appears crucial but remains offstage. As Emerson (2001: 92) wrote regarding Perec:

While space, to Perec, is the armature of experience, it remains fragile and ephemeral. As a result, a meticulous attention to the physical world is necessary in order to create character and, more importantly, protect it from erasure and disappearance. If Perec is so concerned that his characters are constructed by spaces and things, it is because the characters, in themselves, are incapable of remembrance. Space is the locus of memory (and history) and it must, therefore, be protected in order to prevent erasure.

This inattention to the actual stories of the people in the square appears as a kind of constant distancing. An indicative passage, taken from field notes in the square, indicates this manoeuvre:

Circular saw
A child screams
I hear people talking.
A man sits next to me.
He asks why I am here. Why does this place concern me? I remembered an aid-worker in 1992 who was asked a similar question [...] (p. 145)

In what follows this passage, Riding briefly tells the story of Stuart Laycock, who delivered aid during the Bosnian War and made videotapes of his travels throughout the war, which were provided to Riding. The narrative shifts to a phenomenological account of Riding viewing the videotapes, a Perecquian analysis of a Perecquian medium: ‘The films display in their entirety the seemingly inconsequential and inadmissible, the apparently irrelevant things in and stories from a country at war’ (p. 146). But do they? Do they display ‘in their entirety’? To what kind of sensing body is this ‘entirety’ perceptible? Does it matter that this is a second order viewing by an Englishman of another Englishman’s videos? I would argue that it does.

Riding has indeed followed in Perec’s footsteps, producing a detailed – and at times incredibly moving – account of the way memory and trauma are unfolding in both Bosnia and its diaspora. But the experimental effort to break free of the metanarratives of war and ethnic conflict instead substitute another mediating frame – the overriding experience of the author, whose relationship to the place is one of an ‘outsider’ (p. 14). The artifice involved rather unnecessarily detracts from understanding either the ‘weight of history’ in Bosnia or the region’s emancipatory politics.

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Locating the embodied interconnections in performative geopolitics

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Writing a geopolitics of memory is no simple task. Writing a geopolitics of memory of a country whose history falls outside the normative Western European memory narrative, presents an even more complicated task. Certainly, what Riding’s work shows us is that geographies of remembrance are complex, and their politics deeply knotted. These complex knots entangle in complicated geopolitical terrain – the Balkans exemplifies this point – but
they also tether together as material representations, in calendar rituals or memorials embedded in designated state-sponsored and often strategic locations as interconnections of memory, place and identity. Yet, complexity also manifests because we feel memory, we feel it through our bodies. Geopolitical memory can be felt by people who directly experienced the events and places connected to that geopolitics. It can also be ‘felt’ in places of trauma, as evidenced in Riding’s visits to sites of memory intimately connected with trauma.

Till (2012) has termed such places ‘wounded’. Their “‘dissonant” or “difficult” heritage . . . narrate(s) the trauma of war in places that are built around the residual or material remains of conflict – memories literally etched into place’ (Drozdzewski et al., 2019: 257). These etchings wound; wounds like the railway tracks, Riding reports on page 121, reveal a confluence of material and immaterial scars of place. The edges of these places are often so heavy with the affect of that trauma, that it is hard to comprehend how they may ever be felt differently, even while their stoic memorial presence exudes calmness and silence. As Riding (2019: 121) noted when visiting the Sisak Antifascist Spomenik in Brezovica, ‘the silence belies the torture, the unheard horror, and death buried within in the soil’. Memory scholars often characterise this type of site, one beset with the trauma of its memory, using Pierre Nora’s adage of lieux de mémoire: a site of memory that functions to preserve memory in its place-based national context (see figures 12, 13 and 14).

Further complicating a geopolitics of memory, and as Riding (2019) points out, these embodied and felt experiences of such wounding also resonate through the everyday city. Riding’s impulse for incorporating this everyday focus stems from an ethnographic focus and a substantive nod to post cultural-turn scholarship and its interest in the everyday. Generous scene setting takes place between the introduction of these ethnographic and everyday themes, and the fieldnotes. Therein conceptual sidesteps jump from justification of approach and method, to chapters providing place-based context for the complex geopolitics, before further skips and hops to our initiation to fieldnotes (p. 63). When reading the first pages of fieldnotes, I pondered where would this lead? How was this place to be exhausted, and why? What hop, skip, or jump was necessary for me to answer these questions? Until this point, I felt amply instructed about what the book did and did not do. Despite the admission of the ‘non-linear, unfolding, intimate’ proclivity of narrating post-genocide landscapes (Riding, 2019: 43), as the book progressed, I felt a little lost on this journey through (and to Bosnia), as we travelled from city square to small rural townships, kitchen tables, organised pilgrimages, memorial ceremonies, guided through raw war-time video footage, and back to the square.

In the space that remains, I offer some critical reflection on my sense of disorientation. My strongest connection to the book was in its engagement with embodied and performative memory – methodological and conceptual – and its grounding in the everyday. Riding reasoned that a performative approach was vital because it offered specificities of time and place and the possibly of overcoming an oculocentric gaze towards Other(ed) landscapes. Such performative explorations were positioned as taking place through the embodied and emplaced participant, in the ‘bodily work of remembering’ (Riding, 2019: 43). Riding critiques how geographers have broached such bodily work(s) of remembering, especially in post-conflict landscapes. I suspect that his statement that ‘a re-presenting of the past takes place, the dead summoned through the body of the geographer’ (Riding, 2019: 44), would jar those who have pushed the boundaries of memory-work past expositions of the material.

This position had resonant affect through the narrative, its loudest affective echoes resounded in absence of scholarship grounded in feminist and non-representational geographies, and which have employed embodied approaches to better understand memory in place (De Nardi, 2019; Gensburger, 2019; Micieli-Voutsinas, 2017; Ratnam and Drozdzewski, 2020; Sather-Wagstaff, 2016; Sumartojo, 2016; Tolia-Kelly et al., 2017). Moving beyond assertions of bearing witness or attempting to conjure a ghostly haunting of place, this scholarship speaks to the importance of embodied approaches to understanding memory by exploring
how these feelings embody places – in contrast to how the researcher feels this embodiment – and to how they are made possible and activated in different spatial, cultural and geopolitical contexts (Drozdzewski and Birdsall, 2019). Working beyond what we see, and how the field makes us feel, requires discerning all the layers of complexity that a geopolitics of memory provokes us to engage with – the material, the uncomfortable edges of wounded landscapes, and the long lasting capacities of trauma on the city, its residents and the self.

Riding’s journey to Bosnia has these layers: large sale monuments to genocide comprise the material; the Pozor mine has the uncomfortable edges of a place that witnessed trauma but with few material remnants of that trauma; Zekija and Dino’s stories narrate long lasting trauma; Café Monolog, the city; and, Riding’s ethnographic body as the self. Yet what I found wanting among these layers was the connective work, between and within them. This connective work forms the crux of the embodied ethnographic, geographical and memory-studies scholarship previously motioned to. Such connective work recognises that ‘the personal is grounded in sharing stories and giving voice to hidden or silenced experiences, connecting up everyday practices to show the ‘bigger’ or ‘broader’ political picture’ (Hall, 2020: 243).

Patently, Riding’s fieldnotes show that the specific qualities and atmospheres of that everyday square propelled him – via thoughts and feelings – to other stories, and memories of other places saturated in these geopolitics. For example, the church bells and bird on page 66 connect, and introduce us to Zekija and Dino. Yet this meandering, from the square to other times and places continues attempts to exhaust the place, and results in parallel stories disconnected from the thing connecting them – the researcher’s body. Performative and embodied research requires bodies; foremost, the researcher’s body in the making, feeling, facilitating, and conjuring of linkages, and as a geopolitical site itself (cf. Smith, 2011). The researcher’s body is a location of power through their embodiment, in the field, its/their scope regime, and in the academy where the work manifests. Recognition of this positionality extends to how we choose to tell the story, situate it in existing scholarship and distinguish how the various component parts interconnect. So, if I return to my critique of feeling a little lost through this narrative journey, it is because amid considerable and diverse empirical data, the interconnections remained faint.

Perhaps this sense of disorientation lies in wanting more from what was there, especially considering the wealth scholarship that engages with/in embodied methods, geopolitics, memory-work, post-conflict landscapes and the body (Dixon and Marston, 2011). Power refracts through the (re)production of memory scholarship. A politics of memory speaks to how ‘power impacts and influences the experience of representations of memory, but also how it affects the (re)production, maintenance and performance of identity’ (Drozdzewski et al., 2019: 253). We see this power exerted in the stories and images of the landscapes Riding visits – a fascinating and laudable assemblage of dedicated acumen. But I remain concerned that the politics of memory of this geopolitics of memory reminds me of the entrenched Cartesian binary, which not only dissociates the body and feeling from thought, but also operates to devalue how memory may move us to feel and sense places in-between and, as somehow separate from how we discourse upon it.

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Drozdzewski D and Birdsall CJ (2019) Doing Memory Research: New Methods and Approaches. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan.
In The Sight of Death art historian T. J. Clark (2006) gives an account of daily visits to the Getty Institute in Los Angeles to observe two paintings by Nicolas Poussin: Landscape with a Calm and Landscape with a Man Killed by a Snake. Clark’s book – ostensibly stimulated by the fortune of both paintings hanging in the same gallery – is organised as a set of diary entries and its purpose is at once prosaic and experimental. At first glance the book is an act of aesthetic description but lurking beneath is a deeper current of philosophical and political commentary. It charts a journey ‘outwards’, to the gallery and to describe the paintings’ juxtaposed existence, where the nature of the artworks themselves and their changing qualities in the shifting light are all meticulously documented. But the book is also a journey ‘inwards’, where Clark is drawing on the paintings to reflect on his own status and purpose, threading together artistic observations with wider political and psychological analysis.

While it is not a direct influence – though there are citations of one of Clark’s concurrent projects with the San Francisco-based collective RETORT (2006) – echoes of Clark’s approach reverberate in James Riding’s (2019) The Geopolitics of Memory: A Journey to Bosnia. It is a book that similarly seeks to utilise an experimental method, describing observations in a central square in Sarajevo made over repeated visits across 2 years, while connecting these descriptions to a wider set of experiences and journeys within the former Yugoslavia. Inspired by French novelist, essayist and thinker Georges Perec, Riding is seeking to document the everyday life of the city – what Perec terms the ‘infra-ordinary’ – in order to break from representations framed in relation to Sarajevo’s traumatic past (pp. 28–29). The flow of the book is, then, interspersed with lists of observations taken from a central square in Sarajevo (Trg oslobodenja – Alija Izetbegović), avoiding analysis or inference to provide a direct account of