

The Nazi Camp Commandant's House as a Space of Complicity: Understanding Art at Atrocity Sites– the Case of Falstad, Norway

Ingvild Hagen Kjørholt

Abstract: The article examines the role of art at sites of atrocity heritage. Its case in point is the temporary art exhibition 'Perpetrator Perspectives' (2022–2023) which the Norwegian Nazi camp memorial, the Falstad Centre, commissioned to exhibit in its former commandant's house. Through a close reading of the exhibition's recurring commandant's house motif, I argue that the Nazi camp commandant's house becomes a space of complicity – a many-layered topographic matrix where an embodied visitor participates in shaping perpetrator memory through engaging with the space as home, crime scene, and memorial space. In a concluding remark, I suggest potentials and pitfalls for visitor engagement in perpetrator memory in such a space of complicity.

Keywords: Atrocity Heritage, Commandant's House, Complicity, Implicated Subject, Installation Art, Nazi Perpetrators, Perpetrator Fiction

Introduction

Imagine a visitor to a state-funded Nazi camp memorial site standing in the former house of the camp commandant. She finds herself in a space which was once SS officers' living room. The room is aesthetically pleasing, with a large window providing a beautiful view of a garden surrounded by trees and meadows. The space is now a museum. It has been extensively redesigned since the war years, but still contains visible material traces from the past. A TV screen installed in the window captures the visitor's attention and directs her gaze away from the building details and the outside scenery, and towards an artwork. As she perceives the first tones of a melancholic soundtrack, yellow letters appear on a black screen: 'Imagine transforming a former Nazi commandant's house into a welcoming place'.¹ Perhaps the words uncannily confront the visitor with the fact that the pleasant room once belonged to perpetrators. Maybe they disrupt a sense of walking in the commandant's footsteps. The figure of the commandant's house might

1 *A New Beginning*, dir. by Jakob Ganslmeier (The Falstad Centre, 2022), 00:05–00:33.

spark her imaginative interpretation of what it means to transform such a space in the aftermath of atrocity. Or she might consider the artwork irrelevant, a disturbing element when visiting a heritage site.

What happens when artworks intertwine with a heritage site? And how may art installations shape visitors' engagement with perpetrator memory at a hybrid type of 'atrocity heritage'?² Departing from such questions, the article examines the role of art at sites of atrocity heritage. Its case in point is the temporary art exhibition 'Perpetrator Perspectives', commissioned by the Norwegian Nazi camp memorial the Falstad Centre and exhibited in its former commandant's house from July 2022 to June 2023.³ The exhibition consists of six art installations: four video works by the German photographer Jakob Ganslmeier and two literary texts by the Norwegian writer Simon Stranger. They might be viewed as continuations of the artists' former works on Nazi perpetration and its afterlife: Stranger examined the social, political, and psychological motivations of a notorious Norwegian war criminal, Henry Rinnan, in his 'Holocaust perpetrator fiction' novel *Leksikon om lys og mørke* (2018).⁴ Ganslmeier concentrated on the materiality of violent ideologies as a documentarist in the photo-series *Haut, Stein* (2019). Following the example of the Jewish Museum in New York's renowned art exhibition 'Mirroring Evil', 'Perpetrator Perspectives' explores both the Nazi perpetrators' own viewpoints and our cultural images and narratives of them.⁵

The present article scrutinises a recurring motif in the exhibition, namely the commandant's house. The aesthetic depictions of the commandant's house in the commandant's house initiate a double mirroring; the works mirror the material site and vice versa. The entanglement of art and heritage evokes disparate cultural expectations which influence visitors' experience and understanding of the main

2 J.E. Tunbridge and G.J. Ashworth, *Dissonant Heritage: The Management of the Past as a Resource in Conflict* (Chichester: Wiley, 1996), p. 94.

3 'Perpetrator Perspectives', 2 July 2022 – 1 June 2023, the Falstad Centre, Levanger. Digital versions of the exhibition's artworks available at <<https://falstad.housesofdarkness.eu/>> [accessed 17 June 2024]. The creative producer company Paradox (NL) curated the exhibition together with the Falstad Centre as a deliverable of the EU co-funded culture cooperation project *Houses of Darkness: Images of A Contested European Memory* (2020-2023). As the project leader, I participated in the commissioning of artists and the production of the exhibition (in the minor role of a co-editor).

4 Joanne Pettitt, 'What is Holocaust Perpetrator Fiction?', *Journal of European Studies*, 50.4 (2020), 360-72.

5 For a description of 'Mirroring Evil', see its exhibition catalogue: *Mirroring Evil: Nazi Imagery/Recent Art*, ed. by Norman L. Kleinblatt (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001).

issue at stake – the meanings of past perpetrations in the present. The analysis departs from a description of the commandant's house as a site of atrocity heritage as well as an aesthetic figure, and from the thesis that art installations shape the Nazi camp commandant's house as a *space of complicity*. Through a close reading of the commandant's house motif in the exhibition, this article aims to reveal the potentials and pitfalls of using art installations to explore perpetrator memory at sites of atrocity heritage.

The Nazi Camp Commandant's House as Atrocity Heritage and Aesthetic Figure

In contemporary Western memory culture, the house of the Nazi camp commandant exists as material heritage at former camp memorial sites, as in Ravensbrück or Struthof for instance, and as an aesthetic figure in art, with some cinematic examples including Jonathan Glazer's *The Zone of Interest* (2023), Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1994), or Mark Herman's adaption of Jonathan Boyle's children's novel *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2008). In these films, depictions of the Auschwitz commandant's house serve as a symbolic setting to contrast perpetrators' horrific crimes and idyllic family life. Visitors, readers, or spectators have different expectations and ways of understanding the two kinds of commandant's houses. Perhaps the most persistent expectation is that fiction and imagination are considered legitimate sources of artworks, while heritage sites depend on visitors acknowledging their authenticity and historical truth value.⁶

Material (remnants of) Nazi camp commandant's houses belong to what critical heritage studies scholars have labelled a site of 'atrocity heritage', 'terrorscape', 'traumascap' or 'trauma site': a site-specific space dedicated to public commemoration of mass violence that occurred at the site at a given point in the past.⁷ While heritage sites

6 Cf. Ernst van Alphen's discussion of the dichotomy between imaginative and historical discourses of Holocaust memory in *Caught by History: Holocaust Effects in Contemporary Art, Literature, and Theory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 16–17.

7 I refer here to the terms 'atrocity heritage', 'terrorscape', 'traumascap' and 'trauma site' as they are coined by J.E. Tunbridge and G.J. Ashworth, Rob van der Laarse, Maria Tumarkin, and Patrizia Violi, respectively. Tunbridge and Ashworth, p. 94; Francesco Mazzucchelli, Rob van der Laarse and Carlos Reijnen, 'Introduction: Traces of Terror, Signs of Trauma', *Versus*,

never communicate one unified meaning, heritage related to past atrocities is considered particularly 'dissonant' because it 'cannot be separated from the problem of who allegedly did what to whom'.⁸ The fact that someone suffered because others deliberately inflicted that suffering upon them, and thereby the victim-perpetrator relation, is at the core of trauma sites' representational practices.

The Nazi camp commandant's house is an understudied and particularly complex type of atrocity heritage.⁹ It may be characterised as a 'perpetrator site' in the sense that it was a space inhabited by Nazi officers and to which victims had no or very limited access.¹⁰ Consequently, the commandant's house resembles what Sharon Macdonald calls a site of 'perpetration at a distance' as it was 'part of the apparatus of perpetrations but not locations in which suffering was directly inflicted'.¹¹ The scholarly attention to Nazi perpetrator sites has focused on monumental former administrative headquarters and official residences in Germany, like the Wannsee villa, the RSHA and the Gestapo headquarters in Berlin (now the Topography of Terror), or Hitler's buildings on the Obersalzberg in Bavaria.¹² As heritage sites are often perceived to be 'markers of worthwhile history' via which

119 (2014), 3–19; Maria Tumarkin, *Traumascapes: The Power and Fate of Places transformed by Tragedy* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2005); and Patrizia Violi, 'Trauma Site Museums and Politics of Memory: Tuol Sleng, Villa Grimaldi and the Bologna Ustica Museum', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 29.1 (2012), 36–75.

8 Tunbridge and Ashworth, p. 95.

9 Despite extensive research of atrocity heritage, there exist, to my knowledge, no systematic studies of Nazi camp commandant's houses as heritage nor thorough discussions of the specific roles and functions that commandant's houses assume within contemporary Nazi camp memorial sites. Two recent exceptions that focus on perpetrator spaces within memorial sites are: Susanne Luhmann, 'Managing Perpetrator Affect: The Female Guard Exhibition in Ravensbrück', in *Perpetrating Selves: Doing Violence, Performing Identity*, ed. by Clare Bielby and Jeffrey Stevenson Murer (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 247–69; and Jitte Waagen, Tijm Lanjouw, and Maurice de Kleijn, 'A Virtual Place of Memory: Virtual Reality as a Method for Communicating Conflicted Heritage at Camp Westerbork', *Heritage, Memory and Conflict*, 3 (2023), 87–93.

10 For the notion of 'perpetrator site', see Caroline Pearce, 'Visualising "Everyday" Evil: The Representations of Nazi Perpetrators in German Memorial Sites', in *Representing Perpetrators in Holocaust Literature and Film*, ed. by Jenni Adams and Sue Vice (Portland: Valentine Mitchell, 2013), pp. 207–30 (p. 207); and Markus Urban, 'Memorialization of Perpetrator Sites in Bavaria', in *Memorialization in Germany since 1945*, ed. by Bill Niven and Chloe Paver (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 103–13 (p. 103).

11 Sharon Macdonald, *Difficult Heritage: Negotiating the Nazi Past in Nuremberg and Beyond* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 3.

12 For comprehensive studies of perpetrator sites, see Macdonald; Niven and Paver (ed.); Brigitte Jirku and Vicente Sánchez-Biosca, *Geographies of Perpetration: Re-Signifying Cultural Narratives of Mass Violence* (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 2021); Marc Silberman and

the public agree to pay their tribute, shaping such perpetrator spaces is a difficult balance.¹³ Practitioners in the field need to tackle the fact that these places have the potential to attract 'perpetrator admirers'.¹⁴ Representations of perpetrators at German perpetrator sites avoid historical reconstructions, often take the form of documentary exhibits, and adhere to strict historical accuracy to prevent visitors from admiring empathising with the perpetrators.¹⁵ This hesitancy toward fictional strategies does not seem to apply as strongly in formerly Nazi-occupied countries like Norway.¹⁶

Even though camp commandants' houses are subject to some of the same visitor expectations as the 'Eagle's Nest' or the Nazi authorities' headquarters in Berlin or Nuremberg, a comparison between them hardly makes sense. At least three characteristics distinguish the Nazi camp commandants' houses from the grandiose official buildings: the houses' geographical proximity to the camps, their relatively modest scale and architecture, and the fact that they served as the homes of officers who not only administered, but also personally interacted with the prisoners they made suffer. Their proximity to the camps means that former commandants' houses all over Europe today are often, as in the case of Falstad, part of a Nazi camp memorial site. The localisation makes them part of a primarily victim-oriented atrocity heritage site, characterised by a focalisation on the individuals' suffering.¹⁷ This hybridity – being

Florence Vatan (ed.), *Postwar Memorials: Confronting the Violence of the Past* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

¹³ Macdonald, p. 3.

¹⁴ Ibid. For strategies of managing 'heritage of perpetration', see also Tunbridge and Ashworth, pp. 108–11.

¹⁵ Cf. Pearce (2012), p. 215; Caroline Pearce, 'The Role of German Perpetrator Sites in Teaching and Confronting the Nazi Past', in *Memorialization in Germany since 1945*, ed. by Bill Niven and Chloe Paver (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 168–77 (p. 170); Urban.

¹⁶ Ingvild Hagen Kjørholt and others, 'Det medierte minnesteedet: En studie av Falstad digital rekonstruksjon', in *Estetiske praksiser i den digitale produksjonens tidsalder*, ed. by Knut Ove Eliassen and others (Oslo: Fabokforlaget, 2022), pp. 289–318.

¹⁷ Despite divergent national narratives surrounding the Holocaust, Nazi camp memorial sites across Europe tend to be victim-oriented. See Tunbridge and Ashworth, pp. 106–11; and Macdonald, p. 3. For reflections on the characteristics of Nazi camp memorial sites, and Nazi camp memorial sites and museums as being victim-oriented, see also Luhmann, pp. 248–50; Kjørholt and others, p. 297; Silke Arnold de-Simine, *Mediating Memory in the Museum: Trauma, Empathy, Nostalgia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 75; Aleida Assmann, *Shadows of Trauma: Memory and the Politics of Postwar Identity*, trans. by Sarah Clift (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), p. 186; Amy Sodaro, *Exhibiting Atrocity: Memorial Museums and the Politics of Past Violence* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2018), p. 24; Anette Homlong Storeide, '"...It No Longer is the Same Place": Exploring Realities in the Memorial Falstad Centre with the "Falstad Digital Reconstruction and V/AR Guide"', in *Visitor Experience at Holocaust*

a perpetrator site and a victim site, situated both within and outside the Nazi camp – entails representational challenges that impact the narratives and cultural practices of their commemoration. Traditionally, silencing and demonisation have been deliberate strategies to represent perpetrators at Nazi camp memorial sites.¹⁸ Such strategies enable the cultivation of a 'clean' victim perspective, but fall short when seeking to shape the commandant's house as a memorial space that evokes its dual function as crime scene and perpetrator home.

While the commandant's house is hardly recognised as a proper type of atrocity heritage, it is a well-known aesthetic figure in contemporary novels and films. One of the fields that shape the figure of the Nazi perpetrator's house is the literary genre of 'Holocaust perpetrator fiction' which examines 'the social, political and psychological motivations of Holocaust perpetrators'.¹⁹ Opposing the cultural myth of the perpetrator as monster, the genre applies the narrative mode of autodiegetic narration and typically represents the Holocaust perpetrator in situations of quotidian normalcy and through (most often) his own voice and point of view.²⁰ Erin McGlothlin states that the first-person and internally focalised narration gives the reader access to 'not only a *historical* connection [with the perpetrator] but also an *aesthetic* one'.²¹ The aesthetic connection allows readers to imaginatively access the perpetrator's mind, to see the world from the perpetrator's perspective. As accessing perpetrators' mind often involves imagining their everyday life, the figure of the perpetrator's home might be listed together with autodiegetic narration as a genre characteristic of perpetrator fiction. Depictions of domestic spaces provide a narrative setting of perpetrator's inner life. At the same time, as indicated above, the home often has a symbolic meaning in narratives of perpetrators.

Memorials and Museums, ed. by Diana Popescu (London: Routledge, 2023), pp. 121–32 (p. 122). The victim orientation is manifested in the Falstad Centre memorials charter. See The Falstad Centre, 'Vedtekter for Stiftelsen Falstadsenteret', October 2006 <<https://falstadsenteret.no/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Vedtekter-for-Stiftelsen-Falstadsenteret.pdf>> [accessed 12 March 2024].

18 Tunbridge and Ashman, pp. 105–09; Pearce (2010), p. 168.

19 Pettitt.

20 See Pettitt; Erin McGlothlin, *The Mind of the Holocaust Perpetrator in Fiction and Nonfiction* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2021), p. 176; Richard Crownshaw, 'Perpetrator Fictions and Transcultural Memory', *Parallax*, 17.4 (2011), 75–89; and Joanne Pettitt, 'Nazis in Auschwitz: Reflections on Anglophone Perpetrator Fiction', *Humanities*, 12.47 (2023), 1–13. See also Diana Popescu, 'Representing Infamous Others: Perpetrator Imagery in Visual Arts', in *The Routledge International Handbook of Perpetrator Studies*, ed. by Susanne Knittel and Zachary Goldberg (London: Routledge, 2019), pp. 321–31.

21 McGlothlin, p. 182.

As an aesthetic figure, it evokes contradictory images of ordinariness and perpetration.

Studying Art at a Site of Atrocity Heritage

CASE AND ANALYTIC APPROACH

This study belongs to the interdisciplinary domain of cultural analysis. According to Mieke Bal, cultural analysis does not apply one method, it rather 'conduct[s] a meeting', 'a triangular relationship', between cultural object, analyst, and concept.²² In this meeting, she argues, the emphasis should be on the object. She thus makes a plea for the practice of 'close reading', an in-depth analysis of the cultural object.²³ The motif of the commandant's house in art installations exhibited in a former Nazi camp commandant's house constitutes a complex cultural object. It encompasses qualities like textuality, visuality, spatiality, and materiality, and 'reading' it involves conflicting cultural expectations and visitor positions. Two basic conditions inform my meeting with the object. First, I have close acquaintance with the Falstad Centre from several years of working as a practitioner in the field. I participated in transforming the Falstad commandant's house into a museum and educational venue, and my analysis is based on repeated visits and walk-throughs of the space. Second, I am a literary scholar, trained in genre history and close reading of literary texts. As Literary Studies fall short of accounting for aspects of materiality and spatiality, this close reading combines key literary concepts (like figure, motif, genre, and narration) with Heritage Studies' semiotic concept of material sites as 'spatial signs', and Art History's concept of the art installation.²⁴

Above, I suggest that the Nazi camp commandant's house should be recognised as a proper type of atrocity heritage. How can visitors experience and make meaning of such spaces? At a trauma site, violent

22 Mieke Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), pp. 4–18. Bal introduces her notion of concept as dynamic notions and debates that transcend disciplinary boundaries (for instance 'narrative' or 'tradition'), to replace strictly disciplinary theoretical and methodological discourses. The purpose of my article is not to adopt her understanding of concepts, but rather to follow her call for a culturally situated close reading.

23 Bal, pp. 8–10.

24 Mazzucchelli, van der Laarse and Reijnen.

memories of the past are spatially organised in a 'topographical matrix'.²⁵ Visitors move in space while they 'read' the site itself – its materiality and spatiality – as well as other media and cultural forms as meaningful signs. From a semiotic perspective, the meaning depends on understanding the site as both evidence (index) and symbolic representation (symbol) of the past atrocity.²⁶ Patrizia Violi claims that the indexical character – the fact that 'these places maintain a real spatial contiguity with the trauma itself' – is the essential semiotic feature of trauma sites.²⁷ But for visitors to be able to interpret the material remnants as an indexical sign of the atrocity, they need to be made aware of the history of the place through strategies of visitor interpretation and rhetorical enunciation.²⁸ Such strategies often depend on other media and cultural forms, such as plaques, monuments or exhibitions helping the visitor understand the place. Violi, like other scholars in the field, stresses that trauma sites are not time machines transporting visitors back to an authentic past. They are always already staged and palimpsestic spaces, containing several layers of post-catastrophic history, and depending on strategies of conservation, elimination or transformation.²⁹ Posteriority's rhetorical staging contributes to the visitors' experience of the place as also a symbol of past atrocity. In line with what Jonathan Culler and Aleida Assmann describe as 'the paradox of authenticity',³⁰ Violi sees authenticity as a symbolic meaning, a '*meaning effect* produced in the experience of the visitor', dependent on cultural conventions and not a consequence of an inherent material quality of the site.³¹

Falstad's commandant's house dates back to 1943, when the building was constructed and built by prisoners of SS *Strafgefangenenlager Falstad*, 'the only prison camp in Nazi-occupied Norway with connections to

25 James Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 7.

26 For trauma sites as index and symbol, see Assmann, p. 193; Mazzucchelli, van der Laarse and Reijnen.

27 Violi.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid. For notions of layered and palimpsestic atrocity sites, see Jirku and Sánchez-Biosca, p. 12; Assmann, p. 189.

30 Jonathan Culler, *Framing the Sign: Criticism and its Institutions* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), p. 164; Assmann, p. 192.

31 Assmann, p. 191; Violi (italics in original). See also Storeide, pp. 120–22.

the war's greatest battlefields and death factories'.³² The last three SS commandants and their staff made the villa their residence and operational headquarters until the end of the war. Since then, the building has been in continuous use: From 1945 to the 1990s, it was state-owned and retained its dual role as a blend of private dwelling and workplace. In 1998, the property transitioned into private ownership and served as a family home for more than a decade. When the Norwegian state bought it back in 2011 with the intention of transforming it into a museum and educational venue, it contained several traces of post-catastrophic history.³³ Since 2012, the house has been part of the Falstad Centre, a state-funded Nazi camp memorial site and documentation centre. By the time the former dwelling was opened to the public in 2021, extensive refurbishments had been undertaken in collaboration with architects, exhibition designers and cultural heritage authorities.

The least reconstructed part, the basement, houses a permanent historical exhibition on perpetration and power. The exhibition displays historical artefacts, testimonies, and curated texts which together provide contextual information to help visitors understand the indexical and symbolic connections to war crimes. The main floor is dedicated to teaching activities (with high school students as the most important target group) and temporary art exhibitions in an environment where, to quote the memorial's own presentation, 'the original living rooms and bedrooms of the commander and his closest subordinates have been converted into an informal workshop area for exploratory, creative activities and good conversations'.³⁴ There is no explanatory text telling the story of the house. Except a few exhibited small copies of

32 Trond Risto Nilssen and Jon Reitan, *Legacies of the Nazi Camps in Norway: Falstad 1941-49* (Zürich: Lit Verlag, 2020), p. 84. From November 1941 to May 1945, an estimated 4200 individuals, including Norwegian political prisoners, a few Norwegian Jews, and prisoners of war from Russia and Eastern Europe, were held captive within the confines of the camp. Several prisoners were transported to camps such as Auschwitz, Ravensbrück and Sachsenhausen. During 1942 and 1943, SS officers and guards of the German security police killed and buried approximately 200 individuals in the nearby Falstad Forest.

33 For the history of the Falstad commandant's house, see Arne Langås and Åshild Karevold, 'Kommandantboligen/Commandant's House', *Falstadsenterets skriftserie*, 14 (2013). A similar history of use applies to the former commandant's houses in Camp Westerbork Memorial Centre (the Netherlands), Struthof Memorial (France), Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum (Germany), Sachsenburg Concentration Camp Memorial Site (Germany), Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial (Germany) and Ravensbrück Memorial (Germany, the house of the SS auxiliaries and the commandant). I am indebted to Mario Panico and Susanne Knittel for sharing examples.

34 Cf. the Falstad Centre's web pages. See: <<https://falstadsenteret.no/en/hva-skjer/exhibition/faces-of-power>> [accessed 3 June 2024].



Figure 1. SS Strafgefangenenlager Falstad, May 1945. The commandant's house is visible behind the main Falstad building in the middle of the photograph. Courtesy of: Oskar A. Johansen / The Falstad Centre.



Figure 2. Falstad commandant's house facade, entrance glass foyer, November 2020. Courtesy of: Arne Langås / The Falstad Centre

prisoner drawings and family photographs of the first inhabitants (ref. Figure 6), the curated space of the first floor rather speaks for itself. The visitor is left to interpret the interior design, which fuses traces of the old and the new, the 'authentic' and the reconstructed; some surfaces date from the year of the house's construction (layers of newer panels and wall coverings are carefully peeled off to reveal the original inner structures crafted by prisoners), others show traces from the 1990s or are recent reconstructions. The rooms are arranged with vintage furniture from the 1940s, and a spectacular new glass foyer, designed to meet governmental standards for universal accessibility, is added. This palimpsestic quality makes it difficult for visitors to judge between signs' indexical and symbolic meanings.

The topographic matrix of the Falstad commandant's house becomes even more complex and many-layered when an art exhibition is installed in its rooms. 'Perpetrator Perspectives' consists of six art installations which initiated from a joint archive and fieldwork residency at Falstad in the autumn of 2021. Ganslmeier's video works communicate through sound, text and moving image. Stranger's literary texts are presented in three different media – as writing projected on a wall or screen, as printed booklets, and as podcasts through fixed-mounted earphones. All works are available in Norwegian (default) and English versions. The commandant's house motif is visible in four of them.

In installation art, space plays a vital role of the aesthetic expression. The space of the commandant's house is an integrated part of all these works. This is because the installation is a performative art form which, to quote Claire Bishop, 'heightens the viewer's awareness of how objects are positioned (installed) in a space, and of our bodily response to it'.³⁵ In other words, the installation is a cultural object which requires an 'embodied viewer' whose physical environment informs her engagement with the artworks.³⁶ An embodied and co-producing recipient has also become an ideal visitor position in Holocaust museums and memorials in recent years. This turn to the experiential visitor welcomes artistic experiments at atrocity sites.³⁷ In addition, experiencing art installations is also an activity which resembles visiting a trauma site. Both situations welcome an emotional response, and, in

35 Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), p. 6.

36 Ibid.

37 See for instance Sodaro, pp. 24–25; and Stephan Jaeger, *The Second World War in the Twenty-First-Century Museum: From Narrative, Memory, and Experience to Experientiality* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), pp. 57–60, 292.

both cases, the addressee's localisation is a semiotic resource that affects the process of interpretation. But while the experience of a heritage site is still bound to cultural expectations of authenticity and aims at a historical connection with the past, responding to art installations rather requires what McGlothlin calls an 'aesthetic connection,' which promotes visitors' imaginative associations.³⁸ When the Falstad Centre took on the task of transforming the former commandant's house, they decided to engage artists as collaborators as an effort to create a memorial space where the connection to the perpetrators was not only represented as a matter of history, but also of aesthetics.³⁹ The potentially conflicting ways of understanding the space's topographic matrix call for an in-depth examination of the quality of the space.

THE FALSTAD COMMANDANT'S HOUSE AS A SPACE OF COMPLICITY

Space of complicity is the concept that informs my meeting with the cultural object of artworks at a heritage site.⁴⁰ Visiting a Nazi camp commandant's house is to enter ongoing social and cultural negotiations of the meanings of past perpetrations. Questions of complicity and responsibility are at the core of such debates. In *Memory and Complicity*, Debarati Sanyal develops 'complicity' as an ethical and aesthetic concept departing from the term's etymologies. She explains that the term has five different nuances of meaning: (1) it denotes the state of being accomplice in a crime; (2) it means complexity and involvement; (3) it signifies collusion or collaboration; (4) deriving from the French *complicité*, it may signify 'understanding or intimacy'; and (5), the term's Latin root *complicare* means 'to fold together'.⁴¹ The Falstad commandant's house activates all these meanings as a *space of complicity*: (1) the space is a former crime scene and a present-day memorial space which holds several representations of Nazi perpetrators including the permanent historical exhibition and display of the commandant's family photographs, as well as four artworks from the 'Perpetrator Perspec-

38 McGlothlin, p. 182.

39 The collaboration includes the project 'Art in the commandant's house', where seven visual artists and writers participated in creative explorations of the space and archaeological material (Arts Council Norway, 2019), and the art exhibitions 'Håkon Bleken: Grafiske arbeider' (June to August 2021), 'Perpetrator Perspectives' (July 2022 to June 2023), 'Vitne' (July to September 2023), and 'Løvnens møter Hilt' (June to September 2024).

40 Bal, p. 4

41 Debarati Sanyal, *Memory and Complicity: Migrations of Holocaust Remembrance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), p. 10.

tives' exhibition that depict war criminals. The house (2) is a complex topographic matrix, with several media, different kinds of signs, and multiple layers of history. The third (3) nuance, collaboration and collusion, applies to the visitor position. As visitors' spatial and embodied presence informs the meanings that are produced, they participate in the ongoing memory work. Being a co-producer of perpetrator memory, the visitor also becomes what Michael Rothberg calls 'an implicated subject', someone who 'participates in injustice, but in indirect ways'.⁴² The fourth (4) dimension concerns the former function of the commandant's house as a home, a space of affect and intimacy. Last (5), through the recurring motif of the commandant's house and the performativity of the art installations, the artworks, the material site, and the embodied visitor are folded together. The visitor's experience of the artworks is bound to her experience of the site and vice versa, and it is a dynamic interplay between the site, the art, and the visitor that creates the meanings of the space.

In *Memory and Complicity*, which by means of close reading investigates how postwar Francophone literature on Holocaust memory relates to memories of France's colonial history, Sanyal emphasises the ability of aesthetic figures to 'produce mobile and asymmetrical proximities between events, subjects, and histories'.⁴³ Sanyal primarily focuses on allegory, but the space of complicity appears to rely more on the metonym. While the allegory produces metaphorical connections, for instance a relation of similarity between different areas, the metonym creates a relation of proximity – of a causal, material, or conceptual closeness. The space of complicity of the Falstad commandant's house shapes perpetrator memory first and foremost through relations of spatial proximity. Through its indexicality, the heritage site is in itself a metonym of the Nazi perpetration. The heritage site, the artworks and the visitors are also folded together in a relation of spatial proximity. My close reading of the commandant's house motif in 'Perpetrator Perspectives' includes an analysis of the visitor position – of how visitors might experience the museum space, and how their understandings are informed by cultural expectations of atrocity sites and art.

42 Michael Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019), p. 20.

43 Sanyal, p. 49.



Figure 3. *Where Dreams Come Home* installed in the glass foyer, 2022. Behind are the remains of the inner timber-framed structure of the original outer wall. Some parts of the floors date from the war years, other are newer. Courtesy of Jakob Ganslmeier.

The Commandant's House Motif in 'Perpetrator Perspectives' – a Close Reading

Entering the renovated commandant's house through its new glass entrance at the time when the temporary art exhibition 'Perpetrator Perspectives' was on display, the visitor is welcomed by Ganslmeier's video installation *Where Dreams Come Home*.

Where Dreams Come Home is a parodic real estate video which presents a guided tour of a 3D-modelled virtual commandant's house. A fictionalised real estate agent (played by a Dutch actress) guides the tour, partly as a voice-over, and partly by being visible in peculiar proportions in the foreground of the image as the only real person in an otherwise computer-animated universe. The real estate agent has no personal relation to the property and enthusiastically promotes it as a commodity in easily recognisable real estate agent rhetoric. The depicted spaces appear 'immaculate' (one of her words of praise). The rooms – a nice kitchen, an inviting children's room, luxurious bathroom facil-

ities and living rooms suitable for parties – are generically styled with domestic objects. Flowers and decorative cushions signal intimacy and thriving in rooms which otherwise show few signs of individuality and lived life, in compliance with the real estate video genre's aesthetics of domestic everyday happiness. The space is seemingly represented as a utopia; isolated and deprived of time and historical change. However, the real estate agent's strange appearance and exaggerated enthusiasm reveal that the video is instead a parody.

Visitors cannot avoid noticing the parallels and double mirroring between the virtual house and the material house they have just entered. But the real estate video is a refracted mirror image of their physical environment. The artwork is displayed in the least homelike room in the building, the spectacular new glass entrance. The room denotes a public museum space with a wheelchair lift and signs to the basement's permanent exhibition. It also contains an authentic trace from the war years and a clearly staged musealised element – the building's original end-wall. Its exterior cladding has been stripped away to expose the inner mural structure crafted by camp prisoners. The contrast between the represented house, a cozy home, and the material house, a complex memorial space, adds to the impression that the video presents a caricatured home.

It is not only visitors' spatial environment that invites them to understand the house in the video as a representation of Falstad commandant's house. The video also references a historical past by establishing an intertextual relation with documents from the Falstad archive, the sales report and the accompanying newspaper announcement issued by the private owners who listed the property for sale on the regional real estate market in 2011. The video reconstructs the property in accordance with these documents. The video, then, is a double parody; it parodies a genre, the real estate video, and it caricatures a specific item from the Falstad archive. While the parodic real estate video contributes to introducing a distorted image of a home to this space, the travesty of the archive document is an implicit comment on contemporary Norwegian memory politics and posterity's shaping of the trauma site. The work thus alludes to the house's contradictory functions as home and memorial space. However, the sales report from 2011 is not on display and only briefly mentioned in the curatorial text. The visitor would need to be quite observant or already extremely well-informed about the history of the house to be able to catch that Ganslmeier's video is a travesty of the archive.

The subtle intertextual referencing to the archive requires an enlightened visitor. *Where Dreams Come Home* makes extensive use of this type of referencing. The villa's first inhabitants are metonymically evoked through details, offering visitors clues about the villa's ties to the Nazi perpetrations: a harmonious soundtrack, the naming of Constanze Manziarly, a large-scale Playmobil figurine, posters of Albert Einstein and a German Shepherd's dog, a rifle placed on the wall, and a large selection of alcohol. These are quite faint clues. As an intratextual reference to two other works in the exhibition, observant visitors may recognise the soundtrack as a former SS song. Knowing a bit of the Nazi camp history, they might also interpret the poster of the dog, the rifle and the bottles of liquor as metonyms, and more specifically synecdoches, of the SS officers and the executions they perpetrated in the nearby Falstad Forest. Perhaps they remember that, as a German Jew, Einstein was persecuted and had to flee his homeland. These elements disrupt the idyllic setting and encourage the observant visitor to understand the seemingly innocent details as symbolic references to a violent historical past. However, some of the figures are almost incomprehensible for most visitors. Very few young Norwegians, the memorial's largest target group, will know that Manziarly was Hitler's chef, or associate the Playmobil figurine with the history of the Bavarian toy industry's collaboration with the Nazis. They could thus hardly be considered meaningful signs sparking the visitor's understanding of complicity. At best, they awaken her inner detective and invite her to further explore how these elements add a sense of historicity to the commandant's house in the video. There is a risk, however, that the artwork's aestheticization and odd recontextualization of these implicated objects initiate what Sanyal calls 'a spatiotemporal erasure' that interrupts their connections to the past violence of the Nazi regime.⁴⁴ If visitors see nothing but the real estate advertisement's commodified design, the work rather contributes to decontextualization and a concealing of the fact that the house was a crime scene.

The next encounter with the commandant's house motif is in Stranger's brief literary fragment *A Journey to the Grey Zone* in a room that originally served as a bedroom. Blue light colours the room, which is furnished with a desk and two chairs. The visitor is invited to sit down, put on earphones, and listen to the author's voice while watching a visual projection unfold, word by word, as white letters on the

⁴⁴ Sanyal, p. 34.



Figure 4: *A Journey to the Grey Zone* installed in a former bedroom, 2022.
Photograph by the author.

blue wall. The short piece consists of loosely associated sentences on our implication in past and present injustices. The text starts and ends by localising this implication, referred to as ‘the grey zone’, in the author and the reader: ‘It’s within me. / It’s within you. It’s in the white lies we tell ourselves, in our shifts and alterations and in our constant need for oblivion’.⁴⁵ After positioning the ‘me’ and ‘you’ as implicated subjects who hesitate to confront their involvement in historical and current injustices, the subsequent sentences identify the ‘grey zone’ in different human areas and practices.

The narration moves in large spatial and temporal leaps from the clothing and mineral industries, via racism and warfare, to the spread of hate speech. While most sentences represent the grey zone in a contemporary globalised reality, one of them localises it in an audible memory, the sound of a specific past place: ‘in the footsteps on the floorboards in the commandant’s house, and the clinking of milk bot-

⁴⁵ Simon Stranger, *A Journey to the Grey Zone* (Levanger: The Falstad Centre, 2022), pp. 1, 12.

tles a farmer sold to the Falstad prison camp to earn money'.⁴⁶ Like an echo from the past war years perceptible in the present, the sound of footsteps on floorboards directs the visitor's attention to the exhibition space; the building's materiality and history, represented by the prisoners' construction work.

By focalising and enunciating this specific material detail, the motif contributes to shaping the commandant's house as a crime scene. The text helps the visitor understand the architectonic structures as an index, as material evidence of past slave labour. The metonym of the floorboards gives agency to the historical victims and includes them in the visitor's conception of the commandant's house. This commandant's house motif, however, does not only establish a metonymical relation between the victims and the building. It also draws attention to a metaphorical connection between the past process of building of the house and present injustices. The motif suggests that the 'implicated we' of the narrator and the visitor are involved in both past and present crimes. The SS officers residing in the villa were not the only persons responsible for the war crimes of the past. The house was built and the camp organised with the help of local agents who were implicated by way of supplying the necessary goods, such as timber and food. The dairy farm, too, was implicated in the Nazi regime just as you and I are implicated in the exploitation of poor workers when we drink coffee or buy electronics. Representing the victims' labour as an echo of the past audible in the present, the implicated visitor might become aware of her diachronic entanglement in past perpetration.⁴⁷

The visitor also encounters Stranger's other text, *Attempts to Grasp The Inner Life of The Last Commandant*, as a booklet, audio narrative and letters projected on a video screen. The text presents two intercalated inner monologues narrated by two autodiegetic narrators situated in the same space. One is the author, present in the commandant's house nearly eighty years after the war, where he imagines the commandant's thoughts and motivations. The other is Falstad's last commandant, sitting in his armchair drinking, while describing, contemplating, and justifying his involvement in war crimes. In the printed and digitally projected text, the commandant's voice is marked by italics, whereas in the audio version, two distinct voices – Stranger and an actor – represent the two identities. Both monologues centre on an iconic

⁴⁶ Stranger, p. 5.

⁴⁷ Rothberg, p. 8.

episode from the Falstad archives: the story of the exhumation of bodies from the Falstad Forest and the dumping of their remains in the sea in early May 1945. The last Falstad commandant, SS *Obersturmführer* Karl Denk, was responsible for organising the violations.⁴⁸ Among the bodies was the Norwegian Jewish businessman Hirsch Komissar, the ancestor of Stranger's wife and children. The history of Denk and this act of perpetration is thus not only a collective memory within the paradigms of local and national memory culture, but also part of the author's family memory, intimately related to his everyday life.

In the author's monologue, the commandant's house motif is developed in a recurring scene wherein the narrator attempts, by means of his presence in the renovated commandant's house, to create an affective proximity to the commandant of the past:

I walk through the hallways of the house and try to picture him going about his daily routines. Preparing food, listening to music, sleeping, writing letters. I try to imagine the sound of his footsteps, laughter, coughing or the clinking of porcelain plates in the kitchen. [...] Did he enjoy sitting in his easy chair, similar to the ones now on display, smoking, while the day's events flashed through his mind? [...]

I see him drunk, stumbling through the hallway towards the kitchen to fetch something to eat, or perhaps on his way to the garden, to pee in the silvery light of the moon [...].

I picture him by the window in the living room, seeing the reflection of his face in the glass [...].⁴⁹

In this series of affective imagined situations, the narrator represents the commandant through intimate everyday practices situated in specific parts of his home. Locating the commandant in the same space that the author-narrator occupies at the moment of narration becomes a vehicle for the author's normalising and identifying with the perpetrator. The desired identification is realised at the end of the monologue, whereupon the author looks for the commandant only to find his own

48 Nilssen and Reitan, p. 124. Shortly after the German capitulation, Denk staged his own suicide and fled from Falstad to avoid being prosecuted for his criminal deeds.

49 Stranger, *Attempts to Grasp the Inner Life of The Last Commandant* (Levanger: The Falstad Centre, 2022), pp. 2, 4, 10.

mirror image. The commandant's house motif thus creates an intimate proximity between the author and the war criminal.

The intimate proximity, or complicity, between the author and the commandant is anchored in the author's representation of the commandant's house as a domestic space. The commandant's monologue challenges the depiction of the commandant's house as a safe domestic space. His voice reiterates the same activities and the rooms in which they took place:

*One last drink. I really deserve it after a day like this, I think to myself, before sinking into the easy chair in the living room. While sipping the burning liquor, I blink away the glimpses of today's work in the forest: smouldering corpses, with mud and dirt falling from their decaying faces.*⁵⁰

By focalising the commandant's point of view, involuntary memories of the acts of extreme violence infect the living room. The mud, the 'smouldering corpses' and 'decaying faces' disturb the homeliness by way of contrast and make it difficult to clearly distinguish the crime scene from the home.⁵¹ The brutal flashbacks stress a difference between the author and the commandant, interrupting a process of identification between them.

Attempts to Grasp the Inner Life of the Last Commandant uses auto-diegetic narration to access the perpetrator mind. However, readers' (or visitors') access to the perpetrators' mind is always mediated. According to McGlothlin, the 'mediating voice of the author' is a typical feature of perpetrator fiction.⁵² The authors' voice, she claims, not only controls readers' access to the perpetrator's mind, but also implies that the authors' 'own affective, cognitive and ethical investments in their projects' regulate and shape the portrait of the perpetrator.⁵³ The authorial voice is an externalised or internalised double to the first-person perpetrator voice, offering a 'buffer' or a 'filter' and preventing the reader from total identification with the perpetrator.⁵⁴ Stranger's intercalated monologues are exactly such a double portrait – of the perpetrator, as well as of the author's perpetrator imaginaries. The commander's house motif serves simultaneously as a medium which assists the au-

50 Stranger, p. 3. (italics in original).

51 Ibid.

52 McGlothlin, p. 182.

53 Ibid., p. 183.

54 Ibid., pp. 183–84.



Figure 5. The commandant's living room ca. 2022. The picture shows the installation of Ganslmeier's *Into the Blue*. Under the TV screen is a historical photograph of the room (see figure 6). The photograph is focalized from the room's forth wall, where *Attempts to Grasp the Inner Life of the Commander* is installed. Courtesy of Jakob Ganslmeier.



Figure 6. SS commandant Erich Weber sitting by the window in the living room, ca. 1944. Courtesy of: The Falstad Centre.

thor in his efforts to imagine the past, and as a 'filter' distinguishing the two voices. The effect of this narrative ambiguity might be compared to Sanyal's notion of 'ironic complicity'. Referring to Jonathan Littell's novel *Les Bienveillantes* (2008), she describes 'the paradoxical site of enunciation' of the autodiegetic perpetrator-narrator as ironic because his moral reflections are based on knowledge from an archive of victims' testimonies and thus on a view of his victims as human beings.⁵⁵ Like Littell's 'protagonist', Stranger's last commandant 'is immersed in Holocaust postmemory and has absorbed its archive' when he reflects on his daily duties.⁵⁶ The author shapes the focalisation of the perpetrator from his own postmemorial knowledge of and sympathy with the victims.

According to Sanyal, ironic complicity is a mode of narration that simultaneously coerces and sabotages an empathetic readerly identification with the perpetrator.⁵⁷ How does the localisation of Stranger's text contribute to the visitor's understanding of perpetrator memory? The installation is placed in a room which once served as the commandant's private living room. Unlike German perpetrator sites like the House of the Wannsee Conference, the space mixes renovated original elements, reconstructions, and stagings to create an atmosphere of a home from the 1940s.⁵⁸ Standing in a curated and 'authentic' room, the visitor is also being intimately involved – or implicated – in the uncanny configuration of the commandant's house as both home and crime scene. After the last renovations, the structure of the original room and the fireplace were kept but all surfaces were renovated and look new. However, the new surfaces and the furniture imitate the original interior from the 1940s, documented in historical photographs made in 1944 and 1945. Experiencing the staged atmosphere strengthens the depictions of an affective and intimate space of daily routines and longings. Some elements signify evidence of the atrocity (indexicality), while others symbolise the lives and crimes of the former inhabitants. On the one hand, the spatial signs' ambiguous quality contributes to

55 Sanyal, p. 191.

56 Ibid., p. 197.

57 Ibid., p. 190.

58 Cf. Pearce (2012), p. 215. 'Despite the historical authenticity [of the House of Wannsee Conference and the Topography of Terror], there is no attempt to reconstruct the past. With the exception of the Wannsee protocol, there are no objects on display in either exhibition. The Wannsee site has refrained from using furniture to represent the dining room of the villa as it was at the time of the conference. This approach avoids encouraging identification with the perpetrators or normalising the site by likening it to any historical building.'



Figure 7. *A New Beginning* installed in the largest window in the main living room, 2022. Courtesy of: Jakob Ganslmeier.

an ironic complicity, which encourages visitors' identification with the perpetrator and simultaneously confronts them with this questionable position. On the other, the experience of being in the commandant's shoes might overshadow critical reflection and lead to a blurriness which conflates past and present, the everyday and the extreme.⁵⁹

Attempts to Grasp the Inner Life of the Last Commandant ends by replacing the author's recollections of the past with a meeting in the commandant's house in the present: 'I walk back out through the glass façade of the entrance to the commandant's house, and see the photographer waiting for me in the dark'.⁶⁰ The author transits from the past to the present both temporally and spatially – he leaves the commandant's rooms and enters the new building structure. The passage constitutes a metanarrative comment on the act of narration and the house's function as a space of commemoration. The motif of the commandant's house in *Stranger's* piece thus activates a third meaning,

59 Cf. Sanyal, p. 10

60 *Stranger, Attempts to Grasp the Inner Life of the Last Commandant*, p. 12.

the role of the house in the present, making all three qualities – home, crime scene, memorial space – present aspects in the visitor's experience of the space. By introducing the glass foyer in the narrative, the end of the author's monologue establishes an intratextual relation to the last commandant's house motif in the exhibition – Ganslmeier's video installation, *A New Beginning*.

A New Beginning documents a road trip in the region surrounding Falstad to places which were once part of the Nazi camp infrastructure. The camera focalises from the passenger seat of a car, and alternates between zooming in on the rainy windowpane and out onto an empty autumn landscape. Some of the pictures are without the pane as a filter between the viewer and the motif, mostly stills of buildings. A melancholic soundtrack and a first-person narrative, presented as subtitles, accompany the visual scenes. The subtitles tell a story of the photographer-narrator's unavailing search for traces of the past. The camera registers buildings that are material remnants of the Nazi perpetrations in the region. A well-informed visitor will recognise some of these perpetrator sites – a submarine bunker and the former villa of Gerhard Flesch, head of the German SD in Trondheim and the top commander of SS Camp Falstad. The narrator, however, reveals nothing about this connection and does not interpret their 'indexical nature' as meaningful.⁶¹

The work contains no visual image of the Falstad commandant's house. However, the house is the main motif in the photographer-narrator's written narrative. The film opens with a black screen with yellow captions apostrophising the house and addressing the spectator with the imperative: 'Imagine transforming a former Nazi commandant's house into a welcoming place. / Imagine it having a glass façade. / Bright, / transparent, / to make you feel at home.'⁶² The camera then moves from the rural landscape near the former camp to buildings in the nearby city of Trondheim. When the camera moves back to the surroundings of Falstad, the commandant's house motif is repeated:

How could a glass entrance confront you with the atrocities that happened here? / Make you understand? / Bring you any closer? / Once again we have found something beautiful in the horrible. / Kept the wound from healing. / As if we could study trauma through an X-ray machine.⁶³

61 Violi.

62 *A New Beginning*, 00:05–00:33. (The slash indicates a new picture).

63 *A New Beginning*, 01:43–02:18.

As in the opening, the commandant's house is again represented through a synecdoche – a part of the building, the recently added glass façade, represents the whole. Then it is made visible through a simile; like an x-ray machine, it is unfit to identify and heal a trauma. While the opening imperative asks the spectator to imagine the commandant's house as a home, the concluding rhetorical questions represent the perpetrator space as a memorial space.

A New Beginning provides a critical view on sites of atrocity heritage. The commandant's house is depicted as manipulated, staged and performed; as lacking authenticity, devoid of indexicality. The newly added and aesthetically pleasing entrance serves to illustrate the narrator's critical assessment that Falstad is a dishonest trauma site and a symbol of the failure of contemporary Norwegian memory politics to confront past atrocities. The narrator's journey in the region confirms his sense of a material disconnectedness between the past and the present. The video ends in a bleak crescendo, where the narrator appeals to the spectator's ethical commitment to confront violence and injustice. In a somehow gothic landscape scene depicting a vast pier with flocks of black birds swirling above an empty beach at dusk, the narrator concludes: 'We are all implicated in this past. / Do we care? / Do we really care?'.⁶⁴ In his conclusion, the addressed visitor explicitly becomes an 'implicated subject' in a space of accomplices in bad memory politics. What the implication consists of – are we implicated because we contribute to transforming and reshaping, and thereby concealing, the past in the present, or because we refuse to care about brutality and injustice that take place elsewhere – remains unclear.

Conclusion

The Nazi camp commandant's house offers curatorial and didactic challenges to a victim-oriented practice of remembering past atrocities which are often encountered at trauma sites. My aim has been to demonstrate how art can play a vital role at such sites by engaging visitors in shaping perpetrator memory that resists static victim-perpetrator binaries and fosters reflection on moral responsibility and collective remembrance. The close reading has scrutinised five aspects which contribute to shaping this kind of atrocity heritage as a *space of complicity*.

64 *A New Beginning*, 03:24–03:42.

ty. Two of the aspects relate to aesthetic figurations and representations of perpetration: of perpetrators and of the site as a crime scene (1) and a home (4). Another two are concerned with the ways in which the space communicates meaning: tangible heritage site and artworks are folded together (5), creating a complex topographic matrix which involves a variety of signs, media, materialities and cultural expectations (2). The last aspect adheres to the visitor position (3).

My close reading has pointed to two pitfalls of introducing art to a heritage site. The first is the risk that the space's topographic matrix becomes many-layered to the point of the incomprehensible. It takes an incredibly knowledgeable visitor, and a visitor trained in approaching art installations, to unpack some of the meanings offered in 'Perpetrator Perspectives'. It is questionable whether an average visitor, a high school student or a tourist, comes to the Falstad Centre memorial with such a specialised background. Tailored pedagogical programs or guided tours could have provided useful resources to assist visitors in their meaning making processes. Despite some initiatives, such resources were not developed during the exhibition period. The second risk relates to the evoking of disparate cultural expectations, blurring the line between fact and fiction, extreme and ordinary, past and present, and between historical authenticity and imaginative visualisation.⁶⁵ This blurring of distinctions is first and foremost linked to portraying the house as the perpetrator's home, and to the metonymical connections between the perpetrator's space and the visitor's space. This depiction might foster an uncritical empathic visitor position and lead to a simplistic downplaying of commandants' houses as instruments of genocide. A thorough discussion of these downsides, of possible pedagogical actions, and of actual visitor responses, requires further research.

Although a risky endeavour, the analysis has emphasised how site-specific art forms are particularly apt to 'interpellate readers and spectators into forms of complicity that theoretical discourses typically do not', as Sanyal claims.⁶⁶ In the space of complicity of the Falstad commandant's house, aesthetic figures and literary genres such as the parody, or the motif of the commandant's violent flashbacks, counter the myth of the perpetrator as monster as well as a total empathetic

65 Sanyal, p. 10. 'It might illuminate convergences between self and other, past and present, here and elsewhere. But it can also convert difference into sameness or conflate the extreme and the everyday.'

66 Sanyal, p. 50.

identification with the perpetrator. Through strategies like ironic complicity, they rather contribute to defamiliarizing the home, reminding the visitor that the commandant's 'normal' everyday life was far from the cultural clichés of the home as a safe and harmonious space of intimacy. The works' pointing to cultural remembering and contemporary memory culture, and thus showing how our access to past perpetrations rely on cultural constructions, might also foster advanced historical consciousness.

'In bearing direct witness to the past', Violi asserts, 'trauma sites do not merely depict a given historical and political situation, but they actually take part in its cultural reconstruction and transformation'.⁶⁷ Memorial sites and museums worldwide are deeply political institutions with an explicit goal of educating future citizens through the commemoration of victims.⁶⁸ Shaping, using, and preserving a former Nazi camp commandant's house as a memorial space of complicity – a space that houses perpetrator memory and might open discussions on a culture's shared understanding of what state-inflicted suffering means – is a collective task that 'remains of strictly antiquarian interest' without being linked to the present.⁶⁹ In our current political climate, the Nazi camp commandant's house as a space of complicity, unfortunately, does not only open up possibilities for curators to recognise aspects which impact the relationship between art, heritage and visitor participation at atrocity sites. It also becomes an alarmingly pertinent metaphor of state violence and humanitarian suffering. As a hybrid space – both perpetrator site and victim site, simultaneously a home, crime scene and memorial space – the commandant's house resembles the current global space. Folded together by live-streamed images and stories of brutal state violence continuously exposing us to perpetration and suffering. Whether witnessed at close quarters or from afar, the representations invade our private spaces in a hypermediated culture which obscures the lines between home and crime scene, the real and the represented, innocence and responsibility.

67 Violi.

68 Sodaro, p. 25.

69 Rothberg, p. 8.

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Ingvild Hagen Kjørholt is Professor of Literature Didactics at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU).