Deborah Lipstadt is our first presentation. Ms. Lipstadt is a bit of a rock star among out scholarly companions. After listening to her, I understand why. She is lively and speaks with conviction. Only 5 minutes into the lecture, I am completely absorbed.

Here are the notes I furiously scribbled down plus a bit of explanation in parenthesis, minus all the arrows and other indicative doodles.

- Holocaust Denial – a form of anti-Semitism (this will become a reoccurring theme throughout this seminar)
- Misogyny and anti-Semitism seem to have a good relationship (an observation made by the speaker after mentioning David Irving’s treatment of women in his writing)
- “Nothing you say today will be inconsequential.” “You are our witness.” (Comments made to Ms. Lipstadt during the court proceedings, quoted as she phrased it)
- “Hate language” toxic... a crime against humanity, but what about free speech when is legislation appropriate, is it appropriate?
- Dehuminsation, demonisation, the “use of tools” of genocide
- Denial by redefinition, ex. Murdered vs. died, abuse vs. discipline, review vs. revision
- Denial: What is the proof... (at this point we are encouraged to “read the footnotes” with the following example paraphrased by yours truly)
 - An order issued by the Nazi’s to give socks and coats to prisoners in the camps. Why? The Nazi’s are awesome, loving folks? No... it was winter and their forced laborers were dying before they could squeeze the life from them.

At this point the lecture wraps up with a warning against “pseudo-scholarship” and a reminder that the role of scholars is to maintain accuracy for the future generations.

*

We are in an enormous luxury bus and some of the roads we traverse were clearly not made with this behemoth in mind. Conversation is accomplished by staggering up to the front of the bus to use the microphone so everyone can hear; this results in some serious monologues. Even with the microphone I am having trouble hearing what people are saying. Morgan decides she has had enough. She makes it safely to the front and commands her audience. She is an educator, mentions that she has taken students on this journey before, and tells us what she tells her students. We are not going to Auschwitz, she says, we are going to the museum where Auschwitz was. Perhaps we could each take some time to ourselves, think about where we are going and reflect. The bus breaks out into applause. The conversation is concluded. I am in love with Morgan.

The following is my journal entry as we arrive at the museum:

Billboards, bricks and windows. Trees and arrows. Pedestrians, flowers and muddy rivers. Houses.

Life.

Nausea overtakes my belly and I am forced to close my eyes and disconnect from the conversation. I don't usually get carsick... but I think that's what this is.

The bus pulls into the parking lot and we're here.

I have seen the images... the photos, the films. It looks nothing like any of that. What I am seeing is tour busses, park benches, and snack shops. A sign announcing a bar. We file out of our luxurious bus and head for the toilets. The restroom is clean, one zlota helps pay for the upkeep. We mill about in the lobby and browse through shiny postcards. I am at Auschwitz...

We begin our afternoon. We are led to a classroom. It is a barrack, a prison in a former life. I prepare for a lecture.

“Extermination...
Extermination...
Extermination...
Extermination...”

What are we doing here?

“Sightseeing.”

“Now there are only monuments”

I am not feeling any better

“But people were killed, but people were killed.”

The lecture continues. A fly buzzes in the back somewhere my belly rumbles and my mind buzzes along with the fly. I want to know, I want to understand... but my mind is not in this moment. Millions of people died here. It is hard to focus with this looming in the atmosphere. It is all around us and yet we are speaking to each other so matter-of-factly. We pass numbers back and fourth. I am longing for silent contemplation. The language becomes the buzzing. The buzzing becomes one.

After we are released from class, our tour begins. Our tour guide speaks passionately, but I have a tendency to stray from the group today. If something draws my eyes I follow. I am amazed that flowers still bloom and butterflies still float. That is where my head is when I notice the size of the trees. All of the trees here were planted as the camp was constructed. They are all relatively the same size and shape, neatly following the lines of the buildings. In the photographs they are young trees, small and fragile. Now they tower over the barracks. This is a marker of time. I stand there wondering how much this place has changed. Are we still exploiting these people who lost their lives by selling glossy photos of them in a gift shop? Do we acknowledge human suffering by purchasing a guidebook to show our friends back home? Are the trees the only ones who have grown from this experience?

2. *Hands above the head, Srebrenica*. Sarajevo is as beautiful and complex as its reputation. The conference agenda was loaded, but one was able to move freely and explore the town. For the range of panels, workshops and presentations, explore the IAGS site: www.isg-iags.org, and see also the agenda, attached. There were redemptive occasions of great erudition, penetrating testimony, and thorough debate. Some events were stronger than others; interface with the local community began haltingly and warmed up. The choice to honor Carla del Ponte with an award was – dramatically timed, given the unrestrained rage at recent decisions by the ICTY (which failed to find sufficient “specific intent” to render convictions at recent trials). Overall, in terms of

the structured circumstance, the conference provoked serious thinking on the practical, and rational uses of the word genocide, beyond the innate, experiential senses of disgust and confusion. More on this below. As is often the case at a conference, some of the richest benefits accrue outside the regular structures – meals, a Dervish concert in the rain, the mysteries of tram fare – where connections and disconnections, complain, utopian scheming, and the most immediate awareness of present place come to light.

The visit to Poticari memorial by Srebrenica was one such broken, extra-mural occasion. 8,000 Bosnian Muslims were killed in a genocide, July 1995. Bodies continue to be discovered, and on this memorial day, victims recently found were being reburied under prayer. It was pouring rain; there was confusion about which buses to take, where the busses were leaving from, when they were leaving, what our role was in going... The area surrounding the site was chaotic, with parking (in broad, muddy fields) obscurely conducted, and an oddly carnival atmosphere, with food vendors lining the route to the graves and chiming conversations. The graves are in a field – our groups got increasingly fragmented as we progressed, with access to translation increasingly tenuous. You are outside the experience, the gates are shut, prayers have begun, the grief is blindingly personal; you are inside the experience – there are cameras and banners, this is a ritual and public demonstration of grief, you are inside the gates and a stream of narrow wooden coffins draped in green winds towards you, you are passing coffins overhead to fresh graves, the mineral pungent in the storm. The crowd thins and you make your way to the memorial, you clamber up a dirt road to see the latest exhumation. The chores associated with being a tourist, a conventioner, and an academic bleed across the mastering duty to keep your eyes open, to put your heart in the way of suffering, to break what you have sealed in order to make room for peace, to lay down your ignorance and limit and stand in an outsized scale.

3. *Universal language.* Nearly every session of the conference addressed, directly or indirectly, the definition of the word genocide. A range: the Holocaust is the genocide of genocides/every genocide is unique; genocides lose their precision when set in the context of war crimes or counter-genocides, the word is to be used judiciously/we must handle the word with less taboo and fear, using it with more liberal dexterity; genocide is a problem for the international community/genocide is the problem of the international community...

The etymologic difficulty is of a piece with the pervasive straining to a global epistemology. We're looking for world-wide structures, bound up in a newly dense and vital web of causality; for these structures to stand we need a new language... Genocide, for example, is a word that must have universal meaning – the same in all cultures. If it cannot be applied globally, it is indeed subject to mitigation, softening, caviling.

The crime of genocide is not murder, multiplied. It is the effort to destroy a world. It is the effort of a world to image and destroy a world within. It is akin to suicide with a faith in resurrection – the assumption that when the killing is over the difference between the preferred and the reviled and me (the “I” not rationally compounded or confessed to in the calculation), all that will be left is what *I* prefer (Faulkner talks about Quentin's suicide in this light – the habit of removing oneself from action and simultaneously acting as observer of one's own removal).

Short of resurrection – which is not in the human purview – there is a permanent break and you need a *new* world (vs. the old world, redeemed).

But there can be no new world – you are unable to know newness without memory, which you've just destroyed. There is only the plagued, impaired work of repairing what in some senses is beyond repair; there is perpetual debt to a world-in-planning, perhaps forever unreachable.

Genocide is utopian tautology – defining the world per a simulacrum of the world, whose application only ever results in permanent, persistent damage.

If it is a universal crime, then when it is committed, we are all somehow implicated. Of course we back away from definition.

And if it is universal, there is no judge; all are in the case; there is no guilt if there can be no judgment. All guilty, all innocent.

But as poetry teaches, impossible constructions may be used reliably and forcefully. We don't really know how to scan "peace" either, but are obliged to pursue uses.

4. *Problematic peace.* Along these lines, the open, unrelieved rawness of experience in Srebrenica was always before us, despite the breadth and depth of history, the intensity of the hospitality, and the (re-emergent) music of the social scene. I'm paraphrasing, but one speaker proposed that "a bad peace is worse than a well conducted war." And, frankly, Bosnia seems subject to a crappy peace. The country has been inorganically and emphatically divided; international engines of politics, economics and jurisprudence are ill fitted, indifferent, or even hostile to local sensibilities.

5. *Post-political.* I believe it was Emmanuel Taub from the University of Buenos Aires who suggested that we are living in a post-political age – where in the reality of the contemporary discourse politics is indistinct from economics, etc. – no philosophic touchstone remains. The sophisticated arguments went well beyond the intuitive, but I'll confess to my swift consent to the rhetoric.

6. *Stable and not.* Moving to themes that threaded through the whole of the summer's experience:

Per Alain Joxe (*The Empire of Disorder*), genocide represents the desire of few, free and mobile sources of power to preserve the rest of the world in units that are small, stable and weak (inarticulate); resources can be sucked up and concentrated, reliably. Better (more artistically) – there is no "rest" of the world. Draft and rehearsal, exhibit and performance at a time, the arts push to a small, unstable (creative), and strong (articulate) world, made whole in horizontal network. Genocide is in the economic interests of the "international community" (which was nearly never mentioned without these quotes drawn forcefully in the air), and so is allowed... and constructed, driven.

7. *To predict Lucifer, look to the angels.* In line with the notion that we must be very careful with the architecture of peace, lest its shelter collapse, fatally: consider in general how often genocide is preceded by calls for stability, for public health (cleanliness, the biopolitical), for national arts and culture. All these may, in certain guises, lead to a loss of diversity; unity is enforced as the impossibility of change. As assiduously as we look at violence and the flouting of morality in the run-up to genocide, so must we examine the arts, and the presuppositions of reconciliation, and over-determined morality (the moralistic) as harbingers. Re art: is the practice about the generation of objects and their mastery? Does this extend to the objectification of a people? Does it look to solve problems or create them?

8. *Survivor support and the fight against negationism.* The trip to Rwanda/Uganda wants to be contemplative at core, with space for listening, and ethical guidance around issues of accepting testimony and entering into colloquy with trauma. The trip is at its best when there is internal and external quiet, when we take time; the dancing and singing come out of a sweeter place when they are responsive to their counterparts.

A clear appreciation of the requisite tenor is paralleled by a steady crystallizing of the IGSC mission. While IGSC sees hosting as one of its chief functions (it can facilitate research projects in Rwanda along a generous axis), it is committed above all to creating a safe space for survivors. The question of the perspective of perpetrators, or of viewpoints outside of advocacy, comes up repeatedly – and the exchange has featured visits with genocidaires in prison, also with journalists and legislators operating with an avowed sense of objectivity. However the trip is perhaps not best suited to this meditative or objective approach. International and internal pressures to denial

are so strong, the level of trauma is so high, and the security of survivors is so tenuous, that a clear commitment to the survivor's point of view is merited. There are many successful models, in the arts, of projects that work towards reconciliation between victim and victimizer; it is essential that these models continue to exercise their very good work. It is work different from the work of the IGSC. One can argue equally that a rape crisis center, for example, should work closely with rapists, working to their healing – and also that rape survivors require a space where their circumstance is not held relative to their opposition.

In partnering with IGSC, More Life attests that there was a genocide against the Tutsis, fights against denial of this genocide, looks to record and witness to victim testimony, and enters into community with survivors.

9. *Equiprobabilism*. [In St. Alphonsus' formulation – when choices are co-equal, one is justified in committing to any one of the options.]

A wholly absorbing ethical consideration... Nearly very expression of hope we encountered in Rwanda was matched with a sober realism. There is the will to justice, and a recognition that there are no sufficient means (not enough time in a lifetime to try all the cases; not enough room in the jails, not enough compensation for survivors). Equivalence of choice can be achieved in a world where everything is equally broken. In a broken situation there is no choice between good and evil, right/wrong in an absolute sense. There is only choice. And one must make choices to move ahead.

10. *Adjacency, mediation*. In one meeting in Kigali, with a student survivor group, we found ourselves asking again and again, rephrasing and through translation: is there a therapeutic encounter between perpetrators and victims? What are the mechanisms for mediation? We were repeatedly bent aside from this line of inquiry, and our incredulity (our insistence on the answer we wished for) pushed us, I fear, to callousness. In the end, the sense we received: there is no mediation. Many of the perpetrators are back in the community already, having confessed, having served time, and now performing service. Victim and perpetrator are living side by side, building, under a national policy. No mediation or reconciliation as expressed goals in *gaçaça* – there are no defense or prosecution lawyers. This desire to confront perpetrators is partly a wish to put oneself in the mediator's position – to get on top of it – force reconciliation *in you*.

11. *The study center*. Through the collective efforts of the tea in Rwanda and the U.S. – through donations of material and labor – the IGSC is now a physical space in downtown Kigali. Kathy Carbone, the Performance librarian at CalArts, was outstandingly generous in organizing and shaping books and our database; we have fifteen new computers; we have a room where survivors and scholars may meet. Kigali is starved for libraries, and modest as this effort is, it is a substantial contribution and an important statement on behalf of interdisciplinarity (the collection features history, sociology, theology, poetry, drama... related to the genocide in Rwanda, but also to moral inquiry, peace-building, and cultural studies in general).

12. *The shape of next year's program*. [Please understand that this is all wholly hypothetical at this point. The timing, and in fact, every element of the program, are up for discussion and contingent on resources.]

Proposed structure:

- July 31-Aug 3 (Thu-Sun), Four day international performance festival.
- Aug 4-14, Interdisciplinary Genocide Studies
- Aug 15-20, Five day arts training workshops

Aug 21, Travel to Uganda

Aug 22-31, Uganda workshops: Makerere, Ndere, Hope North

Performance Festival: The goal here (and only a goal; this may be ambitious to the point of fantasy) is to invite ensembles from various points around the globe to bring work. Eric Kabera is developing a possible venue. What we can offer, is, at this point, uncertain, and the leading assumption is that participants will make their own way. Work from abroad will play side by side with work from Rwanda and Uganda. The beginnings can be very modest; the hope is we will build a habit. Work should deal with genocide, testimony, conflict transformation, or the recovery of historical memory.

Interdisciplinary Genocide Studies: Clearly directed, rigorous study, coupled with space for reflection and dialogue. Meetings with scholars, journalists, survivors, artists, and government officials. There will be an application process, which calls for a personal statement reflecting on objectives in pursuing this line of inquiry; participants are encouraged to set writing as an expected outcome. This aspect of the summer's project will be open to students and professionals from a wide range of fields.

Five day arts training workshops: The core performance workshop will be Rwandan led, with pedagogical participation per Rwandan invitation. Depending on interest, there may be several workshops running simultaneously, with a collective sharing on the last day. For example, interest has been expressed in organizing an animation workshop... a Theater of the Oppressed workshop as well.

Uganda Workshops: At Ndere we study (music, dance, drama) in cooperation with Makerere University (Ndere is hope and guide). At Hope North (a community/school composed of orphans and refugees fleeing the Lord's Resistance Army), we're teachers, part of the fabric of arts programming at the center's school.

Not everyone will be able to do all the parts. However, participants are required to complete all of whichever independent parts they sign up for (all ten days of the IGS period, and/or all five days of the arts training workshops...).

*

These are a few ideas in circulation, right now. And – your thoughts?

Peace,

Erik Ehn