

It is Difficult

Alfredo Jaar

Introduction

As a practicing artist I believe that the range of questions posed by this conference as a platform of Documenta11 offers a rare, much needed space of reflection on some of the most pressing issues of our time. This space of reflection is doubly necessary because it is put forth in the context of an art conference, and I emphasize the word "art", because we haven't heard that word in the last four days. The burden of the conference, then, is to shift the focus of contemporary art exhibitions from entertainment to serious discussion. There are few spaces left anywhere where these kinds of critical discussions can take place. Jean-Luc Godard has said of art that it "is not a reflection of reality, it is the reality of that reflection". This platform focuses on both reality and its reflection. As we have painfully witnessed in the last three days, reality is overwhelming. That is precisely why these spaces of reflection are fundamental, and I feel very privileged to have witnessed so many passionate and moving intellectual exchanges.

I have divided my presentations into four parts. First I will present an early work, from 1984, that relates to India. Second I will show some of the most relevant sections of my Rwanda Project, which lasted six years, from 1994 to 2000. Third I will show a few other projects to describe different strategies I have used in my work, and then I will conclude with a few remarks.

I

Bhopal, India, December 3, 1984, 12:45 A.M.: forty tons of toxic gas were accidentally released from a Union Carbide plant and spread throughout this city of a million people. The gas was methyl isocyanate (MIC), and the plant it leaked from was a pesticide factory in the city's north. Some 8,000 people were killed and more than 500,000 injured in the immediate aftermath of the tragedy, the largest industrial disaster of the last century. Today, nearly twenty years later, perhaps ten to fifteen people are still estimated to die each month from exposure-related complications, so that the total death toll is currently more than 16,000 people. The causes of the disaster are well-known: a cost-cutting drive by the company reduced the number of key personnel and eliminated vital safety measures.

In January 1989 an agreement was signed between Union Carbide and the families of the victims, who were represented by the Indian government. There would be no trial; each family would receive some 15,000 rupees (430 U.S. dollars at the time). The *Wall Street Journal* had calculated that an American life was worth \$500,000 and that consequently an Indian life was worth \$8,500. For Union Carbide the settlement represented a loss of 43 cents per share in the stock market. Then, in 1991 a tribunal in Bhopal indicted the president of the company, Warren Anderson, and issued an international detention order for his arrest. Anderson is today a fugitive.

Three weeks after the accident, the headline on the cover of *Business Week* magazine for December 24, 1984, had this to say about it: "Union Carbide Fights for Its Life". I had started to research the tragedy and to accumulate images and information. I was shocked when I discovered this image. I displayed it in a blue frame with a red background. It is titled *Business Week Magazine Cover, December 24, 1984*. A second version of this work, which I showed in Documenta 8, in 1987, consists of a sequence of four black-and-white images.

I was shocked by the obscenity of this cover. I was shocked by the attitude of both Union Carbide and the American press – the indifference. But I felt a terrible inability as an artist to confront the tragedy and could go no further. In retrospect I realize that I had asked myself the question: “How do I make art when the world is in such a state?” and I had no answer. I would feel the same kind of inadequacy countless times in subsequent years as I approached different crises and tragedies around the world.

II

Exactly ten years after Bhopal I went to Rwanda, to witness, document, and collect evidence about what would become the third genocide of the last century. Out of the material I collected there and in subsequent research I created the Rwanda Project, which I worked on for six years.

I will share with you some of these works. The first is a twelve-minute performance that I will reenact for you exactly as it was performed for the first time, in Chicago in 1995. Please take into account that this was directed to a specific audience at a specific time and place. [*In a darkened space, the artist showed slides which he accompanied with the following text.* – Eds.]

Untitled (Newsweek), 1994.

“April 6, 1994: *A plane carrying the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi is shot down above Kigali, the capital of Rwanda. Their deaths spark widespread massacres, targeting Hutu moderates and the minority Tutsi population, in Kigali and throughout Rwanda. The Rwandan Patriotic Front, which had been encamped along the northern border of Rwanda, starts a new offensive.”*

“April 12, 1994: *The interim Rwandan government flees Kigali for the town of Gitarama. Relief officials estimate that as many as 25,000 people have been killed in Kigali alone in the first five days of violence.”*

“April 21, 1994: *The United Nations Security Council Resolution 912 reduces the U.N. peacekeeping force in Rwanda from 2,500 to 270. 50,000 deaths.”*

“May 8, 1994: *The Rwandan Patriotic Front gains control of most of northern Rwanda. As killings continue, hundreds of thousands of refugees flee to Zaire, Burundi, and Uganda. 200,000 deaths.”*

“May 13, 1994: *More than 30,000 bodies wash down the Kagera River, which marks Rwanda’s border with Tanzania.”*

“May 17, 1994: *The United Nations Security Council passes Resolution 918, authorizing the deployment of 5,500 U.N. troops to Rwanda. The resolution says: ‘Acts of genocide may have been committed.’”*

“May 22, 1994: *The Rwandan Patriotic Front gains full control of Kigali and the airport. 300,000 deaths.”*

“May 26, 1994: *Deployment of the mainly African U.N. force is delayed due to a dispute over who will provide equipment and cover the cost for the operation. 400,000 deaths.”*

“June 5, 1994: *The United States argues with the U.N. over the cost of providing heavy armored vehicles for the peacekeeping force. 500,000 deaths.”*

“June 10, 1994: *The killing of Tutsis and moderate Hutus continues, even in refugee camps. 600,000 deaths.”*

“June 17, 1994: *France announces its plan to send 2,500 troops to Rwanda as an interim peace-keeping force until the U.N. troops arrive. 700,000 deaths.”*

“June 22, 1994: *With still no sign of U.N. deployment, the United Nations Security Council authorizes the deployment of 2,500 French troops in southwest Rwanda. 800,000 deaths.”*

“June 28, 1994: *The U.N. Rights Commission’s special envoy releases a report stating that the massacres were preplanned and formed part of a systematic campaign of genocide.”*

“July 4, 1994: *French troops establish a so-called ‘safe zone’ in the southwest of Rwanda.”*

“July 8, 1994: *As the Rwandan Patriotic Front advances westward, the influx of displaced persons into the so-called ‘safe zone’ increases from 500,000 to 1 million within a few days. 900,000 deaths.”*

“July 12, 1994: *An estimated 1.5 million Rwandans flee toward Zaire. More than 15,000 refugees cross the border every hour and enter the town of Goma, which becomes the largest refugee camp in the world. A cholera epidemic sweeps through the camps in and around Goma, killing an estimated 50,000 people more.”*

“July 21, 1994: *The United Nations Security Council reaches a final agreement to send an international force to Rwanda. One million people have been killed. Two million have fled the country. Another two million are displaced within Rwanda.”*

“August 1, 1994: *Newsweek magazine dedicates its first cover to Rwanda.”*

[Sound, in darkness: Papa Wemba sings „Awa Y’okeyi.”]

You have just heard Papa Wemba from Zaire, today called the Democratic Republic of Congo. At one point in Zaire you could find 1.5 million refugees, including those in Goma, the largest refugee camp in the world, which held 1 million people. In this song Papa Wemba is using a technique he learned from his mother, who was a *pleureuse*, a professional mourner, someone who sang and cried at funerals and in churches. He sings here in a minor key, which is very different from most contemporary singers who most of the time use a major key. Papa Wemba has said his mother’s songs made his heart ache. *[The lights come up.]*

The structure of this performance is very simple: I recited the events as a weekly chronology, beginning the moment the genocide started. I simply showed the barbaric indifference to the events on the part of one of the main newsweeklies (*Newsweek*) in the United States. In the last four minutes, when this song of love and loss is played, my intention was to offer the audience a space of mourning. My feeling then – in Chicago in 1995 – and sadly still today is that people had not mourned those million deaths.

Although I have begun with a graphic account of the Rwanda Project as it was first presented in Chicago, the first piece in the Rwanda Project took place before this performance and was done from Rwanda itself. One day we were walking around Kigali, the ruined capital of Rwanda, and found a half-destroyed post office. Some workers were cleaning up the floor and offered me a box of tourist postcards. From that moment on, I used the postcards to write down the names of the people I had started to meet on my trip, and sent them to friends around the world:

*"Rubanda Tresifoli is still alive!
Justine Numararungu is still alive!"*

This work refers directly to a classic work of 1960s conceptual art by On Kawara, who sent postcards to his friends announcing that he was alive. I wanted to make a parallel to that work, omitting the self-referential element by announcing that someone else, rather than the postcard's author, was alive. The piece is titled *Signs of Life*. Because there was no communication between Rwanda and the rest of the world, the postcards were sent from Uganda.

*"Joseline Mukayiranga is still alive!
Caritas Namazuru is still alive!
Jean de Dieu Hungulimana is still alive!"*

A few months after my return from Rwanda I was invited to create a public project in Malmo, a small town in Sweden. I was offered fifty outdoor advertising-display lightboxes dispersed around the city. I was not yet ready to show the most horrifying images I had taken in my life, so I simply put up a sign that said,

"Rwanda, Rwanda, Rwanda..."

I used a common font, Helvetica Bold, and repeated the word as many times as I could. It was a kind of cry that no one was hearing. Because the lightboxes had been offered to the institution sponsoring the art project, most of them were placed in marginal areas of the city. I actually liked that, the solitude of these cries lost in the city – it was a metaphor for the solitude of the Rwandan people during the killings.

The first major installation of the Rwanda Project was called *Real Pictures*. I see it as a group of monuments, memorials to the people of Rwanda. The works are black boxes. Inside each box is an image, but you can't see it; instead there is a text describing it printed on the box. I used these boxes as modules, bricks, to create monuments in a space of desolation and silence. I didn't feel that showing images of blood would make any difference. Instead I wanted a space of mourning.

We are bombarded by so many thousands of images that we have lost our capacity to see and be affected by images. I wanted to try a reverse strategy. The logic here was that maybe if I didn't show the images you would see them better.

I was also asking the audience to start from zero – to forget for a second all the images they had seen, and maybe to try to understand the issues. Reading these very simple descriptions, maybe through the text they would understand better.

The next piece is called *Let There Be Light*. There are ten lightboxes on the left side and a special lightbox in the back. The small lightboxes on the left contain just one word, a word written in light – words like "Kigali", "Mibirizi", "Butare", "Amahoro", "Cyahinda", "Cyangugu", "Gikongoro", "Kibungo", "Rukara", and "Shangi", all totally meaningless for most of us. Yet these are the names of places where between 5,000 and 100,000 people were killed in less than 100 days. None of them

has the connotation of a name like "Auschwitz" or "Guernica" – why? When we reach the end, we are confronted with a lightbox showing a changing sequence of four images. These are actually the first images I released from the 3,500 photographs I took in Rwanda. The images show a group of kids looking at a scene happening outside the frame.

The average time a spectator spends in front of an artwork in a museum is three seconds. If you stay long enough in front of this lightbox the image will change every fifteen seconds. This is the first image in the sequence. I am trying desperately here to slow down the viewing, I am asking for time, I am asking for at least one minute with the work. In this sequence we see these kids embracing, expressing pain, love, solidarity, all the things that we did not express as a world community, as becomes obvious when we walk in front of these meaningless names.

These children are looking at something that we will never see. Most of the media would have concentrated on what is outside the frame here, but I thought that maybe to show a very simple moment of humanity among these children would tell much more about the genocide.

This is another installation with two synchronized Quadvision boxes. The text says,

"Gutete Emerita, thirty years old, is standing in front of a church where 400 Tutsi men, women, and children were systematically slaughtered by a Hutu death squad during Sunday mass. She was attending mass with her family when the massacre began. Killed with machetes in front of her eyes were her husband Tito Kahinamura, forty, and her two sons, Muhoza, ten, and Matirigari, seven. Somehow, Gutete managed to escape with her daughter Marie Louise Unumararunga, twelve. They hid in a swamp for three weeks, coming out only at night for food."

This text stays on the screen for forty-five seconds. Those very few who are patient enough to stay that time will see the next sequence:

"Her eyes look lost and incredulous. Her face is the face of someone who has witnessed an unbelievable tragedy and now wears it. She has returned to this place in the woods because she has nowhere else to go. When she speaks about her lost family, she gestures to corpses on the ground, rotting in the African sun."

This text lasts for thirty seconds. Third and final text:

"I remember her eyes. The eyes of Gutete Emerita."

Fifteen seconds. Up to now we have had forty-five, thirty, and fifteen seconds of text. For those who are still here, this is what happens now: for a fraction of a second we see the eyes of Gutete Emerita flashing onscreen. Then we go back to the first text.

In this work I am making a desperate attempt to balance information and visuals, information and spectacle. I am trying to suggest that this is the amount of information we must know in order for this image to make sense.

I met Gutete Emerita and spent an afternoon with her, we took her to the hospital with her daughter, she was visibly disturbed. Meeting Gutete Emerita was extremely moving, and very important for me and my project. I will never forget her. I dedicated four works to Gutete Emerita. The next one is a space divided into two areas. Every wall is painted black. On the first wall we encounter an illuminated text some sixteen feet long. It is the story of Gutete Emerita. Walking along this text to enter the second space, the audience is invited to read it. But the font is very small; they have to get close

to the text and walk slowly. The end of the text reads: "remember her eyes. The eyes of Gutete Emerita." Reaching the end of the corridor we turn left into a large space where we are confronted with a light table some six meters by six meters square. On its top we find one million slides. We also find magnifiers, inviting the spectator to take them and look at the slides more closely. This is the moment I am waiting for – when someone takes a slide and puts their eyes one inch away from the image. It is the eyes of Gutete Emerita, the eyes that witnessed the genocide we did not want to see. As we look at the slides we realize that this same image is repeated one million times. Here again I am trying both to create a powerful *mise-en-scène* and to supply enough information for that image not to be dismissed, for that image to make sense. I am desperately trying to go back to a certain kind of respect for images. All these works are exercises in representation, but they all fail, they are all condemned to fail. That's why I am always trying different strategies.

This is another essay in representation, a very simple one. The audience is confronted with three landscape photographs: *Field*, *Road*, *Cloud*. Next to each photograph is a small frame that holds a sketch of the same landscape with annotations telling the viewer about the image. It is only when the viewer gets close, then, that he or she will understand what the images are about. The sketch next to the first photograph shows that we are seeing Shot No. 15, we are looking at tea fields forty kilometers from Kigali, and we are going toward the Ntarama Church. The second one tells us that this is Shot No. 21, showing the road to Ntarama Church on the same date. The reason for these numbered sequences is to explain to the viewer that the images relate to a journey that took the photographer from here to there.

The last photograph is an image of a cloud. The sketch next to it identifies it as Shot No. 28 – a lonely cloud above the Ntarama Church. At the bottom left of the sketch is a text reading "Bodies, 500?" Only here does the viewer understand that in photographing the cloud in the sky the photographer is surrounded by some 500 bodies. Here again I was trying the possibilities of evoking without showing.

I next come to a retrospective of the Rwanda Project in 1998 in the Centre d'Art Santa Monica, located in an old convent in Barcelona. Here, along with the rest of the Rwanda Project, including the Real Pictures monuments, I presented another work, a sculptural piece titled *Emergencia*. The work is a metal pool, ten meters by ten meters. When the water is quiet and still, it reflects the space and the people there like a mirror. To reach the galleries where the other thirteen works in the exhibition were installed the audience had to walk through the central area holding *Emergencia*.

Every twelve minutes, the African continent, made out of fiberglass in a perfect 1.2 million:1 scale, emerged from the reflective pool. When it reached the surface, it stayed there for about a second and disappeared again. Spain is only fourteen kilometers from Africa at the narrowest point, you can actually see it from Cape Tarifa. It has the potential to be the door to Africa for Europeans and the door to Europe for Africans, but it has not played that role, because Spain is a racist country, as every country is racist. In this piece I wanted first to put Africa back on the map – it was after all right there, a few kilometers from us in Barcelona. I also wanted to create something else that I will explain in the next set of images.

Emergencia is now installed in a closed courtyard in the Umel Public Library, in Sweden. Now the pool reflects books – supposedly all our knowledge and information – and of course the architecture, and it also reflects the people who know about the functioning of the piece and wait. When the continent emerges, all the reflections are broken. It is as if the entirety of the knowledge in the world is put into question by what we know and do about the continent of Africa. The narcissistic impulse that this mirror invites is broken by the emergence of the continent.

A related project is a public intervention in Stockholm in 1998, when Stockholm was the Cultural Capital of Europe. This project is called The Gift. It is a box, printed in an edition of 15,000, and distributed free to people in the street by volunteers who asked, "May I offer you a gift?" We went to the most important public places in the city. The box is completely red on the outside and bears a simple inscription asking the recipient to open it from a specific side. Once it is opened, you can read a printed text on the inside of the box that says,

"What did you expect? We can only offer you a possibility. Please get out of yourself and give something to someone else. Please help Médecins Sans Frontières."

A text in small type at the bottom of the box asks you to open the box completely and refold it so the inside becomes the outside and the outside becomes the inside. A sequence of the photographs from *Let There Be Light* is now visible on the outside. The red box now becomes a money box, its top a wallet-size card with the account number of Médecins Sans Frontières. Besides giving information about Médecins Sans Frontières, I wanted to give the organization visibility in 15,000 homes – and to raise funds for Rwanda.

I will now turn to a film project, *Epilogue* (1998). This is a three-minute floor-to-ceiling projection that begins with one minute of light, nothing but light. Here again is a work that demands time from the viewer – most people will enter the room, see the light, and just leave. But those patient enough will see a face emerging after that minute of light, the face of Caritas Namazuru, a Rwandan refugee who walked more than 400 kilometers to reach a refugee camp in Zaire. Her face emerges very slowly, one second at a time and one percent at a time. After thirty seconds, we reach a thirty percent definition of her face and we think we are finally going to see her, but then the image starts to fade again until we see another one minute of light. But those who have seen the image will experience an afterimage effect, so that the image of Caritas Namazuru will still be there onscreen, even after she is gone. The work is a piece about memory. How do we remember?

In the Koldo Mitxelena cultural space in San Sebastian, Spain, in 1998, I presented the same fourteen works from the Rwanda Project that I had in Barcelona, but I also created a new work for two courtyards. The courtyards were spaces of light, while all the other works in the hallways around were in relative darkness. People had to circulate around these courtyards to see the exhibition. Wanting to provide spaces for meditation, I offered a wall text and four cushions on the floor, where people could sit and think. The text was in Spanish. In English it reads as follows:

"I am lured by faraway distances, the immense void I project upon the world. A feeling of emptiness grows in me; it infiltrates my body like a light and impalpable fluid. In its progress, like a dilation into infinity, I perceive the mysterious presence of the most contradictory feelings ever to inhabit a human soul. I am simultaneously happy and unhappy, exalted and depressed, overcome by both pleasure and despair in the most contradictory harmonies. I am so cheerful and yet so sad that my tears reflect at once both heaven and earth. If only for the joy of my sadness, I wish there were no death on this earth."

This is a text by one of my favorite writers, E. M. Cioran, who died in 1995. So the piece is also a kind of memorial to him.

Let's look now at this small device at the bottom right of the wall. I had brought tea and coffee from Rwanda, and I asked a scent specialist to distill and transform them into scents – the scents of Rwandan tea and coffee. The first courtyard was filled by the scent of Rwandan tea, the second, where the text was in Basque (one of two official languages in the Basque country), by the scent of

Rwandan coffee. The reason for this was that when I came back from Rwanda my body smelled like death for months, and I could take showers and more showers and I could still feel it. My psychiatrist insisted that it was in my mind, not in my body. That is why I wanted to do a piece about healing and bring in a different smell from Rwanda.

The last public project I made about Rwanda was in the city of Lyons, France, in December 2000. Over three nights I projected these words on the facade of the Hotel de Ville: "Kigali", "Mibirizi", "Gikongoro", "Rukara", "Cyangu".

As you know, Americans and Belgians have made a small effort to clarify their responsibility in the genocide. But France has been a little less forthcoming about it.

The last piece about Rwanda is called Six Seconds. It shows a girl whose image is out of focus; next to her is a small lightbox with the text "It is difficult". The girl is one of 100,000 Rwandan orphans whose parents were killed during the genocide. I met her for only six seconds – she was visibly disturbed and the image came out of focus. I wanted to use this image as a final image from Rwanda. Here I am trying to convey the pain and the sorrow through a beautiful image, through poetry. The text „It is difficult“ is taken from a poem that I have used often in my work and is also the title of one of my books. The poem says:

*"It is difficult
to get the news from poems
yet men die miserably every day
for lack
of what is found there."*

The poem is by William Carlos Williams. How do we express the loss of life and still use poetry? I have been an artist for twenty years and I find it more and more difficult.

III

The strategies I employed in the Rwanda Project are specific to that project. Three other projects show different strategies of my work.

Over the last ten years, the three Scandinavian countries of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark have been generous in their assistance to the so-called developing world, and have welcomed one million refugees. Finland, by contrast, accepted only seventeen refugees during the year when I was invited to do a project there. In Helsinki in 1995 I did a piece about this called *One Million Finnish Passports*. At the request of the authorities, we had to put this huge pile of passports behind high security glass. Why one million? Because I calculated that in most European countries, approximately 20 percent of the population is either foreigners or people of foreign descent. Finland has five million inhabitants, so I am suggesting that they immediately welcome one million foreigners. The work was lit in such a way that people would see themselves reflected in the glass before seeing the passports. It was a sea of identity, ready to be filled by new faces, new colors, new sounds, new ideas. The most moving reaction to the work was that of a Finnish citizen who came back to the museum the next day after seeing it and brought his own passport and threw it on the pile as a sign of solidarity.

We have not spoken much about Chile during this conference. My friend Jose Zalaquett, a Chilean and former president of Amnesty International, was invited to attend but was ill. Isabel Allende, the daughter of Chile's former President Salvador Allende, was also invited but could not attend. So I wanted to include this piece because it relates to Chile.

I was commissioned to create a monument for Salvador Allende in Barcelona. In the monument, *Playground*, twelve easels are placed in a grid. Made of iron and metal and set in concrete bases, they cannot be moved. They stand in a little square facing a school called the Antonio Gaudi School, and kids from the school come to play in this playground at break and lunchtime. One of the easels has an inscription: „*La revolución no implica destruir si no construir*“ (Revolution doesn't mean to destroy but to create). On the other side are the birth and death dates of President Allende. Each easel has three colors – a dark color for the structure, a light color for the face, and a very light color for the frame. There is a sign explaining the work. It says, „Playground is an antimonument. It is a simple and useful gesture that transforms a square into a space where the children of Sant-Boi are invited to create new worlds. This work does not foster the cult of one person but creates a public service as an homage to an idea of society“.

Playground represents a space of creation for anyone who wants it, but mostly for children: in the school office we set up piles of paper for anyone who requests them. And when they finish their drawings or their poems they can either leave the drawings as a public exhibition or they can take them home. As explained in the description panel, I wanted to create a space of creative and collective activity, a homage to an idea of society.

Playground is a permanent monument; *Lights in the City* was a temporary one, in Montreal, in 2000. The site – the part of the city called Old Montreal – is today an area of boutiques and stores, art galleries, bars, and restaurants. I was invited to intervene in a landmark building: the former seat of the Canadian Parliament. I learned in my research that this monument has burned several times in its history. On the two main floors are shops and galleries; the entire upper part, the cupola, is empty space.

Walking through the area on one of my research trips for the project, I discovered a rather banal building, with in front of it a sign saying “Accueil Bonneau”. Going in, I discovered a shelter for the homeless. The shelter welcomes 3,000 people a month and gives them breakfast, lunch, and dinner at no charge. I was surprised to discover that Montreal, one of the richest cities in the world, has 15,000 homeless people. I learned that there was a second shelter 100 meters away, called Refuge des Jeunes, and a third shelter another 100 meters away called Maison du Père. I decided to do a project about homelessness and to transform this existing monument, the cupola.

Inside the cupola I installed a 100,000-watt battery of red lights. Once they are triggered, the cupola becomes red. I connected the lights to each of the three shelters, where I also installed a sign explaining the project and a button: every time someone in the shelter pushed the button, the cupola would turn red. In this way everyone using the shelter could signal their presence to the city. I wanted to transform the building into a lighthouse sending out a distress signal, announcing the presence of people we don't see. This landmark monument became a shameful reminder of the unacceptable condition of the homeless in Montreal. The red cupola of course refers to the earlier fires in the building, but also to a fire threatening society itself.

Epilogue

This is the approach to Robben Island, a small island thirteen kilometers offshore from Cape Town, South Africa. As you probably know, this is where the apartheid regime held some of its top political prisoners, including Nelson Mandela, Govan Mbeki (the father of South Africa's current President Thabo Mbeki), Walter Sisulu, Mak Maharaj, and Ahmed Kathrada. On the island's grounds one sees different detention centers and facilities (if you can call them that). There is also a lime quarry, where thirty-two of the top political prisoners spent their days. Obviously this was forced labor – six to seven hours a day, five days a week, in the heat of summer or in the cold of winter, and with picks, chisels, and hammers, the most basic tools.

What was the lime used for? Simply to resurface or white out – yes, white out, pardon the irony – the roads of this infernal island. The brightness and glare of the stone blinded prisoners and guards alike, for both were forbidden to wear sunglasses: the prisoners because the idea was to blind them, as simple as that; the guards because it was not part of their uniform. Other effects included extensive lung damage. It is said that Mandela did not cry on the day he left prison because of the effect of the lime-quarry work on his eyes. He had lost his capacity to cry.

This hellish activity was intended to kill the senses of the prisoners and to break their bodies and spirits. Yet as you probably know, Mandela and the others transformed Robben Island into a place of learning, organizing study groups that even included some of the guards.

In 1995, to commemorate the fifth anniversary of their liberation, the prisoners went back to the quarry. There Mandela and the others demonstrated for the press what they had done there as prisoners. During the demonstration Mandela stepped away from the crowd, picked up a stone, and walked a few steps. He placed the stone on the ground, slightly off the middle of the road. Seeing this, the other ex-prisoners did the same thing, piling their stones into a cairn. In the Xhosa culture to which Mandela belongs, the construction they made is called an *isivivana*; it is a sign for a safe place. This very simple monument created by Mandela and the others is still there – which is some kind of miracle, because the monument is very fragile and stands almost in the middle of the road, where buses pass by every day. It is in my view an extraordinary public monument of reconciliation. Its extreme fragility is a good metaphor, I think, for the extreme precariousness of a long and difficult process. And this is where I want to end – with this monument to reconciliation created by men who cannot cry. *Shukria*.

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