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'The Killer Point': Contemporary Reconfigurations of The Gap as a Crime Scene

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Abstract

In November 2008, Gordon Wood was found guilty of the murder of his girlfriend, model Caroline Byrne, over a decade after her body was found at the base of an ocean cliff in Eastern Sydney, New South Wales, known as The Gap -- a place that, even while bearing the reputation of a 'notorious suicide spot', has been widely promoted as a popular tourist attraction. This article explores the mainstream media's reporting and regulation of meaning in relation to the crime and the dichotomous tensions and competing (re)interpretations of The Gap this has produced throughout the investigation into Caroline Byrne's death. More generally, this article seeks to understand the ways in which legacies of violence, death and suffering are often embodied in and by the spaces and places where these acts take place and how we might begin to explain our own and the media's frenetic fascination with and ambivalence towards these sites, using a critical discourse that moves beyond the lexicon of legal discourse. In doing so, this article explores the limitations of language; questioning whether available and relevant critical cultural vocabularies are able to adequately capture and communicate the sometimes unsettling complexities and intricacies of embodied places and spaces that ultimately challenge (and complicate) the conventions of crime scene (re)presentation as a result of their multiple other histories.

‘The Killer Point’: Contemporary Reconfigurations of The Gap as a Crime Scene

Katrina Clifford and Glenn Mitchell

Introduction

This paper is not about what is lost and gone forever. Rather, it is about the traces that remain; the ways in which legacies of violence, death and suffering are often embodied in and by the geographical spaces and places where these acts take place. It is also about how we might begin to explain our own and the media’s contemporaneous ambivalence towards and frenetic fascination with these sites, using a critical discourse that moves beyond the legal frame and its customary lexicon, to consider how an interdisciplinary approach may also contribute to an interpretation of these phenomena.

Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of those such as Mark Seltzer and his conceptions of a *wound culture* (Seltzer 1997, 1998); Maria Tumarkin’s seminal work on *traumascapes* (Tumarkin 2005); Michel Foucault’s theory of heterotopias (Foucault 1986); and the literature of ‘dark tourism’ (Foley and Lennon 1996, Lennon and Foley 2000) or *thanatourism* (Seaton 1996), this paper, in many respects, seeks to explore the boundaries or limitations of language. That is, it attempts to question whether the critical cultural vocabularies available to us, such as those previously mentioned, capture and communicate

adequately the often unsettling complexities and intricacies of embodied spaces and places that challenge (and complicate) the conventions of crime scene representation and interpretation as a result of their multiple other histories.

Adopting a meditative approach, in the form of vignettes, this article explores these issues in the context of The Gap in eastern Sydney (a place that, even while bearing the reputation of a 'notorious suicide spot', has been widely promoted as a popular tourist attraction) and the high profile murder of model, Caroline Byrne, whose body was found in 1995 at the base of the ocean cliff. Byrne's death and the multiple investigations that followed during the subsequent decade — culminating in the 2008 conviction of Byrne's boyfriend, Gordon Wood, for the murder — attracted considerable interest from mainstream news media and captured the Australian public's imagination. At the time of writing, at least two books had been published on the case, with a telemovie in final production.

Most intriguing has been the mainstream media's regulation of meaning in relation to Caroline Byrne's death and Gordon Wood's murder trial and the paradoxical tensions and (re)interpretations of space this has produced. On the one hand, The Gap's multiple histories have traditionally existed side-by-side, discreetly layered, as 'incompatible orders of space-time' folded 'silently, invisibly, one into the other yet never breach[ing] their respective borders' (Pugliese 2009: 673) — only breaking free to emerge more dominantly over one another as attention is drawn to them or as the process serves a purpose. For example, The Gap's historical associations as a 'notorious suicide spot' unquestionably and significantly informed and influenced initial police assumptions as to the cause of Caroline Byrne's death, largely to the exclusion of The Gap's other multiple histories (as interpretative frameworks) and, one might argue, to the detriment also of the murder investigation that ultimately ensued. In comparison, however, the mainstream media's reporting of the murder investigation relied heavily on the use of specific framing devices that served to disrupt this embedded history of The Gap as a place of self-harm in the public's imagination via seemingly

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incongruous representations of The Gap as, at one and the same time, a tourist attraction, 'notorious suicide spot' and, finally, a place of deliberate harm at the hand of another — a crime scene.

In spite of the opportunities these aspects of the case have offered for critical interdisciplinary engagement, little academic literature has been produced in relation to the Caroline Byrne murder case and/or the (re)presentations and receptivity of its very public 'crime scene'. A critical language and theoretical framework (alternative to that offered by the legal frame) by which to examine the dimensions of these spatial and temporal tensions and complexities has therefore been left wanting, and the sufficiency of existing critical cultural vocabularies has yet to be tested. This article therefore attempts to fill this gap by some small measure; endeavouring to not only explore, but come to terms with, the disjunctive accounts of The Gap offered by the mainstream media throughout the investigation into Caroline Byrne's death and Gordon Wood's trial for murder, and the impact these (re)presentations ultimately bore on (re)interpretations of The Gap in the public's imagination.

In tracing a trajectory of The Gap's multiple histories and shifting associations, we attempt to bring into focus the way in which media narrative form and visual framing (including the absence and presence of dead and alive bodies in the photographs (re)produced as part of this mediated process) have established 'points of connection' (Pugliese 2009: 674) between seemingly incompatible yet simultaneous dichotomies to encourage and enable the possibility of thinking, at one and the same time, of the coexistence of The Gap as a tourist attraction and a site marked by recurring tragedy, death and even criminal activity. In doing so, we seek to open up a space in which we might be able to also begin exploring both the further possibilities and limits of engagement with 'crime scenes' and places of trauma, more generally, to question whether it is possible (or even necessary) to reconcile the contestable and often competing (re)presentations and collective memories of public places and spaces transformed and 'haunted' by dark pasts.

In relation to the Caroline Byrne murder investigation and trial,

this warrants a closer examination of the ways in which the media's appropriation and interpretative framing of photographs associated with Byrne in life and death served both a *referential* and *anticipatory* function that offered the potential for The Gap to be (re)configured as a site of malevolence — a crime scene — that could not only be imagined, but realised alongside its seemingly aporetic interpretations as a place of both life and death and extreme beauty and tragedy.

Scene 1: A Return to the Scene of the Crime

Within contemporary popular culture, the phrase 'crime scene' has been appropriated with notable and increasing frequency — often, one suspects, with little regard to the parameters of its formal use within legal discourse, the connotations the phrase evokes for those who 'bear witness' to or experience these spaces or, equally, the ways in which such meanings are constructed and contested in relation to sites of death and devastation. This is particularly so with regard to representations of shifting social and lived geographies and liminal landscapes; those places at 'the margins', in the borderlands between events, subject to the slippages of interpretation, ambivalent in their historical representations, marked by spatial tensions, inversion and, ultimately, narratives of 'otherness' and 'becoming'. This increasing 'spectacularisation' and commodification of death and deviance has been evidenced, in particular, by our repetitive exposures to the artifice or (re)presentation of 'crime scenes' through popularised forms of media, including mainstream news reports, television programs, such as *Law & Order* and *CSI*, and, ever increasingly, the "aesthetic canonisation" of crime-scene photography' (Williams 2005). As a result, images of real-life crime scenes have now been 'forced to operate in circulation with a vast commercial, creative and artistic image repertoire, resonating against images remembered from TV, film, advertising, book covers, and other images from the histories of art and photography' (Williams 2005).

These images, in their self-referentiality and 'quoting' of other images, combine to remind us of the discursive markers by which we

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come to recognise 'crime scenes', through voyeuristic repetition and familiarity, brought about by a sense of the uncanny or what Seltzer, in his discussion of *wound culture*, refers to as the 'compulsive return to the scene of the crime' in which one detects 'what might be described as a *binding of trauma to representation or scene*' (Seltzer 1997: 11-12). In order for this return to take place, says Seltzer, 'interpretation, representation, or reduplication of the event' must become inseparable from the trauma associated with the criminal act itself; producing a mediated and 'mimetic coalescence of self and other, self and representation, to the point of reproduction' (Seltzer 1998: 260). By this logic, crime scenes can therefore be said to function as a 'switchpoint' between 'bodily and psychic orders' and as the point of collapse between the 'private and public orders of things' (Seltzer 1998: 254).

What Seltzer's theoretical propositions offer us then is an opportunity to craft a critical discourse that begins to articulate the potential for an engagement with crime scenes and places of trauma that moves beyond the (re)presentational and legal frame to also incorporate the transcendental; to explore what it is that viscerally drives our, and increasingly the media's, simultaneous fascination with, but also ambivalence towards, these spaces and places of death, devastation, loss and suffering. This is not wholly dissimilar from what Maria Tumarkin refers to in her seminal work on *traumascapes* as the shared knowledge and understanding that spaces and places are always inevitably transformed by events that occur on their soil (Tumarkin 2005: 233), because 'violence and pain do not disappear without leaving a trace', but are 'held by the land around us' (Tumarkin 2005: 235) which, once marked by trauma, exerts a power and influence over us. As spectators, witnesses, and occasional travellers to and through these liminal (and criminal) spaces, we therefore seem to (and perhaps have actively sought to) already possess something of an inherent, albeit tacit, common social understanding that while crime scenes often embody an irreducibility that may incommunicably move or affect us, without us ever quite grasping how or why, they also, ultimately, retain a consummate familiarity. These are spaces and places that are both haunting and haunted by their multiple histories and dark pasts.

The central concern here is what consequences derive from situations where the historic context of these spaces and places is abbreviated, receded, misrepresented or deliberately excluded altogether from (re)presentation? What can the absences, silences and slippages subsequently produced reveal to us about the mediation of these images and their associated narratives? And, in this context, how can we negotiate the fact that, as Shields (1991: 18) terms them, these *place-images* (the complex matrix of memories of a scene, socially-maintained reputations and mediated representations of places, and the lived experience of environments), and our views of them, are always produced historically, and are actively contestable? More importantly, what of the ethics surrounding the mediation and exploitation of these tragic and traumatic histories?

Scene 2: The 'Body' of Evidence

In the very early morning hours of 8 June 1995, Gordon Wood, then chauffeur to controversial Sydney business identity, Rene Rivkin, reported his girlfriend, model Caroline Byrne, missing to New South Wales Police. Despite the wintry darkness and limited visibility — even by industrial searchlight — Wood was able to pinpoint to police the precise location where Byrne's body would eventually be discovered; wedged head-first into a crevice at the base of an ocean cliff, popularly known as The Gap, in the eastern Sydney suburb of Watsons Bay.

The initial police investigation concluded Byrne had killed herself — at the time, an ostensibly safe deduction, according to investigating officers, given Byrne's personal battles with depression and, more recently, her referral to a psychiatrist by her general practitioner just two days before Byrne's death (Wainwright 2009a and 2009b). The suicide of Byrne's mother four years earlier, and Byrne's own attempted suicide shortly after, only served to further substantiate the assumptions made about the cause of death.

However, as subsequent police investigations would reveal, perhaps the most decisive factor in the conclusions of the original police report

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would be the location of death itself — the assumption of suicide based heavily on not only Byrne's potential state of mind, but more potently on the protracted and popularised history of The Gap as a 'notorious suicide spot' and as a place inextricably bound to death through self-harm. The combination of these two factors, as journalist Robert Wainwright explains in his book, *The Killing of Caroline Byrne: A journey to justice*, meant that:

From the moment [Caroline's father and brother] Tony and Peter Byrne walked into the Watsons Bay Police Station with Gordon Wood to report Caroline missing, there was a presumption that she had killed herself (Wainwright 2009b: 196).

So clear-cut was the case for suicide in the minds of the original investigating officers that Byrne's body was never photographed *in situ* as is customary of police practices relating to the establishment of a crime scene (NSW Ombudsman 2007: 53). More to the point, The Gap was never considered to be a crime scene; its legacy as a 'notorious suicide spot' instead the greater influencer of initial police assumptions and investigatory practices. As a result, no formal crime scene was ever established, no measurements taken, and no police log books recorded the events surrounding the recovery of Byrne's body (Cross 2009). Yet, in the years following Byrne's death, both interpretations of the cause and scene of death would ultimately require further negotiation and (re)configuration in both the minds of investigating officers and the public more generally as a place of deliberate harm by another, as a site of murder. As part of this process, the circumstances of Caroline Byrne's death would be simulated at The Gap for attending media in the hope that these new *place-images* would prompt memories that may assist in the development of a homicide investigation.

Not surprisingly, however, identification of the precise location of Byrne's body on impact would later become a point of contention in the case; driving media speculation as to how close the mistake (of not photographing the body and initially identifying the wrong spot) had come to 'sinking the case' against Gordon Wood (Hohenboken 2008). As Detective Inspector Paul Jacob, the lead investigator on Strike Force

Irondale (a special unit established to re-investigate Byrne's death), would later say: 'All we needed was one bloody Polaroid shot of her [Caroline's body] on the night and we would have nailed him [Gordon Wood]' (Wainwright 2009b: 260) — a reference to Wood's ability to pinpoint the precise location of Byrne's body, despite the improbability of someone with allegedly no prior knowledge of where it had landed doing so. Such oversights during the initial police investigation would elicit a reprimand of being 'below standard' when New South Wales Coroner, John Abernethy, returned his open verdict on Byrne's death some two years later (Hohenboken 2008). The finding left the Byrne family 'lamenting mistakes by police in assuming Caroline had killed herself simply because she was found at The Gap' (Wainwright 2009a: 4) — the protracted history and reputation of the place speaking more loudly to police than the 'body' of evidence recovered.

This would be the case for almost another decade before renewed investigations by Strike Force Irondale and extensive forensic evidence led to the very public arrest and extradition of Gordon Wood from London in May 2006 for the murder of Caroline Byrne. Following these developments, the assumption of suicide had to be overturned, with Byrne's death decisively reconfigured in the public's imagination as a homicide; becoming one of the most colourful murder investigations in New South Wales criminal history.

Mainstream news media described evidence relating to Byrne's death as being 'straight from a Lynda La Plante script' (McClymont 2008). Favoured, in particular, among media reports was the scientific evidence of Associate Professor Rod Cross, a retired academic of the University of Sydney, whose physics reports — enough to convince the Crown to press for the trial of Gordon Wood — would prove crucial to the Crown's ongoing argument that Wood had known precisely where to direct police to Byrne's body, because he had been the one who had spear thrown her off The Gap to her death ('the killer point' as prosecutor, Mark Tedeschi, would term it).

Court proceedings were similarly dramatised by the media as a 'murder trial made for TV' — a reference, in part, to the rotating

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door of celebrity and socialite witnesses at the trial and the highly publicised ‘tours’ of The Gap-as-crime-scene by jurors (McClymont 2008). Indeed, these ‘tours’ would force an interesting precedent; the trial initially being aborted in sensational circumstances after jury members were accused of planning their own ‘unauthorised night-time excursion to the claimed crime scene’ (Davies 2008). On resumption, the trial judge would take the opportunity to empanel 15 instead of the requisite 12 jurors (although not all would be required to deliberate on a verdict) — the first use of new legislative powers introduced a month before the controversy (Davies 2008). In all, the jury would make at least three reported visits to The Gap (some on request and at least one at night) to view the spot where Caroline Byrne’s body had been found.

In November 2008, well over a decade after the discovery of Byrne’s body at the base of The Gap, Wood was found guilty and sentenced to at least 13 years for the murder of Caroline Byrne. Outside the court, Wood’s barrister, Winston Terracini SC, said his client was ‘disappointed, obviously’ and would lodge an appeal against the conviction (*The Daily Telegraph* 21 November 2008).

Scene 3: A Paradox of (Re)presentations

Situated on Sydney’s South Head peninsula, The Gap is essentially ‘a geological weakness — a 400-metre-long sweep of sandstone crumbled and collapsed by time, wind and water’ (Wainwright 2009b: 61). Bordered by dramatic sea views and a waist-high security railing that skirts the length of the cliff edge — a constant reminder of the need to guard onlookers from the whitewash that buffets the rocks below — The Gap’s geography evokes the multiple histories by which it has been and continues to be associated and defined; one of the most well-known, of course, being its appeal to tourists as an uncorrupted environmental marvel and ‘hauntingly beautiful location’ (Bland in Kidman 2008).

The Gap’s origins as a popular tourist attraction date back to the early 19th Century; formally recognised in 1887 when Gap Park itself was dedicated as a public recreation reserve. Tourist activity thrived

thereafter and moreso once accessibility for sightseers was improved with the extension of the tramline in the early 1900s (Woollahra Local History Centre 2005). It would be this same tramline that would — until its operations ceased in 1960 — carry many an individual to The Gap for purposes more sorrowful or sinister than sightseeing (McIntyre 2001).

Indeed, for many, images of The Gap as a geographically spectacular place, with its historical markers of past prosperity and enduring popularity, belie the traces of another, much darker and distressing story. It is one that has captured public imagination and overwhelmed contemporary (re)presentations of The Gap, reordering it as an enigmatically dangerous beauty; that which is inextricably associated with the coexistence of beauty and awe as much as tragedy and death, inspiring fear and attraction, the power to compel and destroy. It is a representation that bears resonance, in many respects, to the concept popularised by Edmund Burke (1757), and other prominent thinkers and artists succeeding him, such as Kant and Diderot — *The Sublime*. Tumarkin, in her work on *traumascapes*, explains the concept as such:

What it means is that the nature and intensity of emotions inspired by encounters with death as an idea, while often unnerving, can also prove to be mesmerising and addictive ... To experience a place or an object as sublime, said Burke, we need to be assured of our safety, to be removed from the source of danger either in space or in time. Past traumas grant us this guarantee (Tumarkin 2005: 50-51).

The beginnings of this dark history of The Gap can be traced back to the tragic tale of the clipper, the *Duncan Dunbar*, which ran aground in 1857 while it attempted to navigate through Sydney Heads at night and in high seas, killing all but one of the ship's 122 passengers and crew and making the shipwreck one of the state's worst peacetime sea disasters (Wainwright 2009b: 59). The admiralty anchor recovered from the wreck site today stands on display at The Gap, accompanied by a rock inscription, as a permanent memorial to those who lost their lives in the tragedy.

The location for such a notorious shipwreck soon gained notoriety

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in its own right as a place bearing a strong and enduring resonance to death more generally when, just six years after the *Dunbar's* grounding, The Gap claimed its first recorded suicide. In 1863, at a time when *fêlo de se* ('self-murder') was still legislatively regarded a crime, Ann Harrison, a publican's wife, took her life by leaping from The Gap after becoming increasingly depressed over the accidental death of her nephew, who had previously fallen over the cliff edge at the same place (McIntyre 2001). Reports of similar deaths and associated coronial inquests, frequently bearing a dramatic, albeit disturbing, richness of detail, continued to dominate newspaper headlines throughout the early to mid-1900s.

The publicity of such deaths often resulted in a spate of 'copycat' incidents that, as McIntyre claims, manifested 'periodically in the police and press arranging moratoria not to publish news of deaths at The Gap' (McIntyre 2001: 9) — a stark contrast, one might suggest, to the purposeful engagement of print and broadcast media by New South Wales Police in the Caroline Byrne case a century later, and in spite of renewed anxieties over the causal relationship between media reports and increased risk of imitative suicides more recently expressed by Watsons Bay local residents (see, for example, Benson 2009).

In the weeks following the suicide of Channel 10 newsreader, Charmaine Dragun, at The Gap in November 2007, for example, it is reported another six people followed (Benson 2009). Estimates suggest that anywhere up to 50 people take their lives at The Gap each year; prompting increased community calls for improved safety fencing, surveillance cameras, security lighting and emergency phones (Constantinou 2009). However, despite the figures and community concern, the personal stories of the tragic circumstances under which these individuals determine to take their own lives are rarely interrogated with the same fervour in the mainstream media as that following the death of Caroline Byrne in this same place.

By the 1950s, the association of The Gap as 'the city's place of personal oblivion' (Wainwright 2009b: 60) had become so pervasive and embedded within the public's imagination that its reputation as a well-known location for suicides began to precede it — threatening

to transcend, in many respects, The Gap's other histories as a place of spectacular natural beauty, a popular tourist attraction and landmark, bearing the physical traces and mnemonic reminders of a colonial and military past. In response, a fledgling Police Rescue Service was established. Photographs of men in crisp white overalls, scaling down The Gap's cliff faces to either rescue the injured and trapped or to retrieve a body, increasingly surfaced in the print media, as did specific references to The Gap as a 'notorious suicide spot' (a trend that continues throughout contemporary reporting); reinforcing the popularist notion of The Gap as a 'beautiful, wild and tragic place' (Cornford 2006) haunted by the recurring traces and remembrances of a dark and enduring past and present.

This inherent ambivalence and spatial tension within cultural and mediated representations of The Gap raises a number of important questions, not least of all, how we reconcile (if at all necessary) images of The Gap as a tourist attraction and place of eminent raw beauty with its associations with death, malevolence and tragedy. In the case of the Caroline Byrne murder investigation, it also introduces questions about the influence of political and cultural agendas (particularly those of the media) in relation to the (re)presentation of crime scenes beyond that of the legal frame, and the impact of these (re)presentations on public memory and the interpretation of dark pasts.

There are no simple answers to the complications raised by these questions. Although, in attempting to locate a language by which to address such complexities and explain the enduring mystique often associated with natural spectacles such as The Gap, there remains a tendency to turn to concepts that emphasise the spectrality of place — the implication being that a sort of supernatural life force inhabits the landscape; shaping it as an omnipotent being whose ambivalence provokes and allures us, all the while evading sensorial explanation or definition. In relation to the murder of Caroline Byrne, such configurations of spectrality and liminality were played out in Gordon Wood's much-publicised admission that his confidence as to the precise location of Byrne's body, prior to her discovery at base of The Gap, was

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because her spirit had 'guided' him there (Scheikowski 2008).

Some, such as philosopher Michel Foucault (1986), refer to such sites as heterotopias — other spaces, places at the intersection of public and private, defined by juxtaposition and transgression. These are spaces that can 'simultaneously accommodate often violently contradictory differences' (Pugliese 2009: 663), including the spatial and temporal tensions between the fleeting time associated with the tourist experience, for example, and the indefinite temporality of tragedy inscribed onto the landscape (Pugliese 2009: 673). Others, such as Ross Gibson, co-curator of Sydney's Justice & Police Museum *Crime Scene: Scientific Investigation Bureau Archives 1945–1960* exhibition (1999–2000), describe such sites more simply as 'haunting zones'; spaces that 'hum with the psychic electricity and the aftershock of trauma and violation' (Gibson cited in Williams n.d). In this respect, places such as The Gap have a tendency to be interpreted as a landscape of memory: a place of the uncanny, and a site of memory and mourning; a space that resonates with spectral qualities and an 'absolute symbolic power' (Tumarkin 2005: 85).

This is a concept elsewhere adopted by Tumarkin in her definition of *traumascapes* as those places 'marked by traumatic legacies of violence, suffering and loss', which ultimately 'catalyse and shape remembering and reliving of traumatic events' (Tumarkin 2005: 12). She explains: 'They are places that compel memories, crystallise identities and meanings, and exude power and enchantment' (Tumarkin 2005: 14) and can 'also often shape meanings and interpretations of the traumatic events inscribed in them' (Tumarkin 2005: 86). However, the 'haunting' that occurs in and at these places does not, by association, transform them into metaphorical terrains. Rather, as Tumarkin suggests, they remain 'concrete, material sites, where visible and invisible, past and present, physical and metaphysical' coexist and 'share a common space' (Tumarkin 2005: 233).

While Tumarkin's framework for interpretation of public places of trauma rests heavily on the influence of the past in the present, to understand the way in which The Gap's trajectory from 'notorious

suicide spot' and tourist attraction to 'crime scene' was successfully crafted, we must also consider the contribution of the past to the anticipation of the future. What we are referring to here is the way in which The Gap's dark past came to equally embody a sense of ever-present impending tragedy — that which was as yet unrealised. As a place weighted with expectation, it became full of the potential for crime and malevolence, albeit crime *already imagined*.

Scene 4: A Long Imagined Crime Scene

In the intervening decade, prior to Gordon Wood's conviction, Caroline Byrne's death kept the national media in its grip. Print, broadcast and online media obsessively speculated about what had happened to the beautiful blonde at the bottom of The Gap, with some publications going so far as to assume the role of amateur detectives, contributing information and new leads to the case being put together by Strike Force Irondale (Wainwright 2009c). Indeed, after Wood's conviction, *The Australian* newspaper printed a self-congratulatory article, detailing its triumphs as the 'first to reveal' a number of developments in the case, including — most notably — Strike Force Irondale's recommendation to the New South Wales Director of Public Prosecutions that murder charges be laid against Wood and also the discovery, in 2004, of where Wood was living and working in Megeve, a skiing village in the French Alps, an hour outside Geneva (Kelly 2008).

Throughout Wood's subsequent trial, the phrase 'crime scene' in reference to The Gap became an integral part of most mainstream media reports; appearing with particular regularity during the three separate visits made to The Gap (as inspections of the crime scene) by jury members (see, for example, *ABC News* 30 July 2008). However, The Gap's reconfiguring from *mise-en-scène* as a 'notorious suicide spot' (a *stage* for death) to crime scene (a *marker* of death) took its greatest flight into popular imagination late on the afternoon of 28 May 1996, following an invitation from police for Sydney media to attend a re-enactment into the circumstances leading to Caroline Byrne's death, in the hope that doing so may prompt witnesses to

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come forward (Wainwright 2009b: 144). It produced the first of what would eventuate into hundreds of media reports about the case. 'The notorious Gap, so often the scene of grisly suicides,' writes Wainwright, 'had become the focus of its first homicide squad investigation' (2009b: 144) — surprising really, considering The Gap's histories, although the significance of the point was not lost on readers who were rarely afforded an opportunity to consider otherwise.

At every step and turn of the formal police investigations into Caroline Byrne's death, the history and associations of The Gap were (re)visited, (re)defined, (re)stated with its public legacy (re)negotiated. Online and print coverage by *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Australian* and *The Daily Telegraph*, in particular, thrived on repetitively publishing multimedia videos and photographs of The Gap in relation to various aspects of the case — yet another avowal of Seltzer's 'compulsive return to the scene of the crime' (Seltzer 1997: 11). Many of these photographs were stock images, taken straight from the pages of tourist information brochures and landscape photography archives, while a number more were (re)framed and (re)configured alongside modeling images of Caroline Byrne — an example of the juncture at which evidentiary imperative meets high fashion and aestheticisation.

One particular photographic layout, titled 'Closing the Gap', published in *The Australian* newspaper on 5 April 2006, explicitly encouraged this configuration by positioning an image of Caroline Byrne, staring intensely at the camera in a modeling pose, set against an ocean cliff backdrop. Positioned immediately beside the image is a still frame from the police re-enactment of the recovery of Byrne's body from the base of The Gap; replete with the inclusion of a policewoman abseiling down the cliff face in white rescue uniform (Whittaker 2006: 13) — an uncanny resemblance to and recollection of similar images from the news pages of the mid-1900s. The inferred interpretative connection between Byrne, the model, and embodiment of beauty, and The Gap as the site of tragedy and loss is unmistakable, especially in light of the larger image that prevails over them both of a pensive Gordon Wood, photographed at The Gap, staring down to the ocean,

while 'the Sydney suicide spot' reaches out ominously in the background towards the impending darkness (Whittaker 2006: 13).

Photographic layouts not unlike this, symbolically positioning Byrne as inextricably connected to The Gap, and vice versa, were published and re-published online and in print countless times throughout the murder investigation and Wood's trial. Without a photograph of the body (or body bag) at the scene, media organisations relied on various panoramas of The Gap, modeling images of Byrne, and still frames from the police re-enactment video and Channel Seven's now-defunct *Witness* program (to whom Wood had previously given an interview in 1998) to substitute for the crime itself. Persistently framing media reports with images of The Gap in this way, served to reinforce and extend the popular memory of the site as one where bad and sad deeds take place. More importantly, it configured The Gap as a 'metonym for death' (Campbell 2004: 65) — a recurring referent for Byrne's murder (and vice versa). Where once the conclusion of suicide seemed reasonable, now the idea that malevolence had been the cause of Byrne's death took on a far greater logic; made most credible by The Gap's reconfiguration as a place where malevolence had long been imagined.

In this way, we might begin to think of the media's framing of *place-images* of The Gap (often against those of Byrne herself or, similarly, Gordon Wood) as serving 'both *referential* functions (as memory aids, or frameworks for reconstructing events) and *anticipatory* functions (serving as a guide to future encounters at or in given sites and places)' (Shields 1991: 14). Writes Shields:

Such *place-images* come about through oversimplification (i.e. reduction to one trait), stereotyping (amplification of one or more traits) and labelling (where a place is deemed to be of a certain nature) ... [and] may even come to be held as signifiers of its essential character (Shields 1991: 67).

Throughout the Caroline Byrne murder investigation, it could be said that, at one time or another, The Gap was subjected to all three configurations; particularly through the use of visual images in which the mere presence of The Gap itself served as both a reminder of the

sublime nature of the landscape and its enduring dark past, and as a referent to its newly inscribed and anticipated history as a crime scene (that could and would be imagined, reconstructed and explored numerous times over by police, jury and media). An irrefutable example of this would be seen in the media's rush to judgment on another 'possible murder' at The Gap in 2006, following the discovery of the body of a young woman, Katrina Ploy, found floating at the bottom of The Gap on Christmas Day (Duff 2007, *The Sydney Morning Herald* 27 January 2007, *Ninemsn* 10 December 2008, Jones 2008). While the discovery attracted national media attention, the story never quite reached the same heights of media fascination as the Byrne case, although one report did refer to the case as bearing 'chilling echoes of the death of Caroline Byrne' (Welch 2007).

Scene 5: 'Accidental' Thanatourism and Dark Sites

More often than not, conventional crime scene images, reminiscent of those typically featured in forensic photography exhibitions, reveal to us something of the banality of death and its physical surrounds — the quiet duality of suburban mayhem, captured in stairwells and doorways, footpaths, cinema theatres, metro stations, living rooms and bedrooms. It is a stark contrast to the spectacular and uncorrupted vistas of tourist attractions such as The Gap. Nonetheless, against these backdrops, the legacies of violence and trauma inscribed on these spaces are transmuted into 'scenes not of visible horror, but of horror suspected, of horror that has recently happened but is no longer evident' (Williams 2005); that which must be (re)imagined and (re)constructed.

In these instances, the dichotomy of public/private is collapsed; inviting us into the once personal and intimate spaces of 'victims' and villainy; moving us beyond the exclusive domain of police investigations and coronial and legal systems to a very accessible public space in which, we too, are compelled as amateur detectives towards an evidentiary imperative. Within these renewed frameworks of interpretation, crime

scenes — once demarcated by plastic police tape and an unstated reverence for the crime that had transpired (particularly in death) — are no longer configured as private spaces meant for a select few, but as public places for many; exposed to the public's gaze. This is what Seltzer refers to as the sociality of the wound; how crime scene photographs or *place-images* offer us 'a way of imagining the relations of private bodies and private persons to public spaces' (Seltzer 1998: 21).

This collapse in the public/private dichotomy raises, however, a number of largely unanswered questions regarding the possibilities (and limits) this 'imagining' opens up for the production of multiple and contested histories, interpretations and (re)presentations of crime scenes. Likewise, it demands critical consideration of the potential complications that places already configured as public spaces — for example, tourist attractions such as The Gap — introduce to this relationship in their transformation to a 'crime scene'. While we may, as theorists such as Tumarkin (2005) suggest, inherently and implicitly know and anticipate the possibilities and implications of this transformation, locating a language or critical cultural discourse (beyond that of the legal frame) by which to adequately define and articulate its effects is not nearly always as readily accessible or attainable.

Of course, this is not to say that attempts to explore these limits have not previously been pursued. Obviously, here, both Tumarkin's exploration of the dynamics of *traumascaples* (Tumarkin 2005) and Seltzer's conceptions of *wound culture* and the *pathological public sphere* (Seltzer 1997, 1998) bear relevance; as does the body of academic work focused on what has collectively been referred to as 'dark tourism' (Foley and Lennon 1996, Lennon and Foley 2000) or, more precisely, thanatourism (Seaton 1996).

The premise of 'dark tourism', and its various manifestations, rests not so much on exploring new phenomena as with offering a critical cultural discourse to define the ways in which people have 'long been drawn, purposefully or otherwise, towards sites, attractions or events linked in one way or another with death, suffering, violence or disaster'

(Stone and Sharpley 2008: 574) — what we may otherwise refer to, for the purposes of this paper, as crime scenes or places of trauma. With this in mind, ‘dark tourism’ literature primarily seeks to identify the dynamics of the relationship between tourism and death as well as the motivations by which individuals make the ‘spiritual’ journey or pilgrimage to places of tragedy to ‘bear witness’ to or experience a symbolic encounter with real or recreated death and disaster; often, in the case of the latter, through purposeful re-enactments or simulations of death at ‘dark’ visitor sites, attractions and exhibitions (Tarlow 2005, Stone 2006). Reference, within the literature, is frequently made to either specific destinations, such as the Sixth Floor in Dallas, Texas (Foley and Lennon 1996), Ground Zero or New Orleans post-Hurricane Katrina, or forms of tourism including, but by no means limited to, visits to graveyards (Seaton 2002) and celebrity death sites (Alderman 2002), Holocaust tourism (Ashworth 2002), prison tourism (Strange and Kempa 2003), or slavery-heritage tourism (Dann and Seaton 2001) and macabre-related attractions, such as the London Dungeon in the United Kingdom (Stone 2006).

But, despite its increasing popularity and attention, the majority of dark tourism literatures remains, as Stone rightfully points out, both ‘eclectic and theoretically fragile’ in more ways than one (Stone 2006: 145) — although, it must be said that a number of these shortcomings have yet to be explored or evaluated to any great extent by many of the commentators who have critically engaged with this body of work.

For example, while dark tourism literature may offer us a theoretical framework by which to examine the phenomena that is our compulsion towards and engagement with places and spaces with a dark and deathly past, in doing so, the theory remains primarily preoccupied with behavioural phenomena — the motives of tourists — as opposed to any serious engagement with or critique of the particular characteristics of the sites to which thanatourists are drawn (Seaton 1996). How might dark tourism as a critical approach therefore accommodate, for example, the complication of crime scenes as sites of ‘tourist’ activity, albeit for legal purposes? What possibilities does dark tourism literature offer

us in understanding the discursive tensions produced by juror 'tours' of The Gap during the Caroline Byrne murder trial when these visits were clearly intended to support and inform a legal process, but were repetitively framed using language and referents reminiscent of tourist activities? Indeed, the slippages between the two discourses persisted throughout media reports of the jury's site visits to The Gap. Jurors were typically depicted as arriving together by bus (to a place renowned as a tourist attraction no less) to be guided around the site. Most notably during their night visit, they were guided in single file and by torchlight along the cliff's edge for the purpose of (re)imagining the events leading to Byrne's death — a scene altogether reminiscent of the 'ghostly' re-enactments and symbolic encounters with death often experienced by thanatourists themselves. How then do we define these juror visits in the context of the literature related to thanatourism: an example of dark tourism or tours of a place with a dark past?

That scenes such as this are not overtly considered as dark touristic practices highlights the limitations of current thanatourism literature. Yet interpreting The Gap-as-crime scene in the context of dark tourism is further complicated by its emphasis on tourist *behaviour*. Indeed, dark tourism's preoccupation with behavioural phenomena rests on the assumption that thanatourists travel with a preconceived perception of their destination and visitor experience (Seaton 1996). They are tourists familiar with a place's dark past, and it is precisely this history that motivates their compulsion to visit these sites — for whatever personal intensities of meaning such a visit affords with respect to the contemplative aspects of death and disaster (Stone and Sharpley 2008). However, approached in this manner, dark tourism can be said to present a theoretical framework that resists entirely the possibility of travellers becoming accidental thanatourists by virtue of their visits to tourist attractions, such as The Gap, which are incidentally inscribed with a dark past, albeit perhaps unknown to the traveller or of little consequence to their motivations for visiting the site. This is in spite of dark tourism's willingness to accept that places themselves can become 'accidental' dark sites by virtue of circumstance (Stone 2006, Stone and Sharpley 2008).

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While the reputation of The Gap as a ‘notorious suicide spot’ and ‘crime scene’ (inextricably linked most evidently to Caroline Byrne’s murder) may be a concept both commonly circulated and cultivated, it is arguably a fair assumption that the majority of tourists who visit this place do so more for the location’s natural beauty and wonder than for any symbolic encounter with its histories of death and disaster (although we recognise that, beyond running the risk of sounding dangerously naïve, this assumption obviously excludes the motivations of those who have visited The Gap with the intention of suicide — an exception that is considered more appropriately addressed in a forum other than the confines of this paper). The Gap, in its various manifestations as a place actively distinguished by a dark history, but also no less powerfully, by its reputation as a place of uncorrupted beauty — a space of life *and* death in their most vibrant and violent extremes — therefore represents an inversion of the very principles of dark tourism. This is because, in the layering of its multiple histories and (re)presentations, The Gap stands, first and foremost, as a tourist attraction in spite of its dark past, rather than a tourist attraction because of its dark past. On the whole, however, the theoretical framework adopted by dark tourism literature not only refuses to accommodate for these inversions, but also fails to recognise what other theorists, such as Tumarkin, have elsewhere readily acknowledged (albeit in a somewhat cursory manner) — the fact that, just as sites of trauma can become ‘tourist icons seemingly in an instant’, tourist destinations can be ‘as quickly turned into traumascapes’ (Tumarkin 2005:53) and so too tourists into accidental or inadvertent thanatourists.

Scene 6: The Final Act

Even after Gordon Wood’s trial and his sentencing, many images persist as iconic and mnemonic markers of his crime. Clearly, the haunting photographs of Caroline Byrne — a beautiful young model with her life ahead of her — are one set of images; Gordon Wood’s face, before during and after his trial as he attempted to explain her death and his innocence represent another. And then there are the many

photographs and video images of The Gap itself — some with Gordon Wood, none with Caroline Byrne (except for the media's contrived symbolic associations and the clinical examinations, investigations and re-enactments of police in their attempts to unravel the truth of her death) and many more in isolation. All, however, encapsulate within their interpretative frames — even if inadvertently — distinct slippages in (re)presentation, which expose The Gap's multiple histories and its liminal presence and reputation as a shifting social geography distinguished, at one and the same time, by an uncorrupted sense of beauty and, no less powerfully, a dark past.

It is in these very slippages and disorientations, absences and silences, that, as Pugliese suggests, we can begin to identify something akin to Foucault's conceptualisation of the folding of 'dichotomous experiences of space into incompatible dimensions of lived time' (Pugliese 2009: 673) — the conceptualisation of 'absolute difference within the space of simultaneity' (Pugliese 2009: 664). These dynamics are crucial if we are to attempt to understand the process by which The Gap's multiple histories informed its paradoxical (re)presentations throughout the Caroline Byrne murder investigation and trial. More specifically, they remain fundamental to an understanding of the ways in which the history of The Gap as a 'notorious suicide spot' impacted upon and complicated conventional police practices as a consequence of place (and its representations and reputation) coming to substitute for the crime itself. For its part in the subsequent transformation of The Gap to a 'crime scene', the mainstream media's coverage of the Caroline Byrne case brought into sharp focus the notion that while The Gap's multiple histories may sit discreetly side-by-side, overlapping one another, they are always ever simultaneously present, even if this presence is unspoken or occluded.

However, we must remain mindful that geographical locations such as The Gap are only ever places until they are instilled with meaning, and that the meaning frameworks that contribute to this process remain highly mediated and subject to cultural acts of negotiation. In this way, the culturally mediated reception of (re)presentations of places and the

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collective memory, reputation, and (re)interpretations of a place's 'dark pasts' remains as crucial to our understanding of these terrains as the existential participation in or lived experience of these environments (Shields 1991: 14).

In many respects, the Caroline Byrne murder case has produced a far more intimate, forensic and haunting set of images and memories than many other (aesthetic) representations of The Gap have previously done. Moreover, these images — in their appropriation and (re)configuration by mainstream media — have had far greater public accessibility than earlier (re)presentations of The Gap; serving to also remind us that, in their ongoing compulsion to 'return to the scene of the crime', even media professionals can sometimes become accidental or inadvertent thanatourists.

Far less accessible, however, is a critical cultural vocabulary that moves beyond the legal frame and its accepted lexicon to adequately and absolutely address the threshold ways in which beautiful places can be and are often transformed into dark spaces, and how it is that we might attempt to reconcile our responses to the competing discourses and regulated meanings that typically result. On some level, this has much to do, one suspects, with the ultimate irreducibility and transcendental nature of places and spaces marked by death, devastation and trauma, which inevitably possess the ability to enchant and haunt us, without us ever completely knowing how or why, let alone being able to satisfactorily express these visceral experiences through conventional language. On the other hand, however, it may simply be that our attempts to reconcile these responses and the competing discourses often configured around crime scenes and places of trauma are both unnecessary and ultimately futile.

As The Gap's (re)configurations throughout the images and media reports associated with Caroline Byrne's death have demonstrated, crime scenes and places of trauma tend to occupy and embody ambivalent spaces that remain haunted not just by multiple histories, but multiple histories as simultaneously recurring, albeit seemingly disjunctive, histories. This is to say that, just as the legacies of violence,

death and suffering are often embodied in and by the spaces and places where these acts take place, so too are the other multiple histories of these same sites. These histories do not fade away or diminish in the transformation of public places to crime scenes, but rather they become contestable, overwritten and layered, like palimpsests — ever-present regardless of their (re)configurations. As Tumarkin fittingly concludes:

All places in our lives are palimpsests, containing many different layers of the past on top of each other. In its original meaning, 'palimpsest', of Greek derivation, refers to a re-used manuscript with its original text, usually on parchment, overwritten by other kinds of inscriptions ... A place is similarly layered and over-written ... new meanings are superimposed on the old; some memories and histories rest on others, submerged or largely forgotten. Yet just like in the manuscript, marks and traces of the past overwritten by the present are still there, lying underneath each place, an integral and indestructible part of that place, even if 'rubbed smooth' (Tumarkin 2005: 225).

In this respect, theorists such as Tumarkin, Seltzer and Foucault may well have something to offer 'dark tourism' in the formulation of a broader critical theory that takes greater account of the spatial, temporal and experiential complications derived from the transformation of tourist sites into traumascapes and crime scenes. More importantly, this may well open up the possibility for dark tourism specifically, and cultural theories of trauma and place more generally, to accommodate the ways in which a place such as The Gap's other multiple histories (of life, not just death) remain inextricably linked to its often conflicting public (re)presentations and interpretations; finally allowing for an appreciation of The Gap's persistence, first and foremost, as a tourist attraction *in spite of* its dark past, rather than as a tourist attraction *because of* its dark past.

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