This article examines the contested nature of political violence in public places, with a special focus on stadiums. The focus on the built environment sheds light on the role of architecture as a way of articulating identities, and in inscribing different forms of both the ‘political’ and the ‘everyday’. The paper draws on a series of examples offering a reading of the symbolic role of buildings. The paper then moves on to examine examples of violence in stadiums, so as to highlight the ambivalent nature of the built environment, when turning to sites of violence and sites of repression.

Introduction

In recent years a growing body of literature within political studies, but also more generally in urban planning and sociology, political geography, heritage studies and International Relations, has drawn attention to the way the built environment shapes political violence (Gregory & Pred 2007; Coaffee 2003). With this in mind, some writers have started to address the complex relationship between political violence and the built environment: how urban sites are targeted, destroyed and reconstructed (Bevan 2006). In many cases this reflects a growing awareness of attacks on cultural institutions in war, as different groups seek to erase the emblematic structures and architecture of opposing communities. In some quarters this has given rise to the issue-driven analysis of ‘urbicide’, to shed light on the strategic nature of attacks on the built environment, on urban centres, and on certain buildings as part of military campaigns (Graham 2004). While it is well known that urban centres, and for that matter particular buildings and parts of state infrastructure are often targeted in military
and terrorist campaigns (such as bridges and critical national infrastructure), questions about the role other buildings play in political violence remain unanswered: how are acts of political violence shaped by the backdrop of the urban environment and why are certain buildings used in campaigns of repression?

In this paper I argue that widely-held discourses shape the social use of urban space, and indeed of particular buildings, which become contested when they are used for acts of repression or political violence. An examination of sites of violence and sites of repression reveals an uncertainty in the way the architecture inscribes political space, and shapes acts of violence. The first part of the paper focuses on the ambivalence of architecture, illustrating how buildings can be targeted or used so as to amplify political and strategic aims in conflict. The second part of the paper turns to the social and symbolic role that particular buildings play in narratives of identity, drawing particular attention to the role of stadiums. The latter part of the paper builds on this move, exploring acts of political violence in stadiums. Together these examples will be used to demonstrate the contested nature of political violence in public places and to explore the complex relationship between sites of violence and sites of repression.

The Ambivalence of Architecture and the Politics of Everyday Life

In *The Natural History of Destruction* the writer WB Sebald (2003), drawing on travel literature and journalism, paints a vivid picture of the aftermath of the British air campaign directed against German cities in World War Two. He writes, apart from the distraught behaviour of the people themselves, the most striking change in the natural order of the cities during the weeks after a devastating raid was undoubtedly the sudden and alarming increase in the parasitical creatures thriving on the unburied bodies’ (Sebald 2003, p. 34). The city had become a ruinous necropolis in which primal and feral forms of life—rats, flies and maggots—preyed on the devastation. With the infrastructure of the city destroyed, visitors found the sight of millions of people wandering, eking out a painful existence amongst the unburied corpses, surviving amidst the decaying city, a powerful reminder not only of the brutality of total war, but also of the link between modernity and urbanity. The idea of social and urban life surviving against a devastated background meant that the sense of the urban metropolis had been almost turned on its head.

In order to bring this to sharp relief, Sebald turns to the destruction of the zoo in Berlin. As the air campaign gained momentum, the caged animals from the zoo were not all freed, but instead were often killed in the enclosures designed to house them. Sebald writes:

The antelope house and the enclosure for the beasts of prey, the administration building and the director’s villa were entirely destroyed, while the monkey house, the quarantine building, the main restaurant and the elephants’ Indian temple were left in ruins.
or badly damaged. A third of the animals died - there were still 2,000 left, although many had been evacuated. Deer and monkeys escaped, birds flew away through the broken glass roofs ... Next day the ornamental three-storey aquarium building and the crocodile hall were also destroyed, along with the artificial jungle. (Sebald 2003, p. 92)

The zoo, much like the city itself—once a site of tourist attraction and symbol of the international status of Berlin—had become a macabre necropolis. The horror, for Sebald, is magnified because zoos, 'which all over Europe owe their existence to a desire to demonstrate princely or imperial power, are at the same time supposed to be a kind of imitation of the Garden of Eden' (Sebald 2003, p. 93). In effect, the zoo—once heralded as a fountain of life—albeit life caged and controlled—no longer served its symbolic purpose; the meaning of the zoo as an institution and building had been inverted.

While the works of Sebald and other writers offer a general insight into the barbarity of mechanised conflict—of the implications of the strategic use of air war directed against Germany—other works focusing on post-Communist conflicts highlight how targeted attacks on urban infrastructure may have been shaped by particular political rationales. In his book War is a Force that Gives Us Meaning, the journalist Chris Hedges notes:

In Bosnia the Serbs, desperately trying to deny the Muslim character of Bosnia, dynamited or ploughed over libraries, museums, universities, historic monuments, and cemeteries, but most of all mosques. The Serbs, like the Croats, also got rid of monuments built to honour their Serb or Croat heroes during the communist era. These monuments championed another narrative, a narrative of unity among ethnic groups that ran contrary to the notion of ancient ethnic hatreds. The partisan monuments that honoured Serb and Croat fighters against the Nazis honoured, in the new narrative, the wrong Serbs and Croats. For this they had to be erased. (Hedges 2002, p. 76)

Another war correspondent, Janine di Giovanni, writes of Nikola Koljevic, a Shakespearean scholar and former Vice President of the Bosnian Serbs, who oversaw the destruction of Sarajevo. She writes:

When the bombardment of Sarajevo began, he was safe in Pale, and as an architect of the city’s destruction, he made sure that the National Library was demolished. When it was hit scores of texts from all over the former Yugoslavia were consumed by fire, and a blizzard of ashes from the burnt books—including his own—covered the city ... To see the majestic Ottoman-style library on the banks of the Miljacka go up in flames was horrible. The library contained one and half million volumes. Nearly 90 per cent were destroyed in the shelling. The library had been multi-ethnic: texts written by Muslims, Serbs, Croats, side by side. It was everything Koljevic loathed. He had to destroy it. (di Giovanni 2003, pp. 221-2)
di Giovanni, like Hedges, illustrates that some acts of war are political in form and character: explicitly designed to target urban infrastructure so as to erase the very idea of a multi-ethnic state. These writers, along with WB Sebald, also draw attention to ways in which the built environment actually shapes acts of violence. The bombardment of museums may be considered as an attack on everyday life—on free speech—because these institutions often house a historical record linked to a particular narrative of identity which groups seek to erase. Likewise, attacks on mosques or sacred sites, or even the desecration of tombs may be viewed as an affront to certain religions, while the destruction of monuments may be read as an attempt to erase the collective memory of imposed rule. On the one hand then, attacks on certain buildings are undertaken precisely because they undermine the notion of collective memory, but also because they undermine the people’s ability to undertake everyday activities.

On the other hand, however, acts of violence also occur within buildings. In *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry draws attention to the role that the built environment plays when shaping intimate acts of violence, including torture. She argues that torturers have a range of weapons at their disposal, but it is environment, where acts of violence take place, which transforms torture into a display. She notes that it ‘is not accidental that in the torturers’ idiom the room in which the brutality occurs was called the ‘production room’ in the Philippines, the ‘cinema room’ in South Vietnam, and the ‘blue lit stage’ in Chile (Scarry 1987, p. 28). Therefore acts of torture, and more generally acts of political violence are framed, amplified even, by the environment, the buildings and the architecture in which they occur.

When torture happens, Scarry argues, the

world is reduced to a room or set of rooms. Called “guest rooms” in Greece and “safe houses” in the Philippines, the torture rooms are often given names that acknowledge and call attention to the generous, civilizing impulse normally present in the human shelter. They call attention to this impulse only as a prelude to its annihilation. (Scarry 1987, p. 40)

For Scarry, the torture ‘room is not just the setting in which the torture occurs: it is not just the space that happens to house the various instruments used for beating and burning and producing electric shock. It is literally converted into another weapon, into another agent of pain. All aspects of the basic structure—walls, ceilings, windows, doors—undergo this conversion’ (Scarry 1987, p. 40). The building itself—the bolting and unbolting of doors—as well as the normal and everyday contents of rooms—the bathtub in which prisoners are tortured or the chair, cot or bed to which prisoners are handcuffed—are transformed into the tools used to inflict pain, which, in a literal sense, also amplified the pain. As the refrigerator is converted into ‘a bludgeon, the refrigerator disappears; its disappearance objectifies the disappearance of the world (sky, county, bench) experienced by the person in great pain: and it is this very act of disappearance, its
transition from refrigerator to bludgeon, that inflicts the pain' (Scarry 1987, p. 41). Certain buildings are therefore coded by their everyday social function. However the use of particular buildings in acts of violence is often merely opportunistic. This leads to 'the accidental location of the torture rooms or headquarters, the sports stadium in Chile, the police station in Paraguay, the traffic control room in Greece, and in an earlier decade, the sweets factory in Algeria' (Scarry 1987, p. 42). And so some buildings, traditionally viewed as normal institutions of a functioning everyday modern city, acquire an antithetical meaning. This often adds to the shocking nature of the violence which occurs within them, creating ambivalence and decoupling the role of certain institutions from the social function for which they were built and originally used.

At least in part, questions of identity are then shaped by the use of space in metropolitan centres, and by the built environment. Zoos and libraries, museums and monuments, and other buildings such as cinemas are synonymous with 'modern' everyday urban life. Some cities are marked out by their skylines, skyscrapers and post-modern architecture, others are known for their cultural monuments. While architecture plays a role in everyday social life, it can also represent and reflect identity. And at a more localised level, as Elaine Scarry notes, it can be viewed as a physical extension of the everyday built environment, which can be inverted or used to inflict pain by torturers. The torture of individuals in set environments may be designed explicitly to inflict further pain, to amplify the sense of debasement. This can impact upon individuals as well as the groups that they represent. Architecture and urban space is therefore a testament to identity, it plays a symbolic role in society, but it can also be ambivalent.

Political violence involving, targeting, or occurring within particular buildings appears to accentuate the barbarity and intimacy of conflict. Attacks on metropolitan centres as part of military campaigns, especially the bombing of cities in World War Two, has led some scholars to explore the implications of the destruction of urban space as a particular form of war: known as urbicide. In doing so, work in this area has drawn attention to the destruction of certain buildings more commonly associated with everyday public life. As Sebald notes, some of these buildings such as zoos are linked to the very identity of a modern city, such as Berlin in the 1930s. Meanwhile other writers have also drawn attention to the role that buildings play, symbolically, and as cultural artefacts. Thus, the library which houses historical records, the historical monument, the museum, mosque, church, synagogue, university or cemetery, may be viewed in some circles as a target for destruction precisely because of the cultural role these institutions play in everyday life. Some of these buildings play roles in the establishment and maintenance of particular identities, not only as reference points marking out new or modern societies, but also part of the multi-cultural narratives of identity which have shaped everyday life in some cities. But urban infrastructure can also be used to amplify acts of political violence, thereby calling into question the
symbolic role and social function of particular buildings. It is this point to which I now turn.

The Symbolic Role of Buildings: Towards a Reading of Stadiums

As I have argued so far, specific buildings may attain a symbolic status within a broader political and cultural narrative of identity. Therefore, it is useful to consider how urban space has been inscribed by modernity, and shaped by politics. In particular, the idea of creating an independent structure, a building designed to capture events and stories, to house spectator and spectacle, became a commonplace feature of modern societies. Much like the Eiffel Tower, buildings in modern societies offer a whole ‘polyphony of pleasures’ from technological wonder to haute cuisine (Barthes 1997, p. 17).

But the Eiffel Tower is also an object which, in itself, apprehends a certain mythic identity; which is at once very old and somewhat analogous to the ancient circus, and also modern and linked to leisure. Barthes’ work on the Eiffel Tower is important in at least three ways. Firstly, it reinforces the argument that the built environment, or rather, specific buildings, create meanings through their social function in the public realm. It does so, according to Barthes, in very complex ways. Thus, theatre-goers, school-children or factory-workers are signified, in part, by the built environment. Their subjectivity is constructed and reconstructed through their relationship with specific buildings. Accordingly, Barthes helps us to interpret how museums, libraries or universities capture meanings in different ways from, for example, memorials or statues.

Secondly, Barthes demonstrates how particular buildings create meanings through intertextuality. In doing so, a symbolic dimension governs how the built environment is received in society, but also through culture. It is the scenography, the backdrop, the panorama, which inscribe meanings about the built environment. Therefore, some buildings such as churches, mosques or synagogues evoke religious meanings as part of the landscape of a region. Meanwhile, shrines, souks and monuments are associated with their social and cultural function. Other buildings are linked to national narratives, and some, such as fountains and oases, are referred to through their connectivity to life, while cemeteries, catacombs, and the necropolis, are associated with death. For Barthes, some buildings are conditioned by temporality, or geographic locality. Thus, shopping malls, sewers, arcades and cinemas relate, primarily, to Western modernity, while parking lots, border crossings, and airports are variously referenced against changing social functions, especially within late modern international societies. Together then, certain buildings are ascribed meaning when viewed and seen against the backdrop of other institutions in urban settings.

Thirdly, Barthes’ work helps to clarify the relationship between the built environment and political violence. Barthes highlights how the
rupturing of the social function of a building may lead to a reflexive questioning of subjectivity and identity. Attacks against schools, theatres or offices are thus defined as traumatic, precisely because a building generates meaning for a broader audience, illustrating that those inside must be civilians rather than combatants. Similarly, specific narratives also help to inform how a building is understood, from fortresses and castles to checkpoints, depicted as part of military expansionism or occupation, to iconic examples of architecture reflecting a given era. Furthermore, refugee camps are inscribed by their temporary nature and the unbounded lines of demarcation which often surround them. This also forces us to return to questions about the built environment and how it is used.

This brings to attention the role of particular buildings, such as stadiums, within political and against social discourses and cultural narratives which frame them. As the journalist Lindsey Hilsum notes, stadiums became enveloped in the Cold War battle of ideologies. As ‘an emblem of solidarity, China built stadiums for football matches and political rallies in most African countries which declared themselves socialist’ (Hilsum 2006, p. 236). In this way, a sense of political meaning is tied to certain buildings.

However stadiums have a more entrenched social and cultural meaning when turning to a consideration of performance. In a sense then, performance is related to particular architectural structures; it is synonymous with theatre, a place where plays are presented to audiences, where spectators and scenery are actively entwined with performance. In another sense, the understanding of theatre is ‘part of our heritage’, grounded in the course of seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe. Around this time, performance was linked with particular architectural spaces; new theatres were designed and new forms of theatre and performance emerged.

From a Western stance, the relationship between spectacle and the built environment gained currency in classical antiquity, as structures were designed to capture the relationship between actor and audience. Often determined by the type of spectacle involved, Roman architects designed three particular styles of building to exploit this relationship. Broadly speaking, the most well-known is the amphitheatre, a symmetrically-shaped stadium, circular or ovoid, with seats running round the cavea or bowl. The amphitheatre was designed for audiences to view non-directional spectacles, such as combat between men and animals. The second type of building was the theatre, traditionally semi-circular in design, with stepped seating and a raised stage, between which an orchestra sat, facing a stage. So-called perikton, or scenes painted on triangular frames, were used to change the backdrop for plays, introducing the idea of scenery against which a story could be told. The third type of structure was the circus, hippodrome or stadium, usually planned with particular events or spectacles, such as horse-racing, in mind. Often U-shaped, spectators sat on steps and watched races.
On the one hand then, through their design, buildings seek to satisfy a number of demands which can be local, national or increasingly commercial. Indeed, the design of stadiums requires an understanding of place; in the case of the stadium, that is ‘the social and cultural priorities of the local fan-base, and of the importance of sport, or of a sporting team, to a city or a neighbourhood’ (Sheard 2005, p. 23). Ideas of the virtual, beyond the notion of live audiences, the impact of television, the movement from sports grounds to sports stadia, the notion of theatre, stage, spectator, performance, architecture, design and consumerism, meant that buildings were created for multiple functions with, according to some, generations of stadiums reflecting these influences (Sheard 2005, pp. 2-19). In more recent years, the outcome of this has been the development of what is known as the fifth generation stadium, designed to integrate features such as television gantries, press rooms and covers to protect against inclement weather.

On the other hand however, stadiums are not only designed architecturally to generate mass participation in events, but also to reflect a sense of pride and belonging. In effect, the fifth generation stadium is planned for participants and observers, and often a wider television audience, but, like other buildings, some such as national stadiums may represent national identities, with a different set of viewers in mind: the international community. What seems to make some events particularly memorable is the unprecedented capacity of ‘the stadium’ to fuse architecture and spectacle with belonging and national identity. In effect, therefore, it is the story of the built environment which represents and also shapes elements of national narratives. Importantly, the stadium plays a role in local and national identity narratives. In a sense, they serve as markers of identity at the local and national level, and across the realms of the social and political. As the architectural historian Simon Inglis notes, when referring to football grounds, even ‘if the stands change, even if one changes position from the terraces to the seats, or from the seats to a private box, the ground harbours the soul of the club. And however many matches one attends, the ground—an enclosed environment, a den of escape—always acts as a magnet’ (Inglis 1990, p. 7).

Moreover, unlike other buildings designed to make spectacles and events visible to a large, live audience, the sheer size of the stadium, and the numbers of people that visit them, marks them out as important, even unique institutions. Inglis notes, within a local community: ‘A “home” ground really is like a “home” to many supporters; a place of familiarity where, as part of the spectacle, one assumes a role no less important to one’s club than the players’ (Inglis 1990, p. 7). Traditionally viewed as sporting arenas, the construction and architecture of a stadium are also implicitly political acts; stadiums are monuments, often built to reflect certain narratives of identity. Although increasingly used for other events (such as pop concerts), stadiums often house national sporting events, and therefore become sites were national narratives are formed and reified.
Moreover, the very design of stadiums, the fact that they have a stage helps to focus attention on the spectacle or event contained therein. Seating is explicitly designed so as to ensure visibility, and modern communications systems create an added layer of interactivity for the fan (music, large-screens replaying sporting scenes or images from events). The fan or audience becomes a participant in the event, housed in the stadium. And so the meaning of the spectacle becomes linked to the stadium and city in which certain historic events occur: the Beijing Olympics is tied to the iconic architectural national stadium known colloquially as the Bird’s Nest. In this way, it may be argued that the stadium is a stage on which political, sporting and cultural events and spectacles occur. Stadiums are therefore unique architectural focal points, which, although traditionally linked to local sporting events (especially when turning to football grounds), are increasingly being seen as political and architectural points of reference, used by governments to generate and represent a mythic sense of identity.

**Ambivalent Architectures: Stadiums and Political Violence**

With these points in mind, I will now turn to a number of illustrative examples in which stadiums and political violence co-mingle. The aim here is to demonstrate how acts of political violence are amplified by the built environment.

The first set of examples stems from the experience of Victor Jara, a Chilean musician, who was murdered under the Pinochet regime. In the case of Jara, we see that the public arena of the stadium was used to amplify the private experience of cruelty. Following his capture at the University campus as the Pinochet coup gained pace, Jara was taken to the Stadium of Chile, otherwise known as *The Estadio Nacional de Chile*, where five thousand political prisoners were being held. He managed to hand a poem to a friend ‘down in the dressing rooms now converted to torture chambers’ (J Jara 1998, p. 240). Over a few days Jara was publicly beaten, having his hands broken before being forced to sing and play his music, a symbol of the left wing movement in Chile. He was then led from the stadium, and probably killed shortly afterwards, leaving the poem as a testimony, highlighting how the stadium had been transformed into a site of atrocity (J Jara 1998, pp. 242-3).

A further example can be found in Afghanistan, as the Taliban rose to power. As the writer Ahmed Rashid noted, having arrived in Kandahar in 1997;

> the Taliban had lifted their long-standing ban on football. The United Nations (UN) aid agencies—seizing a rare chance to do something for public entertainment—rushed in to rebuild the stands and seats of the bombed out football stadium. But on this balmy Thursday afternoon—the beginning of the Muslim weekend—no foreign aid-workers had been invited to watch the stadium’s inauguration. No football match was scheduled. Instead there was
In both the account of the death of Victor Jara in the Estadio Nacional de Chile, and in the use of the football stadium as a place of execution in Kabul, the type of building had not changed, but its purpose had been converted to a site of atrocity. In each case, the use of the building may have been somewhat opportunistic but it also served to amplify the impact of the act of violence directed against certain individuals—adding to the spectacle of repression.\(^2\)

The second set of examples is tied to the Second World War. In the late 1930s, as the Second World War loomed, hundreds of thousands of people began to move across Europe. Some of these people—including Communists, former royalists, volunteers of every hew, and anarchists—fled Franco’s army in Spain as the civil war came to an end. The so-called ‘undesirable aliens’ were interned in makeshift camps on the border with France. These camps, and others in Eastern Europe, were to provide the blueprint for the mass arrests and detainment which followed the collapse of resistance in France some months later in 1940. Following his arrest in Paris, the writer and novelist Arthur Koestler was transferred from a local police station and imprisoned in one such camp. In his book The Scum of the Earth, which is in effect an account of his experience in France as Nazi forces swept into Western Europe, Koestler writes about his arrest and imprisonment. He is moved from one police detention centre to ‘the great tennis stadium near Auteuil, named after the late French champion, Roland Garros’ (Koestler 2006, p. 73). He goes on to write; ‘The Stadium had been converted into a provisional camp for the detention of ‘undesirable aliens’. There were about five hundred of us, and we were housed in queer sorts of grottos, under the great stand of the central tennis court. The stand consisted of ascending steps; our abode was the empty space under the steps, which before had partly been used as dressing-rooms’ (Koestler 2006, p. 73). It appears that the stadium had been hastily transformed, partly as a result of its ability to house large-numbers of people. Koestler writes that the walls of the stadium still had posters announcing the ‘results of the last match’ and that other signs ‘indicated that the mixed doubles were to take place on court No.3’ while ‘our guards, the soldiers, blaspemously indulged in football on the smooth red earth of the courts’ (Koestler 2006, p. 85). Even though the building had been quickly and apparently temporarily transformed into a prison camp, which by then housed around six hundred people, and even though it was ‘not fitted with any conveniences’, those interred soon developed a somewhat haphazard routine to make use of the building (Koestler 2006, p. 85).

This example was followed in 1941 by a more determined attempt to use stadiums in order to aid repression. Drancy, a purpose-built council estate on the outskirts of Paris, was originally planned as a vast housing estate. After the fall of Paris in June 1941, German troops and sympathetic French police units sought to identify transit
areas to hold POWs and those labelled as ‘undesirables’ in the records of Vichy France. The housing estate in Drancy became one of a number of transit camps which held French communists, Jews and Spanish fighters who had fled from the forces of General Franco. The estate had little water and amenities, with electricity, toilets, food and privacy at a premium. Having originally been designed to hold around 700 people, but by 1942 it had been transformed to hold over 7,000 political prisoners. Then on the 16th and 17th of July in 1942 the Velodrome d’Hiver, a winter bicycle stadium, along with schools and police stations throughout Paris, became the focal points of what became known as the The Great Raid of ‘Vel’ d’Hiv’. The buildings were used as prison compounds designed to house those caught in the round-up of undesirables organised by the French police (Henley 2002). The Velodrome became a detention facility, where families were separated for transportation to Drancy, Beaune-la-Rolande or Pithiviers, and then to the concentration camps in Eastern Europe. Again, a stadium was converted to a site of repression because of their functionality: their ability to be used as sites in which hundreds of people could be housed.

While these examples illustrate how stadiums have become used in political programmes of repression, as Scarry notes, on occasion buildings may be used simply as a result of chance. A third set of examples illustrates that stadiums simply act as sites where political demonstrations inadvertently become sites of resistance. The Dinamo Stadium in Zagreb or the Bernebau stadium in Spain can be read as buildings intimately linked to a sense of local identity. Yet in 1992 prior to the Serbo-Croat War of the 1990s, and in the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s, respectively, the two stadiums were spaces where politics and violence became linked. Moreover, when considering a number of other examples, such as the football stadium in Sarajevo or in Baghdad, the building itself and more specifically the pitch became temporary morgues and cemeteries. The green field—a metaphor of life, growth and sport—became emblazoned with crosses marking the burial spots of numerous victims of internecine periods of violence. In some cases the stadium was used as a burial ground precisely because cemeteries were too difficult to reach or had themselves become the focal point for attacks by encircling artillery and mortar teams.

More recently in Guinea, security forces surrounded a demonstration about human rights, which centred on the national stadium. In this way the stadium become a site of political protest. The Presidential Guard, known locally as the ‘red berets’ blockaded the stadium, before storming it. The security forces allegedly fired indiscriminately on the protestors, in what human rights organisations described as a premeditated massacre. ‘Witnesses said that as soon as the Presidential Guard entered the stadium, its members began firing point-blank directly into the massive crowd of protestors, killing dozens and sowing panic … Since most of the exits had been blocked and the stadium was surrounded by the attackers, escape for the
trapped protestors was extremely difficult, and many were crushed to death by the panicked crowd’ (Human Rights Watch 2009). The stadium had been used as a focal point for a political demonstration, but this had inadvertently become an ideal place for the local security forces to commit a series of human rights abuses.

These three sets of examples demonstrate that the stadium can be used as a site of atrocity and repression, inverting the use of the building as a site of celebration for difficult local and political groups. The first examples illustrated how the stadium was used to maximise the viewing of atrocity; the second example demonstrates how stadiums were used because of their functional ability to house people and enable repression; while the third examples highlight how stadiums often become the site of political agitation and have variously been used in the post-Cold War world as sites of violence. In this way, the focus on stadiums generates ambivalence when considering the nature and form of the violence. The stadium and the visibility it enables are relevant here. The three different sets of examples focus on different kinds of violence. It would be good again to draw a closer connection between them—the stadium as a site of torture, the stadium as temporary containment, the stadium as a site of resistance—perhaps focusing on who drives the violence: the state/the sovereign vs. the crowd.

Conclusion

Echoing some of the themes raised by Elaine Scarry, in considering particular buildings we can see how violence within them is accentuated, even if the choice of building was accidental. In Cambodia the Khmer Rouge used a local school as a central interrogation point for suspects as the city of Phnom Penh fell under the control of the peasant militia. The school became synonymous with the Cambodian ‘killing fields’, although it has since been turned into a museum to commemorate the atrocities of Khmer Rouge. And of course, School Number One in the small Ossetian town of Beslan has become associated with political violence, following the hostage-taking incident in 2004. Cigarettes are left on chairs for dead victims, and pictures of the dead adorn the burnt walls of the gymnasium, providing an evocative reminder, an open wound even, of the events in September 2004; a counter point to which is the newly built school for the children of Ossetia, in view of School Number One.

As I have argued, the stadium resembles a cultural monument which captures technical, mythological and social functions. However stadiums are also sites or buildings with unique features. They have become sites where different forms of violence occurs, from hooliganism to acts of political repression. Buildings such as stadiums and theatres are designed to focus the attention of the crowd or audience on a pitch, running track or stage. And yet in cases where political violence occurs within these buildings, their design means that the focal point of the pitch or stage becomes reversed (for
example, the stage in the Dubrovka Theatre hostage crisis, while the seating acted as a temporary holding pen for hostages as the siege unfolded). More generally, I have argued that architectures can themselves be ambivalent, particularly when turning to acts of violence. Stadiums, although synonymous with modernity and urban social life, have undoubtedly become sites of atrocity often tied to repression.

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Notes

1 See, for example, http://www.worldstadiums.com/ (viewed 3 August, 2007).

2 Interestingly, alongside material reparations, recent reports have noted how the Chilean government responded to pressure from associations of the disappeared in order to pay tribute to the memory of the victims of the Pinochet dictatorship. As part of the shift to reconciliation, in 2007 the National Stadium was declared a national monument, following its use as a site of torture and killing, while the Estadio de Chile was renamed Estadio Victor Jara.

3 This raises interesting questions about temporarily bounded areas as sites of repression, such as ghettos, and fixed sites such as universities as sites of resistance. For the latter see, for instance, Tim Judah, Kosovo: War and Revenge (2002, pp. 162-3).

4 One of the catalysts for the break-up of the Former Yugoslavia was inter-ethnic tensions, exposed in a riot at the Maksimir stadium in Zagreb, in 1990. The Croat fans from Dinamo Zagreb and the Serbian supporters of Red Star Belgrade rioted at a football match between the two sides, shortly after a parliamentary meeting in which Croat parties had voted for independence from Yugoslavia.

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