

## Purgatourism

Keith Egan

*Take not one step to either side,  
But follow yet, and make way up the mountain  
Till we meet someone who may serve as guide  
Dante, Divine Comedy 4.39*



Fig. 1: a statue of the cross of the Order of St James, whose motto is 'red is the sword with the blood of Muslims'. The Fleur-de-Lis on each of the arms indicates honour with stain. Ed. Note: All photos in this essay are by the author.

This essay is an imaginative exploration of guided travel. I took three such explorations since 2002, for different reasons. My journey to Ground Zero the year after the Twin Towers fell was a difficult one, the first time I had visited a site of terror and mass tragedy, and I was grateful for my guide, James, who

shaped a journey that made sense for us both, me as interloper, and he, my interpreter. A few years later, conducting doctoral fieldwork in Spain, I walked towards St. James's tomb in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, with another putative guide, Diego, who walked on an apocalyptically-inspired pilgrimage to his namesake Santiago Matamoros, the medieval Christian terrorist incarnation of one of the original twelve apostles. Finally, Vishka, one of the Medjugorje visionaries, offered an international audience of pilgrims, who gathered near the upper room where the visionaries gathered as children to commune with 'Gospa' [the Virgin Mary], an account of her own guided journey through purgatory in the company of her guide, Mary, Mother of God. These three people, James, Diego and Vishka, were not my companions, but offered themselves as guides, with information and insight for me, stories to match my quests. The different kinds of journey all draw together important themes that articulate the possibilities within dark travel for understanding the human need to witness tragedy and suffering in the service of existential stability and moral enlightenment.

Particular places are good to remember with, to remember joy in the face of different threats to "life, lifeworld or livelihood" (Jackson 2005, 187), but are also such places where forgetting occurs. I sketch how the act of seeking these places out has been one of witnessing, of transgression, of facing terror of the Other; Medjugorje as a route of access to Mary, the miraculous and, in my particular example, a point of access to Purgatory too, and Ground Zero as a place obliterated and between symbolic states; whatever the Twin Towers had been, they are not remembered, so much as re-membered. The site has been deconstructed and rebuilt to mean something else in the light of events, events that people have contributed to as witnesses. In 2002, though, it was a monument to a city that had descended for a period, its life and its inhabitants in suspense. I bring into focus a number of juxtapositions, of memory in the figure of the witness, and joy and terror in the figure of the tourist/pilgrim, moving to desert places, places at the edge of the real and the everyday in order to be, to see, to experience.

The boundaries between pilgrimage, the archetypal authentic journey of the contemplative soul towards the infinite (see Dubisch 1995, 77-78 for a discussion of the potential ambivalence around the term pilgrimage), and

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tourism, the seemingly less sincere and potentially camp mode of travel to a secular 'Mecca', travel that revolves around the search for the self at leisure (see Roseman and Fife 2008, Coleman and Kohn 2007) are in dispute here. There is a more enduring human impulse to seek out the resources we need to feel that we have enough to overcome our perennial sense that we are lacking something. The grass elsewhere is greener, and the wherewithal of life is only a journey away (Jackson 2013, 3). I argue for the importance of drawing light and dark together in the kinds of sites that have always drawn people with differing motivations imaginatively, where tourists and pilgrims alike have arrived with the hope of becoming better, in search of wellbeing. Drawing out a clear separation of secular and sacred is not tenable; we may speak of sacred profanity for instance as we account for visitors to Ground Zero. In doing so one remains mindful that 'profane' relates to the physical space before the temple proper that was allotted the mundane activities of religious commerce, buying sacrifices, exchanging currency. Spanning different times, ancient pilgrimage, medieval journeys of purgation, modern pilgrimage to sites of genocide or the postmodern, hyper-real, captured and replayed horrors, all converge around our sense of dealing with the terror of the real and quest for wellbeing and joy.

What becomes clear for students of pilgrimage and tourism alike is that it is no longer tenable to hold those two categories of experience apart. The sacred and the profane converge and co-exist quite easily, and have done for some time. Border situations are those situations in life, "where we come up against the limits of language, the limits of our strength, the limits of our knowledge, yet are sometimes thrown open to new ways of understanding our being-in-the-world, new ways of connecting with others" (Jackson 2009, xii). Whether on a quest for the religious or the real, we seek connectedness, an elsewhere, an alibi for lives lived more or less well, "beyond the horizons of immediate lifeworlds" (Jackson 2009, 7) to press the moratorium of our lives into service. In other words, we are perennially at risk of some manifestation of chaos, and at such times we often set out, sometimes alone, finding ourselves gathering together as witnesses, embracing the fiction that we can "transcend our circumstances if only we have a mind to, and cling to the illusion that the world is ours to save, to transform, to transcend" (ibid., 13). Sites that provide a sense of solidarity, however ephemeral, and a sense of making and remaking history, draw us all the more.

Pilgrimage sites offer the possibility of the suspension of laws of physics, while darker sites reveal how easily moral co-ordinates can evanesce. There can be no spurious separation of tourists and pilgrims though; at such sites we often submit ourselves to experiment, to be acted upon in the penumbral region. Here we are more alive to the convergence of the religious and the real, and bolster ourselves in the process. Border situations exist in the possibility of the everyday; through face-to-face relations we struggle to overcome our given

circumstances ourselves, and in extreme situations reach for ulterior objects, ideas or words. In committing ourselves to such journeys, we open the possibility of seeing ourselves from afar.

### **Remember to remember—A brief history of sacred movement**

From the first century Christians embraced the centrality of their dead and the leisurely possibilities of attending their gravesides. The pre-Christian propensity of people to seek out healing and divination combined with the Christian overturning of a previously-held repugnance of the dead (Brown 1982, 7). The birth of Christian pilgrimage began with the death of beloved Christians, their memorialisation and the subsequent unleashing of a cornucopia of first, second and third-order relics upon Western European Christendom. In this evolving “cult of Christian saints” in antiquity (ibid.), relics were often exhumed, partitioned and moved to more convenient or powerful locations in order to maximise their effects and influence.

The dead, however, provided evidence of a localized sacred space and nurtured the memorialisation of the departed that would ground itself in leisurely feasting at the gravesides of loved ones (ibid., 23, 29) and later into larger feast days (Webb 2002, 3-4), a practice remarkably consistent throughout the first sixteen centuries of Christianity (Brown 1982, 24). However macabre the trade in the material remains of holy men may seem now, these relics were beacons in a world of immanent evil and thus desired, mobile loci of power and resistance.

Pilgrimage has historically had a habit of leading to a dark site, at least as far back in Judeo-Christian thought to Abraham’s journey to sacrifice his son Isaac on God’s command—religion percolating in the company of death and tourism almost since there was someone to go. Evil in the medieval imagination was “real, visible, and tangible” (Sumption 1975, 11), and the counterpoint of evil was the pilgrimage and cult of saints (ibid., 21). In medieval Christianity, for instance, pilgrimage as an ‘act of leaving’ (see Brown 1982, 86), was not to be undertaken lightly. To prepare for pilgrimage, the medieval pilgrim underwent a kind of “civil death” (Tomasi 2002, 6), settling his affairs at home by preparing himself and his estate for his likely demise en route. Pilgrimage was a period of estrangement from home as pilgrims died to the world as “athletes of virtue” (Adler 2002, 30). The growth of Purgatory in the twelfth century as an actual place that all Christians who had not displayed heroic virtue during their lives were destined to endure, and the rise of various forms of indulgence, meant that travel to Holy sites to secure ‘time off for good behaviour’ became of paramount importance in the medieval era (Le Goff 1984).

Pilgrimage to partitioned relics also offered a range of new experiences, fostering the growth of mercantile capitalism by catering to the on-going

material needs and desires of pilgrims—medieval pilgrim hotels have been described as ambivalent mirages, “places of the profane *par excellence*” (Barrett and Gurgand, in Tomasi 2002, 14)—eventually ushering in the age of the Grand Tour (Tomasi 2002, 15). The partitioning of relics did not proceed without local moral panics regarding ‘worldly visitors’ to shrines, control over commodities, “gluttony and contamination” by crowds though (Adler 2002, 27). The graves of saintly martyrs however still became a special focus of attention for Christians who embraced the idea that, while the saints had been “born from earth to heaven” (Brown 1982, 57), they were still present through their bodily remains (ibid., 3), providing a privileged means of access and patronage. Bishops, gaining in wealth as the church became accepted and embraced by the Roman Empire, for instance, became visible patrons of Roman Catholicism, buttressed by being “wired into” the ‘invisible’ patron saints buried in their churches (ibid., 37). The new Christian ontology manifested a great chain of being in ordinary lives, joining the dead, the undead, the sick and possessed, with the divine. The terror of the site, the cacophony of possession, ranting and exorcisms that must have echoed around these early sites were for pilgrims proof of the miasma of sin and the larger truth of perdition, but also pointed to the exercise of the ‘clean’ power of exorcism. St. Jerome in the fourth century writes of the impact of the tombs of the prophets in Rome on a pilgrim named Paula (quoted in Brown 1982, 106):

*She shuddered at the sight of so many marvellous happenings. For there she was met by the noise of demons roaring in various torments and before the tombs of the saints she saw men howling like wolves, barking like dogs, roaring like lions, hissing like snakes, bellowing like bulls; some twisted their heels to touch the earth by arching their bodies backwards; women hung upside down in mid-air, yet their skirts did not fall down over their heads.*

### Remembering to be afraid—Visiting Ground Zero

When I visited Ground Zero in 2002 I found a subdued crowd moving slowly in and about the site, milling (grinding experience) around (a circularity in the site), as people tried to understand how to be there, what the act of witness, in this instance, actually entailed. What does one do at a site of tragedy after the fact, as Taussig (2011, 22) refers to such acts “returning to the scene of the crime”? Many people relied more on the trope of tourism at this site of terror and tried to take photos of themselves and their friends posing. The permanency of the photo counteracting the ephemeral towers and the negative space pushing in on them, those witnesses held the knowledge of the atrocity apart from the feeling of being violated that continued to be felt, whether they responded in fear or defiance. Does one smile here? This wreckage, this excess of suffering, called for quiet and reflection, as at a sacred site. It was hard though for many to

really embrace an idea of anything holy remaining at this hole in the ground. Many photos of quiet and bemused tourists were taken. Others tried to leave something behind, and here the reflex of memorialisation was more familiar. Visitors tried to cope with the obdurate reality of the negation they faced: the hole in the ground had a feeling of its own agency. The still-nascent tourism of this terror site was not comfortable for anyone, even though the relief of having made the pilgrimage and having photographic proof of being there, as well as having left something after them, provided some with an intuitive and ad hoc sense of accomplishment. It was hard to be sure of anything there, and the subsequent course towards war against a poorly-formed but devastatingly executed idea, gradually took hold. The answer to the questions that formed too easily in people's minds on the 11<sup>th</sup> September, "Why do they hate us?", did not critically examine who 'they' were, whether 'hate' was what 'they' felt, or what was the America 'they' had this negative reaction towards (see Sardar and Davies 2002). Instead the question was answered with another kind of tour; the tour of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan. And yet to travel to Ground Zero, itself a term evoking the horror of Nagasaki and Hiroshima was also "a graver, more honourable compulsion to bear witness" (Rushdie, cited in Edkins 2008, 105).

It has to be said that my visit to New York was to take in, under the guidance of my host, the Moondance diner in Manhattan that appeared in Sam Raimi's *Spiderman* and the Battery Park entrance to the secret headquarters in *Men in Black*, before travelling to Ground Zero. Thus, the tour of the Big Apple had for my host to include other instances of famous places viewed on screen, hyper real places, in preparation for the main event. I suspect that there was an unconscious structure to my host's decision to lead me on this circuitous route through Manhattan, to prepare me for was not a memory of an event, but a kind of dreaming, the land yielding up messages to the people who came to or passed by the scarred city-scape. Scurrying around the city, anchoring us in the popular culture and the realm of the silver screen, James sought to show the permanence and iconic city before exposing me to its trauma. Two supposedly distinct modes of travel centred on how one moves and where one chooses to go, bleed into each other, complicating any particularly strict delineation. James's fear for us, the gravity of the site being potentially too much to encounter, required the site to be parenthesised for us both. He pointed out the sights that were already beginning to codify the event, in terms of resilience and emergence, the businesses that had stayed open, the journey of pilgrim-tourists, the not-quite-empty hole around which people gathered. It was impossible not to be drawn into a feeling that there was something sacred there, the large expanse of a space torn into the land must have been devastating for those who knew the Twin Towers. This inchoate experience of collective effervescence was a frisson in a city that had seemed to Jean Baudrillard (1988, 15) to have always struggled to feel that New Yorkers were part of a collective at all.

Barbara Ehrenreich too imagined a New York visited by the unconverted Hottentot, finding himself in a New York crowd, “the raw material for festivity ... but the facial expressions of the people around him immediately belie this supposition ... Whatever these people are doing, they are not celebrating. And this will be the biggest shock to him: their refusal, or inability to put this abundant convergence of humanity to use for some kind of celebration.” (2007, 248) I had never seen the Twin Towers standing; instead as I stood at this site I drew on the urban geography of medieval cities I had visited, those cities that have so occupied Richard Sennett’s imagination (1992), with protective walls and abundant histories, where randomly constructed, unplanned streets debouched into the wide-open vista of the sanctuary that was the Cathedral. The cathedral would physically dominate as the city’s space of truth and sanctuary, overwhelming and awe-inspiring in its verticality. At Ground Zero, the absence of verticality was dizzying, the space revealing a more terrible reality of death and destruction as symbolic negation.

One dimension of experience relates to the kinds of emotions one can encounter at sites of memory or commemoration, proposing an itinerary, movement or passage. Hope is a powerful emotion to stoke and present to visitors, as is shame. Sometimes both can be present (Judenzplatz) and both are thoroughly socialised emotional experiences. One imagines that such places can offer us an alternative to being inured to the human condition, to the slings and arrows that we all feel privately and endure among others. Experience itself is an example of a properly ordered historical and cultural understanding of a socialised self (see Desjarlais 1996) but it is the counter of fear that is pertinent. Here is one possibility of the “terror dream” (Faludi 2007)—despite the prevalent soundbite that everything had changed after the ‘unimaginable’ Twin Towers attack, Pearl Harbour remembered, forgotten; smoking out Saddam; hunting down Osama bin Laden—all Wild West images, a series of paratactic fragments evoked to establish a narrative of recovering a collective sense of self. The world itself is now the wilderness needing to be tamed, through the closing of a new American border.

### **Are pilgrimage sites dark places? Medjugorje as sanctuary**

Pilgrimage sites and tourist sites converge as ‘avenues to re-enchantment’ (Jackson 2005, xxv). Pilgrimage itineraries are nested in, and continually work on, the history of Christianity as possibilities and constraints to be rediscovered and re-animated in different eras by pilgrims and pilgrimage promoters alike, always aware of the potential that pilgrims “vote with ... their wallets” (Reader 2014, 116) to succumb to the tourist paradigm. After a period of waning interest in pilgrimages as a result of European religious reformations, in early modern times, Christian pilgrimages found their niche by resisting the rise of secular

modernity, “the ravages of the enlightenment” in Joseph Ratzinger’s (2005) words. Lourdes is perhaps the clearest example of such a pilgrimage (Harris 1999). Modern pilgrimages have proliferated in the twentieth century under the rubric of spiritual or secular journeys (not religious ones), to many new kinds of sites, from war memorials, to cancer forests and Jim Morrison’s grave (Margry 2008). Such pilgrimages have thus come about with much less attachment to a particular religious tradition and a potentially greater focus on the existential conditions of life and loss (see Reader 2014). But pilgrimage was attractive to so many travellers for more than its transcendence too; the worldly dimensions of other places had their own draw. St. Augustine denounced travel to pilgrimage in the fourth century, and Erasmus found the sale of sacred relics at Canterbury (Ure 2006, 119) to be ludicrous and mocked Camino pilgrims as tourists (*ibid.*, 84).

This (con)temporary oasis from one’s hectic everyday life is a far cry from the medieval dangers that noblemen on pilgrimage risked; “awesome warnings’ of possession by demons, being turned into idiots or simply vanishing altogether” (French 1994, 105). Further, through Bernard of Clairvaux’s promotion of Marian pilgrimage and the rise of the Knights Templar meant a burgeoning sacred geography for European elites, with new relics, new sites and new ways to see the world while playing at poverty.

Pilgrimages prospered because they were sold as time well spent in preparation for the future, and a chance to step out of the ordinary everyday and see new sights, experience new flavours, and enjoy faraway places, when they had a larger message and the means to communicate that message to an audience. Many accounts of pilgrimage today draw on reading the pilgrim as consumer, client, or contractor of commodified experience (see Reader 2014). Pilgrimage certainly always had an element of this fetish experience, but there is a strong historical layering of movement towards a sense of transcendence of the present that articulates other pilgrim motivations as well (e.g. Sanchez y Sanchez and Hesp 2016).

My intellectual fascination with Medjugorje was in part a response to the changes I had perceived during my doctoral fieldwork in Spain on the Camino de Santiago. In many of the literary representations of the Camino, the medieval pilgrimage that drew pilgrims to Santiago de Compostela in the north west of Spain charted a more ‘authentic’ and ‘wild’ place for the imagination to roam as the pilgrim body westward plodded, and posited important connections between these two attributes, connections that highlighted the serendipity of the journey and the paring back of experience, the adventure and experience of traveling under one’s own steam. Of course these are attributes one hopes will turn up in fieldwork too; serendipity and the phenomenological engagement with life as lived are lodestones for the anthropological method and our later representation of the quiddity, the reality of our having been somewhere else, our intellectual

alibis, from the Latin meaning ‘elsewhere’. As I spent weeks at a time over years traipsing behind and among pilgrims seeking the Geertzian (1973, 121) “really real”, tutting at the tourists who took the bus in larger groups, I saw the whole Camino evolve, the industry grow, the time and the space change shape as the wild frontier responded to the market of travellers and provided ATMs, private hostels, washing machines, taxis and trinkets. Ever more categories of separation were required, invented and practiced. People were identified and denounced and the world was set right.

### **Towards Santiago, with Diego**

It was a while before the uncomfortable feeling presented itself to my nearly conscious mind in the pre-dawn. Outside a pilgrim hostel in the western end of Cizur Mayor, I noted a man stretching a little bit away and looking furtively at me. He was at least six-foot-two and stocky for his height, so the expression was immediately disconcerting. I decided that my stretches were done and I began walking. Unfortunately, he did too. Then it dawned; he wanted a walking partner and was not quite able to ask to walk with anyone. I tried some more stalling techniques but apparently I had imprinted on him and I was not going to get away. The awkwardness of the whole situation was palpable, especially as he was clearly hobbling from an outbreak of blisters on the soles of his feet. We eventually introduced ourselves though and Diego and I began walking. The rest of the Irish group whom I had thrown my lot in with earlier had pushed on, further than my stopping point for the day, I later found out, so Diego was to be my companion and would try to be my guide.

As we walked, I told Diego of my project and we set about getting to know each other. Our walk into Puente la Reina brought us to the first commercial refuge along the way, Hotel Jacobeo, where many of the modern facilities we were trying to leave behind were available; washer, dryer, hot showers, good meals, nice beds. Being a traditionalist, Diego dismissed my impure approach to entering the spirit of the Camino, guiding me to the older refuge, where pilgrims scrub their clothes and sleep on less comfortable beds. It was difficult, too, to argue with the logic of self-denial on this path, so I hesitatingly agreed.



Fig. 2: Tomas the medieval Templar Knight, a representative of Holy War, repackaged in a message of peace and chivalry in his pilgrim hostel in Manjarín, Spain.

My time with Diego was fraught because of the divergent motivations that had brought us on pilgrimage. As a member of a deeply conservative charismatic prayer group in Colombia, Diego was told upon his departure that he had been given the sword of St. James the Slayer of Moors. He explained that he had personally helped to avert an apocalypse through the power of prayer and fought the devil during several prayer sessions. The sword of St. James then meant something to him; it was spiritual armour that he would need on the journey to defend himself. He carried the knowledge of how easily the world could end with a heavy heart; only for the prayer of a chosen few, everything could end. I thought then his natural affinity with the James of medieval slaughter, who had travelled with the conquistadors and evolved from being a national saint defending against invaders to being a patron of the conquering army, somewhat ironic, even tragic. And yet as we spoke of the bible, which he neither knew well nor cared to, his belief in a precarious world on the brink of ending comforted him.



Fig. 3: a representation of St James the Slayer of Moors, sword held high, Burgos Cathedral, Spain.

Diego suffered badly with his blisters and we walked quite slowly and only covered short distances each day. As Andrew Irving comments about being engaged in “walking fieldwork” with an informant suffering from AIDS, “the limits of his body became placed upon my actions and by doing these things in his company I partially inhabited his world” (2005, 323). More and more pilgrims were passing us by, and I could have no time to walk or talk with them. With the gift of my company turning into a poisoned offering, I rankled at the thought of weeks chained at his side, unable to free myself. Of course, I only had to say that I was leaving and would not have had to give him another thought, but my escape into the larger ‘imagined’ community would be tainted every time somebody would ask where he was, and why we had parted. Thus, one way or the other it seemed, I risked breaking down the fragile connections I was trying to build with my ephemeral fellow pilgrims.

Often, despite the great intentions to do a solitary pilgrimage, the long periods of being alone can lead not only to loneliness but also to downright boredom, and the abundance of nature can become tedious for those cursed with a modern tourist appetite for sights and sites in quick succession. When coupled with the awkward loneliness of realising that pilgrims could too easily walk to

Santiago sharing only the physical direction, any discourse of rugged individualism behind one's motives becomes severely tested, especially in a restaurant eating alone, for the third or fourth night in a row. For that reason, pilgrims quickly tend to form loose groupings around a common language pool, a series of caucuses composed of fellow travellers that last for a few days. The flow of conversation, the give and take between pilgrims and between groups, transforms a courageous solitary experience into a more 'cultural' one, connecting people from different parts of the world together through a developing sense of shared meanings and symbols. Most groups form quickly enough and can tend to last for a great deal of the journey, although should they form too soon, they can be marked by infighting and resentment.

### *Visbka's guided tour of Purgatory*

Medjugorje offers pilgrims a return to super-nature. This local world in Bosnia-Herzegovina is pored over by pilgrims for signs and events that show the natural world suffused with the supernatural breaking through. People milling around, showing photos of Mary in the sky, recounting strange encounters with angels and demons in the area. This active volcano of religious fervour is steadily increasing its numbers every year, expanding in many countries. The apocalyptic tone of Mary is a solid draw, promising a purgatory on earth for those not willing to turn back to God. By the time I first set foot in the village, the effects of the market that had grown to support this charismatic pilgrimage destination were astounding, even to the seasoned travellers who had been coming since the beginning and who had actively worked for the day that Medjugorje could accommodate the anticipated hordes.

The separation of secular and sacred forms of movement is clearly unhelpful, as shrines consistently deploy marketing strategies to grow their client base (one organiser at Medjugorje spoke of her "soldiers") and gratefully rely on modern forms of mass transport to travel the great distances to the shrines of their choice. And they do choose, and choose again. While Medjugorje for instance attracts people once or twice a year every year, a broader congregation make the trips to other shrines too. Part of this is due to ease of access in some cases, but also the separation of tasks assigned to different shrines; cures in Lourdes, national novenas in Knock, Ireland and personal penance in St. Patrick's Purgatory, Donegal in Ireland too. Pilgrims to Medjugorje, indeed, reported that this was a holiday for them as mothers, leaving their families to pray but also to get some sun, to go to the bar and meet new people, often, as with the Irish, to lament the state of the country back home. Medjugorje was accomplishing quite a bit for many.



Fig. 4: a figure of St James the humble pilgrim to his own shrine, outside Villafranca del Bierzo, Spain. Note the red cross of Santiago emblazoned on his chest.

On one fieldtrip to Medjugorje while observing a successful entanglement of package tourism and pilgrimage itineraries, I had occasion to hear Vishka, one of the original six visionaries, speak to the crowd on the first Wednesday of that month. Here I observed a pilgrim swoon in the spirit, in the middle of hundreds of visitors to the upper room where the visionaries had first been visited by the Virgin Mary. Vishka still speaks to the crowds from outside this room. On this particular cold April morning, Vishka recounted how Mary, or Gospa as she is called locally, took her to visit purgatory, filled with priests who had not kept their vows of obedience and blessed divorced couples in new relationships and dispensed the blessed sacrament to people who had been 'living in sin'. Purgatory was not a pleasant place to be, she told us, as she was overcome with the yellow smoky atmosphere, presumably from the sulphurous environs. "Yellow and smoky" said a man's voice behind me, "sounds like she went to

Beijing”. I turned to find a priest behind me with an impassive expression, quietly smoking away on a cigarette, cracking into a wry look on his face.

Father Ned’s presence was somewhat complicated on this pilgrimage. He had been invited by a woman devoted to Mary, who knew the power and privilege of bringing a priest, and who in effect could be bringing an entire parish with him if he became interested or motivated. Ned was a country priest, though, from a farming family and was the parish accountant, counsellor and shepherd and did not seem to be motivated by the possibility of being motivated by Gospa. Not that he was not deeply steeped in the church, just that the fault-lines between the official church and the Gospa movement are deeper than the latter might like. One priest at a time, sell the story, bring as many as possible, grow the movement parish by parish. “Someone in every parish,” the guide told the group later. It was hard not to notice the look of suspicion on the priest’s face.



Fig. 5: Mirjanna at Cennacolo Drug Rehabilitation Centre, Medjugorje, among devotees as she is recorded receiving messages from Gospa (Mary, Mother of God).

The story of Medjugorje is rooted in terror, the terror of Franciscans being executed by Germans/Stasi at the end of World War II and of communist persecution in 1980s. The communist oppression gave way to the promise of tourism and soon the terror of Medjugorje's humble beginnings was its selling point. The story is important to situate the developing tourist experience, the terror is a temporal anchor. The experience is developing; Medjugorje has learned from Knock (an altogether more sedate experience with the divine) about how to organise in the modern world. It must be kept in mind the awful spectre of famine that returned to Ireland in the years around 1879.



Fig. 6: a pilgrim harvests weeping fluid from behind the knee of a statue of Jesus outside the Church in Medjugorje.



Fig. 7: women pray at the grave of Fr. Slavko Barbarič. Should Fr. Slavko, an important figure in the early life of the Medjugorje visionaries, be confirmed as having been spotted once more, the case for Medjugorje as a site of miracles will be given a large boost. Mirjanna has claimed to have met him after his death.

During a well-structured week at Medjugorje, pilgrims are brought to various places to begin learning the history of the site, Fr. Jozo Zovko, an early champion of the children, tells pilgrims of the atrocities that occurred, the killing of Franciscan priests during WWII who did not deny Christ, the persecution of the children, by the communists, and then the scientists, and finally the pilgrims who had wanted miracles. Other priests explain to pilgrims how tourism won the day, how Knock served as the inspiration for the proliferation of kitsch and expansion of the visionaries' acts of witnessing Mary into the church and the surrounding village. The pilgrims are shown the hotels and brought to the priests for confession, prayer and to be reminded that if their neighbour does not know they are a Catholic, then they are atheists. Pilgrims recite up to fifteen decades of the Rosary every day, and then retire to a bar or hire a bus into Mostar to visit the town's famed bridge and buy some trinkets. Between events, pilgrims mill about taking photos, buying holy water or small statues of Mary. Others ramble through the cemetery around the church in Medjugorje, where locals hold a vigil at the grave of Fr. Slavko Barbarič, another early champion of the children, where a miracle is expected soon to begin the process of having him canonised. Privately I have been told he has already been seen walking up the hill of visions, an early site of Mary apparitions and a huge draw for contemporary pilgrims. Being confronted with the vision of a dead man on the

side of a hill causes not fear, just joy at the prospect of a much-needed miracle to prove the site in the eyes of the Catholic Church in Rome: the Church has not yet officially accepted that Mary has appeared there.

*Terror is nothing new: Light into spiritual darkness*

The scene of planes crashing into the World Trade Centre is by now sealed into the imaginations of anyone near a television on that day, or indeed anyone exposed to the four minutes of footage that replayed for weeks afterwards on screens across the world. From the moment of its unfolding, nobody knew what might be coming next; the world felt that it was changing. Yet the raw data of the event was both predicted in our imaginations through popular culture, for instance in the Hollywood blockbuster *Independence Day* (1996) and the Tom Clancy novel *The Sum of all Fears* (1992) and struggled to match the reality to the tightly edited visual representation of that endlessly-looping four minutes of footage. At the moment of the event, editors, journalists, witnesses and victims tried not to experience this event; they eventually even tried to remember it, talking about how it seemed like a movie, but the real is terrifying. Instruments of modernity to which we had become so habituated had been reconfigured to attack those concrete symbols we took for granted. The effect was terrifying. And yet, as the postmodernists cautioned, we had dreamed this very dream before.

The search for identity is as much a spatial exercise as an internal one. While in Christian spirituality, one route for self-realisation advocated the “*via negativa*” (Borradori 2003, 8), there is another one which draws one into the world, to seek out the self in the immanent and encounter a renewing transcendence. The anthropologist Michael Jackson argues that we solve the problem of being in different ways. The question of being is always present to us and continually in question. It is a question that is not grounded in an individual will-to-be, but a matter of ‘continual, intuitive, and opportunistic changes of course’ (Jackson 2005, xii), an improvised itinerary in itself. Life itself provides the possibility of a range of attempts to deal with the problem of survival, and the possibility of flourishing through “endless experimentation in how the given world can be lived *decisively*, on one’s own terms” (ibid., emphasis in original) and in relation to others, who can participate in sustaining or augmenting one another, or vie for the scarce resources we all require. But Jackson is quick to remind us too though, that we cannot be reduced to profit-maximising individuals, that our reflective awareness of ourselves in this world is a matter of being more or less aware, rather than always attentive, and that at different times in different places we do some of this work as it follows from our actions and experiences. In times of terror, for instance, it may be required of us to travel, to move outside of the sense of a diminished world, not the global village but the village under threat.

Why do disasters attract so many people? And why do we consider their attendance to be tourism? The sites are promoted, which is touristic, suggesting the lack of a moral component (nothing at stake for them in turning up beyond fascination, or voyeurism). Yet witness is an important bridging term here, both in the sense of returning to the crime, and in the other sense that there is a rupture, a break and discontinuity that must be collectively viewed, wherein the viewing itself is a form of healing, salving, changing the meanings of the event, or shaping it by participating in the emerging story. Is it also the idea somehow that we seek out the abyss to be seen ourselves? There may be something at stake beyond the ludic in many sites of disaster, where these sites can be for making life more endurable. There is an encounter with a wild power, a power outside of civilisation at work in many such sites, the power of anti-structure perhaps, or who knows, a chance at collective expression at times. Can we consider then the sites of disaster or darkness the antinomian reality (in a Turnerian sense) that reasserts the rest of the world and of time? Without societal hope, or with challenges to it, one can imagine people flocking in some way like the movement of red blood cells to the site of the societal wound, a clotting occurring, through the condensation of people witnessing and recording and remembering and shaping what the outcome will be. This is another reason why tourists, *qua* pilgrims, may not be so immediately afraid, so much as they are alert and vigilant. There is the question then of those who attend such places in order to re-affirm the order of things.

I have charted a kind of structure of recovery that the Greco-Roman culture bequeathed us, a structure of forgetting, of terror, dreaming and joy that ushered our passage from one state to the next. The passage of pilgrimage, though sprinkled with lighter activities that compose the glue of our everyday and our delight as we travel elsewhere, we descend in to the underworld, to approach some version of oblivion in order to drink of the river Lethe, the Greek watercourse that flowed around the cave of Hypnos, the god of Sleep, and which freed the dead from their previous lives before they could experience Elysium. I am struck by how little we account for joy that we are taken up by the impermanence of our increasingly urbanised existence. We feel ever more isolated, alienated, at risk and out of sync with collective sentiment. We forget that we have forgotten how we have evolved to be sociable as we endure in our everyday lives. When we seek the resources to transcend, to reclaim the world, we move away from the inertia of our routine. However, the real, and the religious are both terrifying, capable of extinguishing us, of claiming our hopes for our own futures. Pilgrims to Medjugorje expect to drink and laugh, to pray and worry about their children and parents, search out their place in the unfolding history of the region and religion. Tourists to dark spots often wish something similar, to face the “lives, lifeworlds and livelihoods” to enquire about the conditions of sustainability. What we call dark tourism we do so I suspect

from the vantage point of living in increasingly Apollonian societies, averse to risk or chance. It is possible to discern the collective witnessing to the Dionysian at such places, that risks have not been vanquished, that terror endures. Joy then is one potent response to terror, the affirmation of life in the eternal recurrence of the abyss. Travel is not a shallow affair, a term that recalls travails and tortures, but neither has movement in the modern day become a cynical spectacle because it is possible to travel in leisure. Journeying to 'dark' places, coming face to face with a moral and geographical anchor for terror, can be a source indeed of enlightenment, a sorting through of the personal, the political and the existential. All the more potent to do so in the company of a guide.

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