Memory, Imagination, and Resistance in Canada’s Prison for Women

Lisa Guenther

Abstract
A group of women who were incarcerated at Canada’s first federal Prison for Women (P4W) have been fighting to create a memorial garden since the prison closed in 2000. In 2017, the prison was sold to a private developer who plans to convert the historic building and grounds into condos, retail, and office space. What does it mean to remember the dead, and to fight for the living, at a time when neoliberal common sense demands the efficient conversion of a place of suffering and death into a “heritage building” on “prime real estate”? How might a collective practice of radical imagination help to resist the commodification of memory into a tourist attraction or an aesthetic improvement of private property? And what is the relation between memory, healing, and accountability in a place where state violence, gender domination, and settler colonialism intersect?

Keywords
prison, Prison for Women (P4W), memory, phenomenology, sites of conscience

How should we memorialize sites of conscience, given that some people have visceral memories of their own lived experience in this site, while others have neither a personal memory nor a generic knowledge of what happened there? This conundrum lies at the heart of any effort to name a place as a site of conscience: If the community as a whole already felt the weight of this place on its conscience, it might not be necessary to formalize its recognition; but to the extent that the community lacks such a conscience, it is not clear how those who currently pass by this site with indifference should be moved, provoked, or inspired to remember something they do not yet know. Beginning with this conundrum, I want to suggest that the effort to cultivate and support a site of conscience must go beyond “educating the public” by sharing damage-centered narratives of the harm done to those who survived, or did not survive, the events that unfolded in this place to provoke a moral response of guilt or accountability. Not only does this approach risk instrumentalizing the suffering of some for the edification of others, it is also not clear that a guilty conscience is very effective in motivating collective action to change the conditions under which such harm was done in the first place.

1Queen’s University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada

Corresponding Author:
Lisa Guenther, Department of Philosophy, Queen’s University, 332 Watson Hall, 49 Bader Lane, Kingston, Ontario, Canada K7L 3N6.
Email: lisa.guenther@queensu.ca
For this reason, I think we need to move beyond the abstraction of con-scientia, or knowing-with, toward the cultivation and support of con-sentir: a consensual practice of sensing-together or feeling-with. Sites of conscience are precisely not places of mutual consent—which is why they demand to be reckoned with in consensual ways. Understood as an embodied practice of con-sentir, conscience is not just a matter of acknowledging that something terrible happened in the past, it is a way of feeling-together the traces of suffering, survival, resistance, and resurgence that spiral out of a particular place. Understood in this way, conscience is not the guilt-ridden hand-wringing of a beautiful soul, nor the guilt-inducing haranguing of “our better angels.” Rather, conscience is a relationship, and like all relationships, it thrives on loving attention. The practice of attending to others and with others is situated in a particular place with an ongoing history that both demands our attention and escapes our grasp. Understood in this way, a site of conscience is a place where collective sensing and sense-making unfold, and to which we return again and again in rituals of care.

Every place calls for attention, even the crack in the sidewalk where the chickweed grows. But there are some places where the soil is so thickly caked with blood, where the stones hold so much grease and sweat of human suffering, that they demand a sustained collective engagement—not just with traces of pain and violation, but also with the quiet hum of simple pleasures, momentary respite, joyful resistance, and floaty numbness. In this article, I will describe one such site of conscience: the former Prison for Women (or P4W) in Kingston, Ontario, Canada. Drawing on Jean-Paul Sartre’s critical phenomenology of history and Sue Campbell’s account of relational memory, I will argue that sensing-with is also a practice of remembering-with that weaves together future, past, and present in a nonlinear ethics of place. Throughout the article, I will reflect on my own position as someone who has not been incarcerated at P4W or elsewhere, but who has worked in collaboration with women who did time at P4W to create a memorial garden for those who lived and died there, and in prisons for women across Canada. As the memorial garden project is still very much in process, my reflections will necessarily be partial and incomplete.

Remembering P4W

From 1934 to 2000, P4W was the only federal prison for women in the country. This means anyone who was sentenced to 2 years or more and interpellated as a woman was sent to P4W, whether her family and support system was in the Yukon Territory or on Cape Breton Island or anywhere in between. Kingston has the highest concentration of prisons in Canada, including the nation’s first penitentiary, which operated from 1835 to 2013. Kingston Penitentiary (or KP) is now a popular tourist destination, film location, and even concert venue, with tours conducted by former guards following a script of penal platitudes (Piché et al., 2019). Redevelopment plans for the prison complex include a mixture of residential, commercial, and community space, with a portion of the former prison set aside for tourism and heritage (The Planning Partnership, 2017). P4W is situated about a block from Kingston Penitentiary, with some lovely views of Lake Ontario. Today, it looks like any other historic limestone building, perhaps an old courthouse or school. There are no signs, no historic plaques, no formal commemoration of the fraught history of the place. In other words: nothing to provoke your conscience, nothing to make you feel-with the people who lived and died here. But if you slow down enough to notice the bars on the windows and the faint crease of the old prison wall in the grass along the sidewalk, a more complicated story begins to emerge.

From the very beginning of its operation, government reports on P4W condemned the institution as harsh and unlivable. Already in 1938, just 4 years after P4W opened, the Archambault Report recommended its closure due to “disgraceful” conditions (Archambault, 1938, p. 314). More than 40 years later, the MacGuigan Report called for the closure of P4W once again,
declaring the prison “unfit for bears, much less for women” (MacGuigan, 1977, p. 135). Still, the prison remained open. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, experiments with LSD and electroconvulsive therapy were conducted on women at P4W, leading to a 1998 lawsuit (St. Clair & Cockburn, 1999). Even after such controversial research ended and more ethical standards for research were implemented, professors and graduate students at Queen’s and other universities continued to learn from women incarcerated at P4W, often in ways that did not benefit the women themselves (Osborne, 2006). Careers have been launched on the backs of incarcerated women, even as these women remained confined in a cold, decrepit institution. And if they died without family to bury them, their bodies were either dumped in a nameless grave or sent to Queen’s Medical School for use in anatomy lessons. Between December 1988 and February 1991, seven women died by suicide in P4W (Pollack, 2008, p. 6). Six of these women were Indigenous. In 1989, Correctional Service Canada (CSC) appointed a task force with representatives from Indigenous (and) women’s groups to investigate conditions at P4W and make recommendations for change. This resulted in the publication of a report called Creating Choices, which again recommended the closure of the prison and the creation of a regional system of federal prisons for women, including a healing lodge for Indigenous women. This time, the recommendations stuck; by 1995, two new prisons and a healing lodge had opened, and CSC began transferring women from P4W to these new institutions.

But P4W was still P4W. There was a hunger strike in December 1993, and in April 1994 a conflict between prisoners and guards was suppressed by an all-male Institutional Emergency Response Team (IERT) who stripped the women naked and left them shackled on the floor for 6 hr. Security footage of the event was leaked to the media and broadcast on a national news program, The Fifth Estate. The final nail in the coffin for P4W was the Arbour Report in 1996, which investigated the incident and confirmed the need to close the prison once and for all. There is no mention of this complex and painful history in the Penitentiary Museum, which is housed in the former warden’s residence between KP and P4W. There is, however, a full-wall display honoring the Institutional Emergency Response Team, featuring a mannequin dressed in full riot gear and a photograph of IERT members in uniform, holding rifles and smiling for the camera.

In 2007, Queen’s University purchased P4W for a reported $2.8 million, intending to use the former prison for student housing or the university archives (Buchner, 2011). But it turns out that a building unfit for bears is also unfit for valuable documents, much less for undergrads. After years of neglect, the building was full of black mold, and it would take a considerable investment to make it fit for use. The prison sat empty for over 10 years until June 2018, when a commercial developer named ABNA Investments purchased the prison and the eight acres of land on which it stands. Possible redevelopment plans include residential, retail, and office space (Nease, 2018).

But not everyone is willing to forget P4W. Every year on Prisoner’s Justice Day (August 10), a group of women who were imprisoned at P4W have gathered for a healing circle to remember lost friends and lovers, and to honor each other’s strength and vulnerability. The healing circles on Prisoner’s Justice Day are organized by the P4W Memorial Collective, which is led by former prisoners who want to create a memorial garden for the women who died, not only at P4W but in prisons, jails, and detention centers across the country. (I was a member of the group from 2018–2021.) In addition to the annual healing circles, the P4W Memorial Collective has organized film screenings, roundtable discussions, a solidarity letter, and artistic collaborations. When public health measures for the Covid-19 pandemic permit, we will gather to mark the 20th anniversary of the closure of P4W and to share our vision for the future.

The creation and cultivation of a garden is very different way to remember a site of conscience than a plaque or a gravestone. It is a livin memorial, and as such, it calls forth a complex mixture of feelings from human and nonhuman visitors, who may be drawn to the garden by a desire for solace, enjoyment, nectar, medicine, shade, or something else entirely. A garden is not didactic:
It does not tell you what to think or feel, it just invites you into relation. This is both its strength and its weakness: the prettier the garden, the more likely it is to enhance the site’s property value for the private developer. How do we mark a site of conscience—in the sense of remembering-together and feeling-with the complex history of this place—in a way that resists co-optation by neoliberal capitalism or redemptive state narratives, both of which are invested in making uncomfortable memories disappear? And how do we connect public memory to political action, bringing an end to the systemic destruction of lives in punitive institutions?

These are not abstract questions. Today, Indigenous people make up less than 5% of the Canadian population, but over 30% of the total federal prison population (Office of the Correctional Investigator, 2020). The situation for Indigenous women is worse: they make up 42% of the people in federal prisons for women. In the decade after the closure of P4W and the creation of a network of federal prisons for women across Canada, the number of federally sentenced women increased by 109% (Office of the Correctional Investigator, n.d.-b). In provincial jails, the situation is even more extreme, especially in Prairie provinces like Saskatchewan where an astounding 76% of inmates are Indigenous (Office of the Correctional Investigator, n.d.-a). To put this somewhat differently, Indigenous people in Canada are 10 times more likely to be incarcerated than non-Indigenous people, and in Saskatchewan, they are 33 times more likely to be incarcerated (MacDonald, 2016). At the same time, Indigenous people are hyper-incarcerated, police routinely fail to investigate the cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, trans, and two-spirit people, they harass Indigenous youth, and they actively endanger the lives of Indigenous people through so-called “starlight tours” and other abusive practices, leading to outrageous levels of Indigenous deaths in custody.

This stark data on state violence and interpersonal violence against Indigenous peoples should remind us that there can be no meaningful movement for prison abolition that is not also a movement for decolonization. The ethical and political arc of prison abolition goes far beyond the closure of penal institutions; it is also a creative project of collectively building a world without prisons, a world where accountability for harm is not equated with punishment and confinement. This world is not the naïve fantasy of a small group of fringe radicals; it is the actual history of Indigenous peoples who did not rely on prisons or police to hold each other accountable. In the territory that we now call Canada, the first penitentiary was built just in 1835, by British Loyalists who “purchased” the land for a steal (Shanahan, 2018). There are trees in Ka’arihkwewi/Kingston that are older than the penitentiary.

So what would it take to remember P4W—or KP, for that matter—in a way that both attends to the particular history of this place by feeling-with the people who lived and died here, and also supports our capacity to remember, (re)imagine, and (re)build a world without prisons? My reflections on this question are shaped by my situation as someone who has never been incarcerated, but who grew up in a world where prisons and punishment have been normalized as the only conceivable way to hold lawbreakers accountable and to keep the public safe. In this world, even those of us who have never stepped foot in a prison are shaped by a carceral imaginary that fuels the common-sense intuition that if you break the law, you must be punished—that you have incurred a “debt to society” that can only be repaid through your confinement and forced labor. This “common sense” is a particular form of con-sentir, or sensing, perceiving, and feeling the world with others. We bind ourselves in solidarity with state violence when we lend our cognitive and affective powers to this intuition. And if we have any feelings left over for the punished, they are likely to be feelings of pity, fear, superiority, or disgust. What would it take to feel-together differently? To remember and imagine a world in which it is common sense that if someone causes harm, they should be supported to figure out why they acted this way, and how they can make things better? And what sort of intervention or interaction with a particular site of conscience might help to call forth this kind of feeling-with? More concretely, what would a decolonial, abolitionist memorial garden look like, and how can we build it together?
Feeling-With as a Practice of Relational Memory

Since the Kingston Prison for Women closed in 2000 and the surrounding walls were torn down in 2008, there has been little to distinguish the limestone building from other historic sites in the city. As one of my students said when we studied P4W in class, “I walk by that building every day on my way to campus, and I had no idea it was a prison.” At the same time, hundreds of women across Canada walk through their lives with memories of their incarceration at P4W: memories of friendships and pain, death and survival, solidarity, and despair. This uneven distribution of memory and forgetting is not restricted to prisons. Kingston was the first capital of Canada (back when it was still a colonial Province), and the first Prime Minister, Sir John A. MacDonald, grew up here. This part of Kingston’s history is well recognized and publicly celebrated with historic plaques, statues, and guided tours. But the Indigenous history of the region is much less well known to settlers, and there is remarkably little public acknowledgment of the complex relations between the Huron-Wendat, Mississaugua, Algonquin, Mohawk, and Oneida peoples in what the Huron and Mohawk called Ka’tarohkwi. Most settlers walk this ground every day, forgetting, neglecting, or refusing to acknowledge that it is stolen ground.

This normalization of settler denial has profound consequences for the psychic, social, and political life of settlers and Indigenous peoples. The 2016 killing of Colten Boushie, a young Cree man from the Red Pheasant First Nation, by Gerald Stanley, a White farmer, in Saskatchewan, and Stanley’s acquittal by an all-white jury in 2018, sparked a nation-wide conversation about racism, settler colonialism, and the criminal legal system, forcing some settlers to confront the injustice of overt and covert genocidal policies and practices, and provoking others to cling even more tightly to national myths of the right to settlement (Starblanket & Hunt, 2020). When settlers and Indigenous people walk the ground of North Battleford, Saskatchewan—or when we walk past the former Prison for Women in Kingston/Ka’tarohkwi—it is not clear that we are in the same place, or even in the same time. And yet, these layers of space and time are somehow simultaneous, accessible from different perspectives and in various degrees of complexity, depending on the patience, attentiveness, and social location of the perceiver.

As a philosopher, I find inspiration in the practice of phenomenology for cultivating the patience and attentiveness that places like P4W demand.7 From a phenomenological perspective, the world is not merely a platform or container for autonomous human action. Rather, we exist as Being-in-the-world, wholly interwoven with the situation into which we are thrown, and constantly projecting possibilities for meaningful engagement or disengagement. For the most part, the meanings that we project are found ready-made, and we rarely take the time to reflect on their implications for our existence.8 For many settlers, the ready-made meanings that organize our Being-in-the-world include common-sense intuitions such as: Canada is a nation of immigrants; I have a right to defend my property; development is progress; prisons and police keep us safe. These meanings are not just word sandwiches (although they are also that). They have a materiality that we often suppress or avoid, but that we sometimes feel in our bones or our guts, for better or for worse. When tourists flock to the former Kingston Penitentiary for a safe glimpse of the dark side, when settlers become frustrated with the “inconvenience” of Indigenous blockades, or when some of these same settlers begin to feel the transformative power of Indigenous resurgence movements like Idle No More or Solidarity with Wet’suwet’en—these are the moments when the materiality of meaning hits us in a visceral way.

If we understand the world phenomenologically—as a palimpsest of meaningful-material layers, some of which get fused together over time, and others scraped away or buried to the point of oblivion—then we’re in a good position to see why the development of a former prison matters, not just for those who were incarcerated there, but for all of us who walk this ground. The shape of our relations with each other, with ourselves, and with the spatial and temporal
dimensions of our world are at stake in this development. As Jean-Paul Sartre explains, the history of the world is not external to my existence as Being-in-the-world:

I totalise myself on the basis of centuries of history and, in accordance with my culture, I totalise this experience. This means that my life itself is centuries old, since the schemata which permit me to understand, to modify and to totalise my practical undertakings (and the set of determinations which go with them) have entered the present (present in their effects and past in their completed history). (Sartre, 2004, p. 54; emphasis added)

This ongoing presence of the past in the form of dynamic structures or “schemata” that shape the way I make sense of the world brings a “temporal depth” to my life, even to simple experiences like standing on the grounds of a former prison (Sartre, 2004, p. 54). Given this interconnection between my own life and the centuries of material culture and collective practice that I have inherited as a both a basis for meaning and way of making (new) meaning, I never sense the world in complete isolation from others, living and dead. The historical depth and texture of my own experience becomes accessible to me through reflection on what we choose to remember and forget. Sartre adds,

And let us not forget that the choice of social memories defines both the present praxis (in so far as it motivates this choice) and social memory in so far as it has produced our praxis along with its characteristic choice. (p. 56)

But it takes more than a simple choice to re-member the past, especially an historical past that I did not experience directly myself.

I find philosopher Sue Campbell’s concept of relational memory helpful for articulating a collective practice of remembering, not just to preserve the past but also, more importantly, to transform relationships in the present and future. Even this splicing of past, present, and future belies the complex temporality of memory, in which the past is ambiguously present in relation to a desire that both loops back to what has been and also arches forward to what could have been and could still become. For Campbell, memory is not just

the faithful reproduction of a past event, securely stored for ready recollection and identical on each occasion of recall. Instead, unstable traces of information about the past, whose encodings have already been shaped by previous history, interact with the needs and interests of the present and meld with previous knowledge and with what we have been told to form memory reconstructions for which no originals exist, and which vary on each occasion of recall. (Campbell, 2003, p. 119)

This approach to memory helps to deepen our understanding of conscience, both as feeling-with or sensing-together, and also as an embodied social practice of remembering-together. This does not mean that everyone has to remember the same things in the same way. There may even be strongly conflicting memories in a single individual, let alone a community. The point of a site of conscience is not to establish a single coherent narrative, as if we were in a court of law where all the facts, evidence, and convictions must line up neatly to count for anything. Rather, the point is to stretch our imagination beyond this juridical model and to complicate or contextualize the dominant state narrative presented, for example, at the Penitentiary Museum or on tours of Kingston Penitentiary. Unlike some sites of conscience, the aim of the P4W memorial garden is not to promote “dialogue” or “debate” between former guards and former prisoners, but rather for ex-prisoners to co-create a place of healing and self-expression independently from state actors and institutions.
What does this mean for “the public,” or for those of us who do not have a personal memory of P4W or of the people who lived and died there? Again, Campbell’s account of relational memory is helpful:

[It] encourages us to think about how people can share memory across quite different pasts; about what kinds of public and social resources (narrative, symbolic, cultural, relational, or material) can help people remember; about the many kinds of activities involved in remembering and about the responsibilities of those with whom memory is shared, especially the memory of harm. How we participate in and respond to others’ remembering will be part of the context that affects how and what people can remember—the significance they are able to give to their past for their present and future. (Campbell, 2008, cited in Koggel, 2014, p. 16; my emphasis)

Again, the point is not that we must all remember the same thing, nor that those with “lived experience” should be pressured to make their memories public to educate or enlighten the rest of us. Rather, the act of gathering in place to sense-with and to remember-together is itself an act of building and deepening the relationships that we need to make carceral-colonial logics obsolete. As Christine Koggel explains in her engagement with Sue Campbell’s work, “Relational remembering demands a commitment to a collective project of understanding the past through the present as a way to move forward” (Koggel, 2014, p. 498). Koggel cites Jeff Corntassel’s insight that this process of engaging with one another in and through memory is a process of “learning to live in the longer now” (Corntassel, 2008; cited Koggel, 2014, p. 500).

We could understand this “longer now” in terms of a tension and relation between cyclical time and irreversible change, which I believe is at the heart of abolitionist mourning and remembering. Sometimes, we experience an irreparable loss: murder, genocide, environmental destruction, a global pandemic. Nothing can bring back those who have been lost, and yet we remember—and in remembering together, relationally, we do not merely conserve a frozen snapshot of the lost one(s), we cycle back to them, bringing them into presence, acting and reactivating our relationship to them in a way that alters the future. Part of what makes irreversible harm so painful is the loss of possibilities: We can never do this again, be here together, or speak these words to the person we wish could hear them. Rituals of mourning help us to retrieve some sense of possibility, but they are never quite the same as the possibilities that have been lost. And yet, life goes on somehow. Love finds another path. Branches that appeared to be dead start generating tiny, fragile buds. Cyclical time unfolds not as the simple repetition of the same, but as a process of emerging, subsiding, decaying, and (re)generating that troubles any neat opposition between the possible and the actual, or between being and becoming. I imagine cyclical time not as a circle, but as a spiral or chiasm that twists and retraces its path—wobbling, diverging, and looping back with a difference. It’s the wobble that brings new life into the cycle, but not without the pain of uncertainty and instability.

This understanding of relational memory as a tension between irreversible rupture and cyclical or spiraling time helps me to address the question of what it means to remember something or someone that you never experienced directly yourself. This question is key for public memory: If you have to experience something yourself to understand the way it shapes your own life, then there is no hope for relational memory as a transformative praxis; the most a site of conscience can teach those of us who were not there to experience it firsthand is a pious recognition that something terrible happened to someone (but not to me, phew!). This pulls us back into the conventional meaning of conscience as an individual capacity for guilty feelings, which have never done much to change the world for the better.

As a relational praxis of feeling-with, conscience calls not for sad passions, but for consent-ful attention, reflection, and imagination. I was not imprisoned at P4W, but I grew up in a world that was profoundly shaped by this institution, and I live and work in a city is still materially
connected to this and other prisons. Not only do I draw a paycheque as Queen’s National Scholar in Critical Prison Studies, but—in spite of everything I have learned or taught about the Prison Industrial Complex, the school-to-prison pipeline, the carceral archipelago, and other concepts—many of my gut reactions to harm, and many of my basic intuitions about justice, still circle around carceral logics that equate safety with distance and attempt to engineer trust through carrots and sticks.

This brings me to a core insight that would not have been possible if not for the relational memory work of the P4W Memorial Collective: I would literally not be the same person if P4W had never existed. Just imagine a world in which the penitentiary was never invented, or a world where instead of “improving” the prison by creating institutions specifically for women, people with a conscience had organized the abolition of penal institutions rather than their expansion and elaboration. The practice of incarceration, and the institutions built to sustain and expand this practice, deeply shape my moral imagination, making it difficult to really feel what it might be like to embody responsibility in a way that is not tangled up with punishment, debt, isolation, and control. And so, the challenge of remembering P4W is precisely not a matter of identifying with prisoners or imagining what it would be like if I myself were incarcerated, as a presumed condition for empathy. Rather, it means paying attention to the traces of this institution in my own body, my own everyday habits and moral intuitions, my own historical Being-in-the-world, by excavating the layers of carceral-colonial sediment in my own life, and reactivating the traces of other possibilities, other infrastructures, other practices.

This relational approach to sites of conscience also has implications for collective grief. Even though I never knew the women who died at P4W personally, I still experience a sense of grief for their lost lives, and for what could have been if another path had opened up for them. This is both a sense of grief for the particular person and also a sense of loss for the world that could have been if they were still here with us. In its broadest sense, collective mourning is a longing for the world that could have been and could still become, if we share space and sense-together to remember, imagine, and build frameworks for mutual care. I feel grief for the lives lost at P4W and other prisons across the world, but I cannot pretend that this grief does not feel more intense, the closer it touches my own everyday life. Getting to know Ann Hansen and Fran Chaisson, ex-prisoners at P4W and founding members of the P4W Memorial Collective, has made me feel connected to a prison I have never entered, to people I have never met, and to a history that I did not experience firsthand, but that nevertheless shapes my own life moral imagination. It is extremely important not to confuse this feeling of connection with identification, as if I, too, shared that lived experience. I do not. But there are aspects of my own lived experience that become foregrounded and clarified as I listen to the stories and critical analysis of Fran and Ann, and as I work together with them to create the social and political conditions for a memorial garden.13

Based on this shared experience of organizing a memorial garden, I understand a bit better what it means to be gendered as a woman: to be judged and punished for deviating from social norms, but also to gather around kitchen tables sharing food and laughter. I get a glimpse into what it means to be a settler: to rest in the assumption that I belong here, and that this place belongs to me, but also, hopefully, to learn how to loosen my grip on property, and to attend to the life-giving properties of land.14 I feel more deeply what it means to be racialized as white: to move through the world with the assumption that I can call on police to protect me, but also, hopefully, learning and practicing ways of responding to fear and harm that don’t mobilize and intensify state violence. In short, I get a better sense of how law and the institutions that apply, interpret, and enforce the law structure my body, my desires, my fears, and my ways of moving through the world—not inexorably, but in ways that take real effort to resist and even to perceive. I am deliberately staying away from words like “privilege” and “positionality” here because I want to stay close to the tangled complexity of overlapping differences and shared structures,
without snapping into a framework of binary oppositions between us and them, privilege and precarity, “lived experience” and sheltered lives.

This is not to deny that these differences matter with respect to social power and epistemic authority, but rather to explore the messy between-spaces where collaboration and creativity are most likely to happen. Part of the challenge for those of us who have not been locked up in prison, reform school, or other coercive institutions is to remember (in the sense of paying attention, following the traces, picking out the patterns, and analyzing the structures) how these institutions have shaped our perception, action, and emotions—whether as threats (“Be good, or you’ll end up there”), as promises (“Work hard, and you’ll rise above this”) or as blank spots (“I never realized . . .”). The point of this remembering is not to produce a tearful confession or to purge ourselves of “bad thoughts,” but rather to locate where the pressure points are for transformation: where the institutions that we may not have experienced firsthand still shape our imagination. Once we locate these pressure points or hinges, we can experiment with different ways of pivoting away from harm and supporting each other’s capacity for healing and growth.

This process is not only about connecting with people but also about connecting with place and with the land. The glittering beauty of the lake, the lush green of grass springing back from winter, the ancient limestone cut into blocks to build a prison, the warm, shifting light as the sun moves to set behind the prison—all of this living-dying beauty complicates my relation to P4W and to the other historic institutions with which it forms a carceral triangle: Kingston Penitentiary just across the street, and Rockwood Asylum for the Criminally Insane further along the lake. This beauty makes me feel more intensely the grief of lives lost, shortened, and contorted by these institutions. And this grief is also a feeling of loss for a world that would have supported them, and for the flickering possibility of who I could have been in that world. But even if this loss is irreversible, that does not mean it is permanent, or that the “could have been” is doomed never to be. Rather, the political challenge posed by sites of conscience is to remember in a way that re-members, or gathers a web of possibilities for (re)making the world together.

Acknowledgments
I wrote this paper after reflecting on many conversations with members of the P4W Memorial Collective, including Fran Chaisson, Jackie Davies, Rachel Fayter, Ann Hansen, Hadley Howes, Bobbie Kidd, Linda Mussell, naphtali, Alisha Sharma, and Georgia Ward. Any errors, hasty conclusions, or wonky bits are my own. Thanks also to Alexis Shotwell for pointing me in the direction of Sue Campbell’s work on relational memory. Finally, thank you to the organizers of and participants in the online workshop on “Critical Perspectives on Sites of Conscience” on May 27, 2020, for sharing their research and for insightful feedback on my own presentation.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests
The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding
The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD
Lisa Guenther https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6146-164X

Notes
1. On damage-centered narratives, see Tuck (2009).
2. Parts of this section are borrowed and modified from Guenther (2018).
3. See Mussell (2019) for a critique of the use of Kingston Penitentiary as a concert venue.
4. See Hannah-Moffat (2000, 2001) and Monture (2006) for a critique of Creating Choices as a neoliberal project of creating “prisons that empower” and attempting to incorporate Indigenous healing within a colonial system of punishment.
5. Compare, for example, the ongoing redevelopment of Holloway Prison in London, UK (http://hollowayprisonconsultation.co.uk/) and the abandoned proposal to convert Bayview Correctional Facility, a former women’s prison in New York City, into a “Women’s Building” with office space for community organizations (Stiffler, 2019).
6. For more on the carceral imaginary, see Brown (2009), Davis (2003), Smith (2009), and Wang (2018).
7. For a more detailed discussion of critical phenomenology, see Guenther (2019).
8. By “implications,” I don’t just mean consequences, I mean the way possibilities are folded or pleated into the way we walk, talk, think, and act.
9. See Lowe (2015, pp. 40–41, 174–175).
10. See Hansen (2018, pp. 3–4) for some reflections on the complexity of memory.
11. For a critical account of site of conscience as places for dialogue and debate, see Steele et al. (2020).
12. Campbell puts it this way: “how we remember can change the significance of the past for the future” (Campbell, 2008, p. 26; cited Koggel, 2014, p. 506).
13. For firsthand accounts of women’s experiences at P4W, see Hansen (2018) and P4W Memorial Collective (2020). See also Sugar and Fox (1989), Elliott and Horii (1994), and the Penal Press online archive of the P4W prison newsletter, Tightwire (https://penalpress.com/en/name/tightwire/).
14. Thanks to naphtali for this insight.

References

Archambault, J. (1938). Report of the Royal Commission to investigate the penal system of Canada. J.O. Patenaude. https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.8b47206&view=1up&seq=326&q1=disgraceful
Brown, M. (2009). The culture of punishment: Prison, society, and spectacle. NYU Press.
Buchner, J. (2011, June 28). Queen’s shackled by small budget. The Queen’s Journal. https://www.queen-sjournal.ca/story/2011-06-28/features/queens-shackled-small-budget/
Campbell, S. (2003). Relational remembering: Rethinking the memory wars. Rowman & Littlefield.
Campbell, S. (2008). Remembering for the future: Memory as a lens on the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission [Discussion paper]. Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada Truth and Reconciliation Commission.
Davis, A. Y. (2003). Are prisons obsolete? Seven Stories Press.
Elliott, L. & Horii, G. (Eds.). (1994). Women’s prisoners [Special issue]. Journal of Prisoners on Prisons, 5(2). http://www.jpp.org/documents/back%20issues/JPP_5_2_TEXT.pdf
Guenther, L. (2018, July 5). What is lost when we pave over a prison. The Globe and Mail. https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-what-is-lost-when-we-pave-over-a-prison/
Guenther, L. (2019). Critical phenomenology. In A. Murphy, G. Salamon & G. Weiss (Eds.), 50 concepts for a critical phenomenology (pp. 11–16). Northwestern University Press.
Hannah-Moffatt, K. (2000). Prison that empower: Neoliberal governance in Canadian women’s prisons. The British Journal of Criminology, 40, 510–531.
Hannah-Moffatt, K. (2001). Punishment in disguise: Penal governance and Canadian women’s imprisonment. University of Toronto Press.
Hansen, A. (2018). Taking the rap: Women doing time for society’s crimes. Between the Lines.
Koggel, C. (2014). Relational remembering and oppression. Hypatia, 29(2), 494–508.
Low, L. (2015). The intimacies of four continents. Duke University Press.
MacDonald, N. (2016, February 18). Canada’s prisons are the “new residential schools.” Maclean’s Magazine. https://www.macleans.ca/news/canada/canadas-prisons-are-the-new-residential-schools/
MacGuigan, M. (1977). Report to parliament. Minister of Supply and Services Canada. http://johnhoward.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/1977-HV-9507-C33-1977-MacGuigan.pdf
Monture, P. (2006). Confronting power: Aboriginal women and justice reform. Canadian Woman Studies, 25(3-4), 25–33.
Mussell, L. (2019, September 3). A prison is no place for a party. *The Conversation*. https://theconversation.com/a-prison-is-no-place-for-a-party-120320

Nease, K. (2018, June 26). Developer eyes Kingston’s shuttered women’s prison. *CBC News*. https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/kingston-women-prison-future-plan-1.4720690

Office of the Correctional Investigator. (2020, January 21). *Indigenous people in federal custody surpasses 30%*. https://wwwoci-bec.gc.ca/cnt/comm/press/press20200121-eng.aspx

Office of the Correctional Investigator. (n.d.-a). *Aboriginal offender statistics*. https://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/aboriginal/002003-1010-eng.shtml

Office of the Correctional Investigator. (n.d.-b). *Federally sentenced women*. https://wwwoci-bec.gc.ca/cnt/priorities-priorities/women-femmes-eng.aspx

Osborne, G. B. (2006). Scientific experimentation on Canadian inmates, 1955 to 1975. *The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice, 45*(3), 284–306.

P4W Memorial Collective. (2020). Toward a world without prisons with the P4W sisterhood. By Any Other Name: A 15 Day Spotlight on Solitary Confinement in Canada. https://p4wmemorialcollective.com/2020/11/28/

Piché, J., Ferguson, M., & Walby, K. (2019). A “win-win for everyone” except prisoners: Kingston Penitentiary tours as a staff, media and public relations campaign. *The Annual Review of Interdisciplinary Justice Research, 8*. https://docs.wixstatic.com/udg/3ac972_5cd1ae16db914adc9e770e433e873893.pdf

The Planning Partnership. (2017, June). *Portsmouth visioning: Former Kingston Penitentiary & Portsmouth Olympic Harbour draft executive summary of the recommendations report*. The City of Kingston. https://www.cityofkingston.ca/city-hall/projects-construction/kingston-pen

Pollack, S. (2008). *Locked in, locked out: Imprisoning women in the shrinking and punitive welfare state*. Wilfrid Laurier University.

Sartre, J. (2004). *Critique of dialectical reason* (A. Sheridan-Smith, Trans.). Verso Books.

Shanahan, D. (2018, November 8). Land for goods: The Crawford purchases. *Anishinabek News*. http://anishinabeknews.ca/2018/11/08/land-for-goods-the-crawford-purchases/

Smith, C. (2009). *The prison and the American imagination*. Yale University Press.

Starblanket, G., & Hunt, D. (2020). *Storying violence: Unravelling colonial narratives in the Stanley trial*. ARP Books.

St. Clair, J., & Cockburn, A. (1999, October 18). CIA shrinks & LSD. *CounterPunch*. https://www.counterpunch.org/1999/10/18/cia-shrinks-lsd/

Steele, L., Djuric, B., Hibberd, L., & Yeh, F. (2020). Parramatta female factory precinct as a site of conscience: Using institutional pasts to shape just legal futures. *UNSW Law Journal, 43*. https://www.unswlawjournal.unsw.edu.au/article/parramatta-female-factory-precinct-as-a-site-of-conscience-using-institutional-pasts-to-shape-just-legal-futures/

Stiffler, S. (2019, October 25). Former Bayview facility no longer future home of the women’s building. *Chelsea Community News*. https://chelseacommunitynews.com/2019/10/25/former-bayview-facility-no-longer-future-home-of-the-womens-building/

Sugar, F., & Fox, L. (1989). Nistum Peyako Seht’wawin Iskwewak: Breaking chains. *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law, 3*, 465–482.

Tuck, E. (2009). Suspending damage: A letter to communities. *Harvard Educational Review, 79*(3), 409–428.

Wang, J. (2018). *Carceral capitalism*. Semiotext(e)/Intervention.

**Author Biography**

*Lisa Guenther* is Queen’s National Scholar in political philosophy and critical prison studies at Queen’s University in Canada. She is the author of *Solitary Confinement: Social Death and its Afterlives* (2013) and co-editor of *Death and Other Penalties: Philosophy in a Time of Mass Incarceration* (2015). From 2012 to 2017, she facilitated a discussion group with men on death row in Tennessee called REACH Coalition, and from 2018–2021, she was a member of the P4W Memorial Collective in Kingston, Ontario, Canada. She is currently researching the relationship between slavery, settler colonialism, and incarceration in Canada and the United States.