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Craig Young*, Duncan Light

Interrogating spaces of and for the dead as 'alternative space': cemeteries, corpses and sites of Dark Tourism.

Abstract: This paper considers spaces associated with death and the dead body as social spaces with an ambiguous character. The experience of Western societies has tended to follow a path of an increased sequestration of death and the dead body over the last two centuries. Linked to this, the study of spaces associated with death, dying and bodily disposal and the dead body itself have been marginalised in most academic disciplines over this period. Such studies have therefore been simultaneously 'alternative' within an academic paradigm which largely failed to engage with death and involved a focus on types of spaces which have been considered marginal, liminal or 'alternative', such as graveyards, mortuaries, heritage tourism sites commemorating death and disaster, and the dead body itself. However, this paper traces more recent developments in society and academia which would begin to question this labelling of such studies and spaces as alternative, or at least blur the boundaries between mainstream and alternative in this context. Through considering the increased presence of death and the dead body in a range of socio-cultural, economic and political contexts we argue that both studies of, and some spaces of, death, dying and disposal are becoming less 'alternative' but remain highly ambiguous nonetheless. This argument is addressed through a specific focus on three key interlinked spaces: cemeteries, corpses and sites of dark tourism.

Keywords: alternative space, death, corpses, cemeteries, Dark Tourism

*Corresponding author: Craig Young, School of Science and the Environment, Manchester Metropolitan University, UK, Email: c.young@mmu.ac.uk
Duncan Light, Department of Tourism and Hospitality, Bournemouth University, UK

Introduction

This paper is concerned with spaces of death, dying, bodily disposal and the dead body itself as 'alternative spaces'. Its central argument is that though modern Western societies have been typified by a sequestration of death and the dead body over the last few centuries, and academia has for the most part marginalised or ignored the study of death and the dead, it is difficult to read off such spaces as simply 'alternative'. Instead, they have always been, and are increasingly, much more ambiguous and liminal, and in contemporary Western society are becoming more mainstream, though they are internally differentiated, with some new spaces and practices forming alternatives to the 'death mainstream'. Relations between the living and the dead are thus fluid and continually emerging, creating new relational spaces sustained by new sets of socio-cultural practices and producing and reproducing new performances, rituals, emotional geographies and affective atmospheres.

Thus, though the study of such spaces has largely been seen as alternative in academia, we question that status and explore how such spaces can be seen as in a continual tension between the rather mundane, unreflexive practices of daily life and sets of transgressive, disruptive, sub-cultural alternative rituals and performances. We argue, first, that death and the dead body are becoming more visible in contemporary society, through different practices of bodily disposal and bereavement, and a greater range of contexts, such as popular culture, museums and exhibits, media reporting, tourism and celebrity. We relate this to changing socio-cultural attitudes towards death and the dead, notably the 'continuing bonds' thesis.

The paper then provides a review of interdisciplinary academic responses to this greater presence of the dead, from a concern with the dead being a relatively marginalised aspect of most social science disciplines, to the growth of Death Studies as a discrete area of enquiry and the more recent spilling out of a concern with death

and the dead into a number of disciplines. In particular we focus on the growth of interest within Human Geography in necrogeographies and 'deathscapes'. The paper then considers three key examples of spaces of death and the dead to illustrate the nature of change and to explore if these spaces can be conceptualised as alternative: cemeteries, the dead body itself, and sites of dark tourism.

Spaces of and for the dead as 'alternative space' – a changing context

The context in which we can consider spaces of, and for, the dead as 'alternative' is undergoing marked socio-cultural, economic, political and environmental changes. Our focus here is on modern, developed Western societies, and we acknowledge that other national and socio-cultural groups have significantly different relationships with the dead, but these lie outside the scope of this paper (but form subjects ripe for further analysis). In this section we therefore lay out a framework which identifies general trends in socio-cultural relationships to the dead in Western societies which have implications for the study of their associated spaces. In particular we consider: the significance of changing attitudes towards death and the dead; the increasing visibility of death and the dead in contemporary society and an increased societal obsession with remembering the dead leading to the emergence of new types of 'death spaces'; and the emergence of inter-disciplinary academic perspectives on death and the dead.

One focus of recent debates around death, dying and disposal has been around the issue of death as taboo and therefore sequestered from 'normal' society. Debate centres around the issue of to what extent it is possible to argue that, following a long period in which death was medicalised and professionalised and thus withdrawn from the public sphere (Mellor and Shilling, 1993), we have in the last two to three decades witnessed a resurgence of death, in which it is less of a taboo and is increasingly visible in contemporary society (Walter, 1991). The literature seems to agree that from the eighteenth to the late twentieth century death was generally sequestered, in the sense of being increasingly the prerogative of death professionals and less socially acceptable to discuss, thus locating it in scientific and professional realms and the private sphere (Miller and Shilling, 1993).

However, it is possible to argue that a more recent trend has been for death and the dead body itself to have re-entered public discourse to a greater extent (Walter,

1991). While we discuss this argument in further depth here we would also be sensitive to not overstating the case, holding instead that death and encountering the dead body itself remain in considerable tension. However, we would broadly support the argument that death and dead bodies are more visible across a range of contexts and spaces which has implications for how we view space as alternative or otherwise.

This viewpoint is supported by both academic analyses and professional understandings of societal relations with the dead and changes in rituals and practices surrounding death and remembrance. In terms of the former, a key shift has been a move away from models of dealing with death which have emphasized the 'broken bonds' model which has until recently dominated modern Western societies and bereavement counselling (ie. putting the dead aside in order to 'move on') towards ideas and practices around the notion of 'continuing bonds' (Klass et al., 1996; Klass and Goss, 2003), which recognises the importance of people's continuing attachment to their dead loved ones. One result is a generalised trend towards an increased willingness among people to discuss death, to express grief and mourning in new ways in public space, and to engage in different practices of bodily disposal and remembrance and encountering the dead in different spaces.

Whatever conclusions we may come to in the ongoing debates over whether death remains taboo in contemporary Western society it is certainly possible to establish that death and the dead body are becoming more of a presence in a multitude of ways and spaces. Economically the dead are becoming increasingly commodified, whether valued as resources in the increasingly globalised trade in body parts and human organs, or in their repackaging as part of the tourist product in dark tourism. Public acknowledgment of and discourses around death are increasingly visible in the public sphere, as exemplified in the growth of 'Death Cafés' (see: www.deathcafe.com) where people can come together and discuss death in everyday settings over coffee and cake, or the increasing presence of more spontaneous memorials (Petersson, 2010) such as roadside shrines (Clark and Franzmann, 2006) - small-scale, temporary, vernacular forms of commemoration and marking death which can now be seen on many roads and streets. These new spaces also mark a blurring of the boundaries between public and private space (and 'alternative' or 'mainstream') as the previously 'privatised'/sequestered discussion and presence of death increasingly penetrates the public sphere.

Museum exhibits are another space in which the dead are increasingly encountered, from anatomy museums

and the UK's Bristol Museum's *Death: the human experience* exhibit which attracted thousands of visitors in 2016 to Gunther von Hagens' controversial *Bodyworlds*. Popular culture is another sphere in which the dead are increasingly visible, from television forensic crime dramas featuring post-mortems to a fascination with celebrity death (Foltyn, 2008; Penfold-Mounce 2016). Political regimes maintain an ongoing interest in controlling and being involved in the burial and even reburial of key figures which can be appropriated to sustain narratives of 'the nation' (Verdery, 1999). And finally, we seem to be living in a time when the urge to commemorate the dead is assuming ever greater significance. As Macdonald (2013: 1) sums up:

> Memory has become a major preoccupation...in the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. Long memories have been implicated in justifications for conflicts and calls for apologies for past wrongs. Alongside widespread public agonising over 'cultural amnesia' – fears that we are losing our foothold in the past, the 'eye-witnesses' of key events are disappearing, that inter-generational memory transmission is on the wane – there has been a corresponding efflorescence of public (and much private) memory work. Europe has become a memoryland – obsessed with the disappearance of public memory and its pre-servation.

The dead are central to many of those attempts to fix and sustain memory.

The rise in this plethora of spaces in which death and the dead can increasingly be encountered has been accompanied by increasing academic interest in death, dying and disposal (though interest in the dead body itself in these processes lags behind a little). The discipline of *Death Studies* is now well established, and archaeology has long engaged the dead body, but death has recently become more of a focus across a number of disciplines, though in most it would still not be considered a mainstream subject. Part of the focus of these academic endeavours has been to bring the study of death and the dead more into the academic mainstream to try and counter its marginalisation reflecting shifts in societal attitudes towards the sequestration of death. As such this places the spaces of death into tension again, as they are no longer conceptualised so much as 'alternative' but remain a specific and not wholly central area of study.

In a key intervention in the discipline of Human Geography, Maddrell and Sidaway (2010a: 4-5) define deathscapes as:

> ...both the places associated with the dead and for the dead, and how these are imbued with meanings and associations: the site of a funeral, and the places of final disposition and of rememb-

rance, and representations of all these. Not only are those places often emotionally fraught, they are frequently the subjects of social contest and power; whilst sometimes being deeply personal, they can also be places where the personal and public intersect. Deathscapes thereby intersect and interact with other moments and topographies, including those of sovereignty..., memory...and work, life and beauty.

The idea of deathscapes thus brings the study of a great range of sites in which the dead are buried and/or represented, and where the living perform various forms of embodied practices in relation to the dead, much more centrally into academic analyses. These can include formal spaces (eg. memorials, crematoria and cemeteries) but also a multitude of informal spaces associated with the life and death of the deceased (roadside shrines, a seat in the pub or sports club, a memorial bench on their favourite part of a walk, or the home) (Maddrell and Sidaway 2010b). Many of the analyses in Maddrell and Sidaway (2010b) focus on examples of the 'continuing bonds' model of relationships with the dead and illustrate the destabilising of categories of 'public' and 'private' space, as private mourning and grief penetrates public space.

In an important theme issue on *Geographies of Death and Dying* (*Social & Cultural Geography*, 17(2), 2016) Stevenson et al. (2016: 158) suggest that:

> The inherent spatialities of practices associated with death/s, dying/s, surviving/s and remembering/s leave considerable scope for geographers...to explore new and nuanced perspectives on space and place in relation to death/s, dying/s, mourning/s and ongoing life for the bereaved.

This in part draws attention to the need to consider how such spaces are valued. Are they still marginalised in society and academic disciplines, or are they becoming more central? In this context, Stevenson et al. (2016: 162) make an important suggestion:

> Social and cultural geographies offer lenses through which the spatialities of dying/s and death/s can be explored and debated beyond just the morbid, and traumatic and re-engage with a politics of hope even in intractable situations.

This point highlights the importance of how we conceptualise these spaces. If we continue to see them as 'morbid' or associated with trauma, if we can only think of them as weird or freakish, exceptional, 'Other', 'alternative' or something to keep at a distance, then we lose a wealth of avenues for exploring a set of spaces which are actually fundamental to life.

To develop this further, it is interesting to consider the plea of Durbach (2014: 65) when analyzing the *Bodyworlds* phenomenon:

as a culture, we continue to seek some form of engagement with bodies that defy the norm...Instead of denying this as immoral and antisocial, it would be more profitable to acknowledge and seek to understand these desires.

Here, then, it is important to remove the stigma of 'freakiness' from consideration of such spaces and to consider them as central to formations of contemporary life. We must consider if these spaces associated with death and dying – and the dead body itself – continue to be (or ever were) 'alternative' and either understand why they are conceptualised in that way or seek to overturn such a position. In this way we can further understand the production of space as relational and sustained through socio-cultural practices and performances, rituals, emotional geographies and affective atmospheres associated with the dead, and also support new ways of engaging with death. In the following sections we do this with reference to three inter-linked spaces: cemeteries, the dead body itself and sites of dark tourism.

Death spaces as alternative space I: cemetery spaces

Cemeteries – by which we mean civilian places of burial rather than military graveyards - are commonly labelled as 'alternative' spaces in both academic and popular discourse. As a deathscape which contains the bodies of the dead it may seem almost self-evident to consider the cemetery as an 'Other' or 'different' type of space that is clearly differentiated from the 'everyday' spaces of the living. Thought of in this way, the cemetery is treated as a bounded, closed world of sacred space that is clearly differentiated from the profane world of everyday life (Rojek, 1993). Hence, we can talk of the cemetery as a space that is marginal or liminal (in both social and geographical terms).

Within the academic sphere, the work of Foucault (1986) on 'Other' spaces has been particularly influential for shaping the conception of cemeteries as alternative spaces. Foucault proposed the notion of the heterotopia: that is, a real space but one which is clearly differentiated from everyday or commonplace spaces. Heterotopias are relational in that they contest or invert other spaces. Foucault identifies the cemetery as a form of heterotopia since it is a space that is connected to, but is unlike, 'ordinary' spaces. For Foucault, cemeteries 'recall the myths of paradise; they manifest an idealised plan; they mark a final rite of passage; they form a microcosm; they enclose a rupture; they contain multiple meanings; and they are both utterly mundane and extraordinary'

(Johnson, 2013: 799). Although Foucault's account of the heterotopia is sketchy and rather ambiguous (Johnson, 2013) the idea has generated considerable academic interest and a number of researchers (for example, Wright, 2005; Gandy, 2013; Johnson, 2013: Toussaint and Decrop, 2013) have sought to consider cemeteries through the lens of the heterotopia.

But is the cemetery really such an alternative space? For centuries the Christian cemetery in Britain was not a marginal (still less an 'alternative') space. Instead, until the late eighteenth century the cemetery was located next to the parish church (cf. Foucault, 1986). Therefore cemeteries were central (in both geographical and social terms) to the life of the community. The dead were interred in the heart of the community and the presence of the corpse was not regarded as threatening or terrifying.

However, society's relationship with cemeteries changed in the late eighteenth century when such spaces were banished to the margins of settlements. As burial space in the parish churchyard became increasingly scarce, new sites were needed for burial. Such sites were to be found on the margins of rapidly expanding towns and cities so that new burial grounds could be much larger. At the same time, concerns about public health meant that the corpse was increasingly seen as a potential source of disease and illness, and therefore a threat to the living (Foucault, 1986). Consequently, the corpse was relocated to the edge of settlements (Rugg, 2000). Places of burial now became increasingly marginal: death and the dead were placed out of sight and out of mind. This way of thinking about cemeteries was apparent in their architecture. As Rugg (2000) argues, cemeteries usually featured an established perimeter (a high wall or hedge) along with a formally marked entrance. These practices effectively protected the dead but also sequestered the dead from the living. This clear separation between the cemetery and the spaces of everyday life in the city marked the cemetery out as a 'different' or 'alternative' space: the cemetery became 'a separate place with a special purpose' (Rugg, 2000: 262).

However, the conception of the role and purpose of cemeteries changed again in the later nineteenth century. Many cemeteries that had previously been sited on the edge of a town or city were swallowed up by urban expansion. As such, the cemetery became again a part of the city (although no longer located in the centre). Furthermore, cemeteries were no longer places intended to separate the dead from the living: instead, they were increasingly conceived as places to be visited and incorporated into everyday practice. At this time the model of the urban park – designed for 'moral and bodily well-being' (Waley, 2005:

4) – was increasingly popular and many such parks were intended to contribute to restorative recreation among the urban populace. In this context, urban burial spaces were increasingly laid out as elaborate, landscaped gardens, intended to be used for informal public recreation (particularly walking) (Woodthorpe, 2011).

Furthermore, towards the end of the nineteenth century, many European countries also established 'national' cemeteries, usually located in the capital city. Here the venerated figures of 'the' nation – politicians, artists, poets and musicians – were buried, often in elaborate tombs. The urban public was encouraged to visit such spaces within political nation-building projects as a way of connecting with the social and political community of the nation. In this context, the dead were no longer sequestered from the living and cemeteries ceased to be marginal or 'Other' spaces. Instead, they were increasingly incorporated into the everyday life of the urban populace.

However, there was a further shift in the way cemeteries were conceived in the twentieth century. In particular there was a move away from 'the elaborate Victorian ritual of commemoration towards a private, less showy grief', a trend that was confirmed after the First World War (White and Hodsdon, 2007: 7). Throughout the century, death and dying were progressively removed from the public realm in another period of sequestration (Stone, 2009). Cemeteries became, again, 'Other' spaces that were defined as places of private grief, mourning, memory and remembrance. As places associated with death and the dead, cemeteries were clearly differentiated from the everyday and the ways in which they were used became much narrower. This was reflected in the changing nature of cemetery landscapes: the extravagant garden landscapes of the nineteenth century cemetery were replaced by sober sites of remembrance, typified by the 'lawn cemetery' of order and discipline (Rugg, 2006).

In recent decades the ways that cemeteries are conceived and used in Britain has changed again, reflecting the influence of a complex set of social, cultural, economic and political changes. By the late twentieth century many cemeteries were running out of space for new burials (Woodthorpe, 2011). This, in turn, limited the funds available for upkeep but it also meant that some cemeteries had a dwindling number of users, particularly mourners and the recently bereaved. Consequently many cemeteries have experienced neglect and decline and some have closed altogether (White and Hodsdon, 2007). Cemetery managers face considerable pressure to provide sustainable futures for the cemeteries in their care (Woodthorpe, 2011). Indeed, current government policy

(The Stationary Office, 2001) seeks to prevent the neglect of cemeteries, encourage their rejuvenation and make best use of their amenity and greenspace value (whilst respecting their role as places of burial).

In this context, cemeteries have been valued in new ways and have become the focus for a new range of contemporary uses (see Dunk and Rugg, 1994) so that their principle users are no longer mourners and the bereaved. This is one illustration of the de-sequestration of death in contemporary societies and it makes any conception of cemeteries as alternative spaces increasingly problematic. Contemporary cemeteries are increasingly valued as urban green spaces, marking a return to the nineteenth century notion of cemeteries as urban parks (Waley, 2005). Furthermore, some cemeteries are increasingly emphasising their biodiversity and nature conservation value and are managed as urban nature reserves (Gill and Millington, 2012). Cemeteries are also increasingly the settings for a range of quotidian leisure activities such as recreational walking, dog-walking, jogging, sunbathing and eating lunch (see Deering, 2010; Raine, 2013). For such users, cemeteries are peaceful and non-threatening places (Deering, 2010) and the fact the cemetery is a place of burial is incidental or irrelevant. Cemeteries are (and, in fact, have long been) also settings for a range of anti-social behaviour and can be sites for 'dark' (or deviant) leisure activities (Rojek, 2000) including drug-taking, drinking and sexual encounters (Deering, 2010). Here participants are drawn to these spaces due to the lack of surveillance and policing and perhaps because they imagine such spaces as 'alternative'.

Furthermore, some cemeteries are increasingly popular with tourists as well as local recreationists. This brings a wide range of additional users to such sites and such tourism takes a variety of forms. Cemeteries are increasingly recognised for their heritage value (White and Hodsdon, 2007; Odgers, 2011) and visitors are drawn to the distinctive architecture, monuments and statuary associated with such spaces. In this way, cemeteries are potentially educational resources in the same way as any other heritage attraction. Consequently an increasing number of cemeteries now provide interpretive facilities for visitors and more than 100 cemeteries in Britain now offer guided tours. Those cemeteries in which famous people or celebrities are interred can also be sites of pilgrimage for fans and enthusiasts (Seaton, 2002) and such cemeteries can be the setting for a range of commemorative rituals and performances (Toussaint and Decrop, 2013; Brown, 2016). Cemeteries are also appealing to particular types of dark tourist (see the discussion below) who have a particular interest in death and the dead (Raine, 2013).

Consequently some cemeteries are the setting for (or are included in) ghost tours. Cemeteries are also increasingly sought out by 'genealogy tourists' (McCain and Ray, 2003; Birtwhistle, 2005) who are seeking personal roots and meaning through visiting the graves of their ancestors.

In short, contemporary British cemeteries are sites of multiple uses, many of which are unrelated to their original role as places of burial. Consequently, cemeteries are now sites which involve multiple stakeholders who have a range of (sometimes competing) agendas and requirements from cemeteries. In turn, this increases the potential for tension and conflict between different user groups (Deering, 2010; Woodthorpe, 2011).

Overall, there is a need to rethink the conception of cemeteries as 'alternative' spaces. Certainly cemeteries are exceptional in that they contain the dead and this makes them a clearly different sort of space. In this sense they can be considered as 'alternative' spaces in relation to 'everyday' spaces in which the dead are not buried. However, in terms of the ways that cemeteries are conceived and used it is a different matter. The relationship between cemeteries and society has undergone a number of shifts over time so that the ways that cemeteries are used has similarly changed. At some points in history, cemeteries have been conceived as 'Other' spaces, most notably from the late eighteenth century (when there was a conscious attempt to separate the dead from the living) and in the twentieth century (when grieving became a private matter that was banished to the cemetery).

However, at other times, cemeteries have been embedded within the practices of everyday life so that any conception of them as 'alternative' spaces is questionable. Certainly, at the present time, cemeteries in Britain are the focus for a diverse range of everyday practices and uses. The 'alternativeness' of cemeteries is, then, contingent upon a range of much broader social, cultural, economic and political factors. This, in turn, points to the need for caution in avoiding essentialist approaches to alternative spaces. Instead, we need to treat such alternative spaces as dynamic, emerging and relational. In particular, it is important to recognise that 'alternative' spaces may not have always been so, and that spaces which are currently 'alternative' may not be so in the future.

Death spaces as alternative space II: corpses

The range of spaces identified above in which death is becoming more visible also include increasing socio-cultural, political and economic encounters with the dead

body itself, but consideration of the space of the dead body is lacking in the social sciences and humanities.

In contrast, the social sciences have been invigorated through a focus on the live body, particularly deriving from the 'sociology of the body' (Turner, 2008). In Human Geography, for example, the body has been conceptualised as the 'geography closest in', with 'Questions of the body – its materiality, discursive construction, regulation and representation – ...absolutely crucial to understanding spatial relations at every scale' (Longhurst, 2005: 94). The living body has been conceptualised as a site of identity and social experience, with spaces and bodies mutually constituted through embodied practice and performance (Butler, 1990), a relationship that can be both political and subject to/expressive of power relations.

But, until relatively recently, this focus on 'the body' has been rather exclusively centred on the live body. In part, this is related to the sequestration of death discussed above, but also relates to the under-theorisation of the corpse and a tendency to view it as static, immobile and something represented by an absence rather than an active presence. In particular, it is only recently that different disciplines have begun to debate the agency of the corpse. However, the kinds of changes discussed above which are generating an increased consideration of death are also opening up a variety of new spaces in which corpses are encountered, and as Foltyn (2008: 99) suggests:

> the dead body has never been a more intriguing, important subject for scholars, public policy officials, the mass media, and the general public. The human corpse, and its social meanings and how it should be valued, discussed, disposed of, imaged, and used, is a critical subject, generating public debate, enormous media attention, and corporate interest.

So, there is an argument that corpses are becoming more present in a range of contexts and that encounters with them are increasing. However, this raises important questions about how the corpse is theorised and, in the context of this paper, what kind of 'geography closest in' do they perform? A key point here is that, rather like live bodies, they can be subjects but also powerful social actors in themselves, and their identities are fluid, changing and not fixed. And while it perhaps remains true that an engagement with human remains is still something exceptional, and perhaps takes place in 'alternative' spaces and involves the alternative space of the dead body itself, it is necessary to conceptualise this encounter in a way that both captures the 'why' of that exceptionalism whilst seeking to make that encounter a more mainstream event (and see the discussion of dark tourism spaces below). Like cemeteries, then, dead bodies

occupy an ambiguous position as 'alternative spaces' – in one way they have in recent Western history often been thought of as the ultimate 'Other' to human life and any engagement with them would certainly have been considered 'alternative'. Such encounters are now becoming more common, but the space of the dead body is dynamic and relational – shunned, excluded, feared and avoided by some, but desired and valued, sometimes mundane and the focus of interest for others. Again, such ambiguity questions notions of them as heterotopic spaces (Foucault, 1986).

The social sciences have of late undergone a 'rematerialising', a recognition that there has been an over-privileging of the social agency of living human beings accompanied by a renewed focus on the role of material culture in social life. As Lury (1996) suggests, cultures are material and material objects are cultural, or, 'social lives have things' and 'things have social lives'. As Appadurai (1986: 3-5) famously argued, we should:

> ...follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories. It is only through the analysis of these trajectories that we can interpret the human transactions and calculations that enliven things.

This focus on understanding the role of material objects certainly provides one way into analysing the space of the corpse and understanding its role in social, cultural and political life. However, even though this perspective would allow us to engage with the corpse and being to explore its social life, there are problems raised immediately in applying these theoretical perspectives. The very nature of the 'dead body' – ie. it is the remains of someone who was once alive, an individual who had life and identity – makes it highly problematical to talk about them as 'things'. And what materiality are we following – 'dead bodies', 'human remains', 'corpses', decomposing flesh, bones or ashes? These were once live human bodies but are now something else. And this slippery ambiguity is amplified in the many contexts in which the corpse is encountered eg. medical students encounter donated bodies as de-personalised 'specimens' which they use to learn dissection, but those same 'specimens' often reveal themselves as still individuals as their bodies are encountered (a blemish, an injury, a tattoo) and are re-personalised later in memorial services (Prentice, 2012). Thus a dead body can simultaneously possess many different qualities and dynamically slide between categories.

This brings us to more recent theoretical developments in which the dead body is seen as a dynamic and vibrant social actor which continues to have personhood and agency. As Crandall and Martin (2014: 432) argue, when introducing debates in bioarchaeology over the agency of the dead body, '...from the standpoint of materiality theory, [dead] bodies, their presence, absence and spectre may exhibit primary agency.' From this perspective, though stripped of intent, identity and self, the corpse can be more than 'merely' material remains. Tarlow (2002: 87), for example, argues that 'the dead body...is...powerfully meaningful' and that we should focus on the 'complex interaction of interests, desires and understandings which are played out through the dead body...'. Sørensen (2010: 129) sees the corpse as 'an active and potent material agent', exemplifying recent arguments in Death Studies that corpses, although lacking intentionality, possess social and mnemonic agency (Hockey et al., 2010; Tarlow, 2002; Williams, 2004; Sørensen, 2010; Hallam and Hockey, 2001). The dead body can thus possess agency, in the sense of how its materiality creates possibilities and sets limits to social action.

Death Studies has theorised that one way in which this happens is that corpses are elements of assemblages of material culture and embodied practice which make up a 'distributed personhood' of the dead (Hockey et al., 2010: 9). In these assemblages the material culture of death, including the dead body, is interwoven with other processes, such as the textual, visual and embodied processes of memory formation (Hallam and Hockey, 2001; Williams, 2004). The dead body is thus 'a node in a nexus of social relationships, objects and exchanges through which personhood and remembrance are distributed and constituted' (Williams, 2004: 267). In this way Williams (2004: 266) argues that:

> ...the deceased has the potential for social action after their biological death...the physicality and materiality of the dead body and its associated artefacts, structures and places can be seen as extensions of the deceased's personhood, actively affecting the remembrance of the deceased by the living and structuring future social action...the bodies of the dead...need to be considered as a further influence upon social choices and social remembrance.

Debates over the agency of the dead body need to continue. As Crandall and Martin (2014: 432) go on to note, there is still disagreement over whether 'human behaviour...[is] what produces the social agency of dead bodies or whether dead bodies are the anchors of fields of power/social influence that shape human action...'. However, what is important about these debates is that they produce an important shift in how we view the corpse. Rather than dismissing the dead body as something lacking agency, as

static, as 'merely' human remains which can be forgotten entirely or appropriated for socio-cultural and political ends, it gives the corpse a vibrancy and a potential for action which brings it more centrally into considerations of contemporary life. The corpse can be seen as playing an active role in a range of performances, practices and rituals incorporating and informed by material culture, all of which are complexly related to space. In this way we can perhaps move more generally towards a position where the dead body is not thought of primarily as something which is the ultimate 'Other' to human life and, to echo Durbach (2014: 65) as quoted above, 'it would be more profitable to acknowledge and seek to understand these desires [focused on the dead body]'. This would make the space of the corpse less marginalized and 'alternative', but a tension would still remain around its ontological multiplicity, as being not alive but still human remains.

Death spaces as alternative space III: Dark Tourism sites

These tensions around the 'alternative' nature of cemeteries and dead bodies themselves can also be traced in a related set of spaces associated with dark tourism (also known as 'thanatourism'), a form of tourism that involves visits to places associated with death and the dead. In its contemporary form dark tourism includes visits to a wide range of sites including graves and cemeteries; battlefields and other war sites (particularly war cemeteries); places associated with genocide (particularly the Holocaust); locations associated with individual and mass murder; sites associated with the death of celebrities and other noteworthy individuals; exhibitions about death (such as Gunther Von Hagens' *Bodyworlds*); conflict zones and dangerous places; and museums of torture. Over the past two decades there has been considerable academic interest (particularly in the English-speaking world) in dark tourism but there is also considerable disagreement over the nature of this activity and no consensus over how it should be defined. Nevertheless, one of the most influential definitions delimits dark tourism as 'the act of travel to sites associated with death, suffering and the seemingly macabre' (Stone, 2006: 146).

Dark tourism is nothing new since places associated with death have long attracted visitors (Seaton, 2009). However, a number of authors (Lennon and Foley, 2000; Stone, 2006; Sharpley, 2009) have argued that, in recent decades, there has been a notable increase among tourists in visiting places associated with death and the dead and in the provision of sites and experiences to cater for this interest. Various

explanations have been proposed for this development (although none is universally accepted). Lennon and Foley (2000) highlight the role of communications technologies and the news media in rapidly raising public awareness of particular instances of death and tragic events, particularly within Western societies. They also argue that the growing interest in visiting places of death reflects growing doubt and anxiety about the project of modernity. Other authors focus on the changing relationship with the past in Western societies, particularly growing uncertainty about the present and the rise of nostalgia (Rojek, 1993; Dann, 1994; Tarlow, 2005). Certainly, as we noted earlier, there has been a marked increase in recent decades in memorialising and commemorating events associated with death and human suffering and this has provided new sites for tourists to visit. The changing nature of tourism and tourists is also important. Over the past three decades mass tourism has fragmented into an ever-increasing range of 'niche' or 'alternative' forms of tourism in which new experiences are commodified for tourist consumption (see Urry, 1990; Urry and Larsen, 2011). In this context, dark tourism represents a particular form of niche tourism based on the commodification of death and the dead (Lennon and Foley, 2000).

The notion of dark tourism is predicated on the assumption that there is such a thing as the 'dark tourist'. Such a people are assumed to have a 'fascination with death' which is the primary motive for visiting places associated with death, suffering, tragedy and atrocity (Korstanje and George, 2015: 13). The emergence of such tourists has generated considerable comment and debate. dark tourism – and the willingness of tourists to visit places associated with death and the dead – has been interpreted as a concerning and macabre development. The very term 'dark tourism' implies 'disturbing practices and morbid products (and experiences) within the tourism domain' (Stone, 2006: 146).

In particular, it is suggested that dark tourism has turned death into 'a form of cultural entertainment' (Korstanje, 2011: 424; see also Lennon and Foley, 2000). It is frequently assumed that the people who visit places associated with death and the dead are deviant and immoral (Stone and Sharpley, 2014) and that there is an element of voyeurism in their motives (Ashworth and Hartmann, 2005). Consequently, the media has frequently regarded dark tourism – and dark tourists – as a source of moral panic (Seaton and Lennon, 2004). For example, one journalist (Marcel, 2004: 1) described dark tourism as 'the dirty little secret of the tourism industry'.

Considered from this perspective, sites of dark tourism could be identified as 'alternative' spaces. If

it is the case that death is sequestered in contemporary societies, then any form of tourism that is involves an encounter with death and the dead can be identified as alternative or marginal - indeed dark tourism has been explicitly identified as a form of niche tourism (Tarlow, 2005). As such, the morbid, macabre and voyeuristic motives and experiences attributed to dark tourists are clearly differentiated from 'mainstream' tourist practices that might be termed 'light' tourism (Seaton, 2009). Biran and Poria (2012) argue that deviant behaviour is at the core of dark tourism. Furthermore, visiting dark places can be conceptualised as a form of 'dark leisure' (Rojek, 2000; Spracklen, 2013); that is, leisure practices that are deviant, transgressive and taboo. In this context, the spaces of dark tourism have, like cemeteries, been examined as a form of heterotopia. They are 'Other' spaces that disrupt the stability and rhythms of 'normal' or everyday life through offering out-of-the ordinary experiences (Lee et al., 2012; Stone, 2013; Toussaint and Decrop, 2013).

However, conceptualising the spaces of dark tourism as alternative spaces is problematic. Firstly, many places associated with death and the dead now attract large numbers of visitors. For example, the Auschwitz-Birkenau museum in Poland attracts around 1.5 million visitors annually (Shirt, 2016); Ground Zero in New York attracted 3.5 million visitors by the end of 2002 (Lisle, 2004); and Pére Lachaise cemetery in Paris attracts around 3.5 million visitors annually. This effectively makes them 'mainstream' visitor attractions, rather than the subject of interest for a particular group of niche or special interest tourists. Thus, visiting places associated with death, dying and the dead is becoming more commonplace than at first appears. This in turn calls into question claims that dark tourism is a marginal or deviant activity. Accordingly, many of the spaces of dark tourism appear to be little different from other visitor attractions, rather than being 'alternative' spaces.

Secondly, there is a growing body of research into the motives of dark tourists which suggest that such people do not visit these sites because of a specific interest in death and the dead. For example, in a study of visitors to Auschwitz, Biran et al. (2011) reported that an interest in death was the least common reason for visiting and that the main motives were the desire to 'see it to believe it', learning and understanding, showing empathy for victims and a desire for a connection with one's personal heritage. Dunkley et al. (2011) explored the motives for visiting First World War battlefields and noted that the main reasons for visiting were pilgrimage/remembrance; the desire to see the places for themselves; and a specialist interest in the War or its battlefields. Sharpley (2012) reported that

a morbid fascination with death did not appear to be important for visiting sites in Rwanda associated with the 1994 genocide. Instead, a sense of duty and a desire to understand and remember were most important. A study of Australian visitors to Gallipoli battlefield (Cheal and Griffin, 2013) found little evidence of voyeurism or a morbid curiosity about death. Instead, visitors were more interested in connecting with a site associated with national identity. Other studies of reasons for visiting dark tourism sites by Farmaki (2013), Isaac and Çakmak (2014), Tinson et al. (2015), and Yankholmes and McKercher (2015) all reported little evidence of an interest in death and that visitors had other motives, particularly an interest in learning and understanding, and a search for connection and empathy.

In short, there is little evidence that so-called dark tourists are seeking an encounter with death and the dead, despite what has been claimed by some academic and media commentators. Instead, the motives of visitors to dark places – particularly remembrance, understanding and connection - are little different from those of other heritage tourists (Biran et al., 2011; Biran and Poria, 2012; Du et al., 2013). Heritage tourism is itself one of the largest and most common categories of tourism supply and demand, and cannot reasonably be described as an 'alternative' form of tourism (although there are some forms of heritage tourism which focus on niche or marginal forms of heritage). If the motives for visiting sites associated with death are little different from those for visiting heritage places it is questionable whether it is appropriate to identify 'dark tourism' as a distinct form of tourism demand. In fact, travelling to places associated with death and the dead that arises from a specific interest in death appears to be relatively uncommon.

However, this does not mean that visitors do not engage with issues of mortality when visiting places associated with death and the dead. Instead, the visit may provide an occasion for visitors to contemplate and reflect upon their *own* death. Stone and Sharpley (2008) argue that, in a context where death has been sequestered from public life, many people feel anxiety, alarm and isolation when thinking about death and dying. As such they may seek socially acceptable ways in which to satisfy their curiosity and fascination with death, and to seek meaning about the nature of existence. One such way is through visiting dark tourism sites. Such visits provide an opportunity for individuals to contemplate and reflect upon mortality (through contemplating the deaths of other people) in a context that does not involve terror or dread but which instead allows understanding and acceptance. This can take an almost infinite number of forms. It may

be unplanned and unintended, and many visitors may not engage in any such reflection at all. This perspective redefines dark tourism as a particular type of experience of (some) visitors to places associated with death and the dead, rather than conceptualising it in essentialist terms according to the attributes of particular sites or the motivations of tourists.

Interpreted in this way, dark tourism can be understood as a further indication of the 'de-sequestration' of death. It represents a form of public culture in which death is increasingly *present* and visible in the public realm (Stone and Sharpley, 2008). Dark tourism sites are places where individuals can encounter and engage with death so that such places can be identified as a form of contemporary mediating institution between the living and the dead (Stone, 2012). This, in turn, indicates how a society's relations with the dead are fluid, contingent and emerging. This perspective also challenges the conception of the sites of dark tourism as 'alternative' spaces. Instead, they can be conceived as 'ordinary' spaces which provide settings for everyday relationships between individuals and the Other dead (Stone, 2012). They also provide a further illustration of how the relationship between death and public/private space is becoming increasingly blurred.

Conclusion

In this paper we have interrogated three sets of spaces associated with death, dying, bodily disposal and the dead body itself to consider their alterity in contemporary Western society. Against a changing background in which death and the dead body are arguably becoming less sequestered and marginalised, we traced how academic disciplines are also focusing more on death and the dead, beginning to shape these as issues more central to their core concerns. However, it cannot be claimed that the spaces which have been analysed here – cemeteries, corpses and sites of dark tourism – have simply shed their status as 'alternative' spaces and become mainstream. They remain highly ambiguous spaces, some aspects of which are more accepted by some people, but for others they remain something outside of the norm. This reflects their ontological multiplicity as spaces of fear, revulsion, abjection and places to be avoided in the geographical imaginings of some, but emerging as mundane spaces, or spaces associated with leisure, self-reflection, fascination, obsession and desire in the everyday lives of others. Rather than labelling them as 'alternative' we would argue that what should be central to the analysis of these spaces is

a concern with the underlying processes which categorise them as 'alternative' or something else, because that very process of classification of space can tell us a great deal about changing societal attitudes to death and the dead, and help to make death a less feared and fearful part of life.

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