Reviews

EXHIBITIONS

Time and place, truth and proof. The 22 July Information Centre

Located in the Norwegian Government Centre in Oslo. Opened 22 July 2015 as a temporary information centre.

In the summer of 2015 the 22 July Information Centre in Oslo opened four years to the day after Anders Behring Breivik massacred seventy-seven people on 22 July 2011. Eight died in a bomb attack on a government building in downtown Oslo. He killed a further sixty-nine people, predominantly young members of the Arbeidernes Ungdomsfylking (AUF), the Norwegian Labour Party Youth Wing, in a pre-meditated shooting spree on the island of Utøya, about forty kilometers north of Oslo. Many more were injured. Breivik's terrorism was rooted in a mélange of militant far-right, ethno-racist, anti-multiculturalist and Islamophobic ideas, amongst others, explained in a lengthy manifesto distributed by email shortly before the bomb attack.

It has been reported that one in four Norwegians knew someone affected by the attacks (Skjeseth 2011). While somewhat indicative of the scale of the effect of the attacks, it was and is clear that they have also had a more diffused impact, constituting, as then Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg called it, a "national tragedy". We might also talk of the

"horizontal" transmission of trauma – a notion introduced by Howard Stein in an analysis of the social effects of the 1995 Oklahoma Bombing (2012:182). This is transmission of trauma to people who, while not "directly affected" through injury or the loss of someone known to them, are nevertheless relationally involved, for example medical personnel treating the wounded. This can be extended, particularly amongst a small population like Norway's, to include those who witnessed the tragedy from a position that feels close, geographically, personally, or both. Such closeness presents in affective responses and processes of empathy that can have collective expressions in ritual and in physical memorials.

Alongside the tragic loss of life and the injuries of survivors there has also been a powerful discourse of collectivized defiance. This sees Breivik's actions as an attack against the liberal political, moral and civic values that characterize (or should characterize) Norwegian society as pluralist, inclusive, multicultural, multiethnic and peaceful. This discourse of defiance – promoted by key political figures such as Stoltenberg – revolves around an unwillingness to give in to terror or the fear of terror, and indeed to reinforce the very values and cultural attitudes that Breivik reviled. For me, this places the events and places of the 22 July 2011 not just within the sphere of commemoration and memory, but also within the discourse of heritage. This is because what is at stake now is the symbolic marking of an attack on historical civic, social, political and moral values that are taken to

Fig. 1. The main room of the exhibition. Photo: Chris Whitehead, 2015.

be, and presented as, still fundamental to a collective identity.

Immediate questions emerge: how to remember so recent and diffused a trauma? When, and where? The 22 July Information Centre is one relatively rapid response to these questions, but it is also part of a distribution of mnemonic and memorial expressions, from the intimate, unofficial shrines created by grieving family members on Utøya in the very locations where their loved ones died, to the private benefaction of memorial statues, and the project – currently stalled – for artist Jonas Dahlberg's *Memory Wound* at Sørbråten, a tract of headland overlooking Utøya.

The Information Centre – not, it should be noted, called a “museum” or a “memorial” – was established by the Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation in cooperation with a team from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology led by historian and memory studies scholar Tor Einar Fagerland, and the Norwegian Government Security and Service Organisation. It was developed in close consultation with the National Support Group for victims of the 22 July attacks and the AUF. Inevitably, it has been controversial, criticized by some for its inclusion of material remnants of the attacks; but it has also received hundreds of thousands of visitors since opening,

148 including around 35,000 in its first week alone. I visited it in September 2015, driven largely by professional interest as a scholar of heritage, museology and memory, concerned with how we relate to the past. I am a foreigner in Norway; I had no direct knowledge of the victims and was personally unaffected by events. Except, that is, as a frequent visitor to the country, and as someone with much the same social and political values as those that Breivik attacked.

A WALKTHROUGH

I walk south down Ullevålsveien and onto Akersgata, map in hand. I know Oslo quite well but as it happens I have never walked this street, and it is with surprise that I come across the large modernist architectural complex that is the Government Quarter. I notice the many windows missing panes of glass in one of the buildings. They are boarded up with plywood, some of the boards with new windows cut into them. The building would look derelict and ready for demolition, were it not for the calm and the well-kept square and pond in front. As I take it in, memories of newsmedia images from 2011 come back to me, and interlink with what I see before me. To the right is an entrance, marked out with white rendered walls, on one of which “22.Juli-senteret” is painted in stylish sans serif. Inside, I’m a British guy on visit and no-one knows me, but I’m met by a staff member who, after gauging what I know about the 2011 attacks, provides an advance overview of the display; she is welcoming, but her tone is very serious. I’m told that I am not allowed to take photographs in the room on my left.

I go there first. In the white-walled room are uniformly hung photographs of the victims, as they were in life, often smiling for the camera. It is now that I start to notice the state

of the interior, which includes both pristine display space at eye level and, elsewhere, large architectural expanses that are ravaged, for the Centre is housed in the very site of the bomb destruction. Made safe, in places the building is scarred, with flaking paint, bare concrete, plywood patches and iron trusswork poking out of blasted sections of wall, sometimes casting dramatic shadows because of the artificial lighting.

The focal point of the next space is a screen showing silent CCTV footage of the moments just before and after the bomb-blast. A wall panel provides a brief overview of the events of 22 July 2011, using exclusively the words of the 2012 Judgment of the Oslo District Court. This will be the only source for explanatory wall texts other than quotations, and it also means that this is one of the few places where Breivik is named: in the main exhibition area he is “the perpetrator”. There is no information here about his life before the attacks, or of his character. This is not to be understood, it would seem, as his story.

To my left is a small window cut out of the plywood boarding. From my conversation with the staff member I know that this looks onto the very area where the van rented by Breivik, laden with explosives, was parked before the blast. Of course, I look out.

The largest of the interiors has a long timeline on the far wall, charting the developments of the day in short descriptive texts, photographs and excerpts from people’s twitter feeds printed onto the wall. One photograph alarms me: it shows the aftermath of the attack on Utøya as police deal with the dead and wounded on the beach. One young man, features clearly recognizable, seems to be peacefully asleep. But he is being zipped into a body bag.

In the middle of the room is the spotlight, mangled wreck of the chassis of the rented

Fig. 2. Preserved traces of bomb blast damage in the exhibition interior. Photo: Chris Whitehead, 2015.

Volkswagen Crafter van that housed the bomb. Tied to one axle is a rudimentary police evidence tag. There is also a large mutilated clock face on the wall, and a display case containing a number of mobile phones and cameras that belonged to the victims. Behind them is an immense photograph of the island of Utøya, covering an entire wall. The island rises from Tyrifjorden, taken from the headland, apparently serene in the dusk. It looks idyllic. On a later date I would learn that both the display of mobile phones and the photograph were even more laden with meanings than I first imagined: the mobile phones rang into

the evening of the 22 July 2011 as parents and loved ones tried to contact the victims; the photograph was taken around the same time, when Breivik, captured by police, was still detained on the island.

After the shock of this room I turn right (the overall route is more or less U-shaped). A further turn to the right takes me into a cinema space where I watch a film in which survivors from both attacks, and in one case people who saved some of them, return to the scene of the terror to tell their stories. Young people tell their stories of trying to hide on cliff edges, helping the dying, praying for the

150 dead and living with their injuries. A young woman – Hanne Hesto Ness – returns to the Assembly Hall, the biggest building in Utøya, and describes how she and her companions sought refuge, right there. In an act of heroism a young man tells her and another young woman a fanciful story about the gunshots to persuade them that there is no danger. She knows it is not true but it calms her down nevertheless. She explains that shortly afterwards Breivik entered the room and killed first her friend and then the young man. She made eye contact with Breivik, whose gaze was empty. Then he shot her too, three times. She explains in close detail where and how, showing her scars and one of her hands, missing a finger.

Although this is the only exhibit with audio, there is no music soundtrack during the film, just people's words. There are also no tears; no-one breaks down. I watch the whole film, which is on a 26-minute loop. From what I witness, most visitors do the same.

Outside the cinema space is the final area of the exhibition. In one wall there is a display case containing the fake police ID that Breivik used as part of his disguise, enabling him to reach the island without suspicion. Alongside these are a Norwegian flag and crusader pendant that he carried on his person. On the opposite wall are giant photographs of the "Flower Marches" that took place across Norway in the days after the attacks. Progressing through the space I encounter more texts from the 2012 Court Judgment, explaining for the first time in the exhibition why Breivik did what he did. There is a giant photograph of the court in session, with Breivik clearly visible in the middle of things, smartly dressed and studious. Quotations from those close to the proceedings, such as relatives of the victims and the defence attorney, try to make emotional and moral sense of things; some of them tell us that Breivik failed in his

mission to eradicate the liberal values that he abhorred, others that he is not alone in his beliefs and that they need to be taken seriously.

At the close of the exhibition is a bookcase, half-filled with books about the attacks and their aftermath. This is meant, as I recall from the words of the staff member, as a marker of what more is yet to be written on the matter.

The exhibition is complete, but the epilogue is a separate, light-filled space behind the entrance desk, to which the circuit has returned me. Here is a further exhibition – of designs and proposals for the renewal and rebuilding of the Government Quarter, in the utopian language of architectural projections of the near future. In this peaceful white-walled space, which was unaffected by the blast, there are none of the signs of violence that disfigure the other interiors.

TIME AND PLACE

The Centre is a hybrid place of multiple modes of remembering. It is not called a memorial, yet the first room, with photographs of each of the victims, is just that. It is not called a museum, and yet its expository logics are mostly museal. The Centre is not (at least not yet) officially inscribed as "heritage" through any kind of listing, but in many ways its siting, its conservation and the tropes of memory upon which it relies are familiar reminders of difficult heritage practice.

The exhibition refracts interconnected geographies and temporalities. It is itself part of the site of the Oslo bomb blast, and the distressed architecture reminds us of this. Elsewhere, other places – the island, and the courtroom – are evoked and the tight chronology of the attacks is marked on the walls, for when the Oslo blast occurred Breivik was already on his way to Utøya. The spaces

Fig. 3. Mobile phones and cameras belonging to the victims. Photo: Chris Whitehead, 2015.

follow a narrative path through prologue, main act, and aftermath, compromised only by the memorial room at the beginning of the circuit. In fact this room was not planned by the government agencies but insisted upon by the AUF and the families of the victims, but in a way it signals a timeless loss transcending the intense temporal arc of events. Also outside of the temporal arc of the tragedy, but annexed to it, is the imagining of the future Oslo Government Quarter – the physical and architectural manifestation of the idea not just of Breivik's failure but of the determination to renew, in spite of terror. Only the final spaces have natural light.

The matter of time is apparent also in the broken clock face high up on the wall of the main space. The clock face is missing a portion, from about 3.20 until 6.30, quite in

accordance with when the attacks took place. This signals time in many possible senses: time lost; the time of lives lost; of destruction; of a wound in time, much like a temporal version of Jonas Dahlberg's notion of the "memory wound" in the physical ground of Sørbråten. In an article available on the 22 July Centre website, Tor Einar Fagerland suggests that the "minutes from when the homemade fertilizer bomb went off in the Government Quarter at 15.25 until Anders Behring Breivik was arrested on Utøya at 18.34 are surely the most thoroughly analysed in Norwegian history" (Fagerland 2015b). The Information Centre is a spatial index of this time, reminiscent of the spatialised temporalities of the museum but different in the concentrated intensity of the minute-by-minute action, expanded into a nightmare world of heightened experience.

152 It is, as journalist and historian Guri Hjeltnes (2015) recognized, a mode of return, taking us back in time, “spot-on” to the moment when the clock stopped. This is one way of warding off forgetting (in the unstoppable flow of newsmedia horror from around the world) and, as I will suggest, warding of anxieties about the veracity of history and memory.

PROOF AND FACT

If time and place are preoccupations then so too is the issue (in a literal sense) of proof and fact. As with some of the most symbolic sites of atrocity that have become consecrated as heritage – most obviously, the many locations associated with genocide – the information Centre deals in tangible proof. This is expressed through photographs and film, and above all through the few material objects on display. As well as these, the building itself, preserved in a state of trauma, is a kind of meta-object combining place, time and material proof. The message is: this – these attacks – *really happened*. This affirmation has a clear purpose in many difficult heritage sites, where a rusted stock of Zyklon B tins, the parts of a gas chamber, or even human remains, can defend against denials and may even be implicated in the identification of war crime and war criminals, and thus in legal trials and the need for justice, sometimes decades after the fact. In Oslo the insistence on proof is less immediately comprehensible, if no less complex. It is hard to imagine that anyone doubts that the attacks “happened”. If anything, we remember them ourselves, either because we were directly affected, or because we were exposed to the newsmedia, or both. Breivik himself was and is not interested in denying what he did (leaving aside the perversities of his explanation of *why* he did it).

The constant use of the Oslo Court Judgment also appeals to the solidity of fact, of legally accepted proofs, while allowing for a tone that avoids the kind of “histrionics” that might otherwise sensationalize, and thus diminish the portent of, the attacks (Fagerland 2015b). This claim to objective truth-telling and to neutral documentation is the most museal of techniques and, at first encounter, the strangest, unless it is simply a default reliance on the conventionally authoritative truth trope of difficult heritage, or a conscious or subconscious connection of Breivik’s actions to the ideologies of past genocidal murderers and regimes.

As sociologist Jeffrey C. Alexander clarifies, the classification of an event as cultural trauma does not take place in a “transparent” speech situation, but in institutional remediations (2004). In the case of the 22 July Centre this is one that avails itself of the interconnected languages of the museum and of difficult heritage representations. Witness once more that the remains of the van still bear their police evidence tag, that the texts are legal documents. These are the terms of the appeal to transparency, to an effacing of mediation. Again, this “actually happened” and there are no two ways about it. In the terms of the exhibition, the story is not a narrative amenable to a kind of “*Rashômon* effect”, to evoke Akira Kurosawa’s film, where multiple recollections of a crime diverge and contrast. But nevertheless, just as in the museum tradition, the unbrookable and apparently authorless proof of fact is inevitably rhetorical, as well as poetic and aesthetic. Anything, in other words, except unmediated. The architectural choices, the selections, the choice of texts, the curation of light and noise... All of these are, of course, inevitable vehicles of meaning.

CONCLUSIONS

Tor Einar Fagerland has insisted upon the necessity of presenting proof, both in his talk at the July 22 conference in Oslo in September 2015, where he stated that his intention was to “use physical evidence as a way of proving that [the attacks] actually happened” (2015a), and in writing. In an article about the Centre he suggests that, four years after the attacks, “the nature of the [Oslo] court’s decision [...] feels distant, almost unreal” (2015b). In one sense this is a comment on the subsequent evolution of people’s feelings about Breivik’s crimes, and how those feelings are expressed. In another sense, it seems to me – perhaps from my distanced position as an interested but relatively unaffected outsider – that this is perhaps about something more fundamental. This is, I think, about cutting a path through the mediated memory of the attacks, back to the moment of violent physical “truth”. It is as though such mediated memory were untrustworthy and questionable, even deniable, causing an anxiety about the insecurity of past events – that they might be changed, superseded or rethought in unacceptable ways. This amounts to a refusal of an amoral and relativistic universe of different historical realities – a refusal that is heartfelt, but cannot face the fundamental validity problem of any positional telling of the past. Put simply, there is no way to evade or transcend positionality and mediation, and to recapture the past “as it was”. This is not to diminish the achievement of the Centre. It offers, to me at least, an affecting and sober experience, and its development must surely have been arduous, politically and emotionally challenging and without much chance of unqualified success or unanimous approval. But the Centre is a crucial place. In its account of recent trauma and its complicated symbolic importance, it cannot but express some of the particular and

indivisible problems that lie at the interstices of our modes of remembering, our relationship with time, our moral codes, our senses of truth, and our senses of ourselves.

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