I Introduction

Museums have always been political. Bennett's (1995) *The Birth of the Museum* draws on Michel Foucault's classic work and argues that the museum played an important role in helping shape modern political power and subjectivity. This and other critical scholarship helped inform the "new museology" (McCall and Gray 2014) and how the museum space today is implicated in movements for social justice (Sandell 2002). Since Geoghegen's (2010) review of museum geographies, scholarship in this area has flourished and taken new turns. What marks this more recent research is a deeper engagement with the turns toward affect, materiality and assemblage. Interestingly, this engagement also advances the concerns around social justice, politics, and power that informed previous research. The re-conceptualization of the museum by way of these recent turns is important for understanding their ongoing relevance and potential impact (see Medby and Dittmer 2020 and Landau and Pohl 2021).

This paper focuses on work in geography and related fields that pushes the boundaries of what the museum is and how it works. While the politics of representation will always be a key element of any museum, engaging with the turns toward affect, materiality and assemblage has re-animated research methodologies in a way that includes objects, feelings, and sensations in important way. Crang and Tolia-Kelly (2010), for instance, put forward an approach to the British National Museum that includes the politics of representation but also the registers of affect, emotion and embodiment that often reinforces those politics. Waterton and Dittmer (2014), too, propose the "museum as assemblage", pointing to the direct encounter between visitor bodies and the museum's materiality, an encounter that conditions the formation of ideas

about nation, politics, and war (also see Hetherington 1999, Phillips et al. 2015 and Smith and Foote 2017 on “museum as assemblage”). Importantly, because assemblages are “open systems” (Waterton and Dittmer, 2014, p. 124) they are constantly experiencing reinvention. These and other contributions provide powerful new concepts for understanding the museum as a political space.

This paper offers one perspective on how museums are potentially powerful as geopolitical entities where a confluence of forces (human, non-human, affective, emotional) comes together to shape the emergence of political subjectivity, particularly around important questions of the state and its penchant for violence (Reeves and Heath-Kelly 2020). To advance this idea, we review scholarship on museums from around the world that take part in what we call “soft combat”, a device for understanding the interventions made by the museum space that act directly on the visitor in their embodied presence. While this is especially pertinent for military museums, we suggest that all museums contain elements of these powers. This paper illustrates how soft combat operates in a slightly different way than the “‘soft disciplining’ power” of museum governmentality described by Beel (2017, p. 462) and others. An affective assemblage space may link to governmentality but cannot always be reduced to it (Anderson 2012; also see Morse and Munro 2018). At the least, we should consider how discourse and ideological narratives actively interface with pre-subjective factors such as affect, a force increasingly “engineered” into the built environment (Thrift 2008). This approach is closer to a biopolitical turn in Foucault’s later thinking (Philo 2012) that is only now finding expression in contemporary literature on museums. Waterton and Dittmer (2014) track this form of power

while also attending to its limits, as assemblage thinking is often characterized by an openness to the future.

There are three trends in this recent critical literature that inform soft combat. First is how museums *enroll the visitor* (Waterton and Dittmer 2014, p. 132, 135) in an atmospheric confluence of forces that often blend information and knowledge with the embodied sensations of affect and emotion. Second, we engage with work that makes an explicit connection between these techniques with the critical questions around *violence and trauma*. Third, we consider how museums are powerful sites of *embodied persuasion*. Moving across these trends, we chart the potential for museums to exert soft combat as a motivated interface that links visitors, museum spaces, and troubled histories in powerful ways, often at the intersection of affect and ideology. To substantiate soft combat, we briefly examine a military museum experience in Arizona, USA, in which visitors are taken inside an active Air Force Base to view thousands of retired aircraft resting in the desert. The soft combat of this museum experience brings together political, historical, military and tourism geographies in complex ways.

II Enrolling the Visitor

Bjerregaard (2015) approaches museum curation in light of what they call a “material turn” (p. 74), particularly with an emphasis on the atmospheres created rather than the objects on display. These are important moves that help create the conceptual space for thinking anew about museums as geopolitical entities. For Bjerregaard (2015) an “overemphasis” on objects implies less attention on the curatorial space the objects are in and the atmospheres that shroud

them. Here, the embodied force of the museum is less about the information or knowledge that is provided, and more about the mood-setting and what that does to create the conditions of possibility for whatever knowledge is to come, if any at all. Importantly, the emphasis is on the space between objects, and the space between objects and the visitors.

Similarly, scholars such as Waterton and Dittmer (2014) advance the "museum as assemblage" (also see Dittmer and Waterton, 2017) that is important for geopolitics. In examining the Australian War Memorial, they chart a new kind of power in the museum that is also characterized by an openness to the unexpected. By attending to affect in the museum, they find evidence of Thrift's (2008) "engineering" and use the term "enrolment" (Waterton and Dittmer 2014, p. 132, 135) to describe the museum precisely because of this capacity. At the same time, they remain open to a key requirement of thinking with affect and assemblage: "underneath the seeming stability of the assemblage is a continual surge and restructuring of constituent relations" (p. 124), thereby always leaving the door open for surprise and the emergence of something new. Their contribution deserves more attention as it moves in the direction of what we are calling soft combat.

Importantly, the museum as assemblage is not only about these atmospheres, but about other geopolitical relationships across the globe, what they describe as "collective performance of assemblage" (Waterton and Dittmer, 2014, p. 135, citing Dittmer, 2014). While the museum is also a participate in broader relations of nations, states and militaries, it nevertheless goes to work by way of affective atmospheres in the everyday practice of life in the museum. This

operation often includes performance-based techniques and use of sound and light. The visitor is affectively absorbed by the space, thereby setting up something very different than the mere transfer of information or knowledge. That, too, may take place, but it is made active and alive in a certain way through the deployment of atmospheric spaces. This confluence of forces is what they mean by referring to it as an assemblage. The museum as geopolitical assemblage, then, "enrols" (Waterton and Dittmer 2014, p. 132, 135) the visitor in a dense network of connections between bodies, objects, atmospheres, slogans and discourses of war that suffuse this kind of military space (also see Miller and Del Casino Jr., 2018). These operations are a key aspect of soft combat: the museum works on the embodied experience of the visitor directly. In discussing an installation called *Bomber Command*, Waterton and Dittmer (2014) suggest that turning to affect and assemblage is necessary for understanding what the museum is already doing: "*Bomber Command* seems to have been designed with a similar assumption in mind – prepared for our bodies, our eyes, our ears, feet, muscles and skin" (p. 129).

These elements of spatial power are also present in Bennett's (1995) *The Birth of the Museum*, detailing how museums are wrapped-up with modern state rationality and social control. While tracking the role of museums, exhibitions, and commercial spaces in the emergence of colonial modernity, Bennett (1995) pays close attention to the use of props (p. 186); mobile techniques like guided walking itineraries (p. 179); and other "performative" (p. 212) elements of the built environment. At times, Bennett (1995) seems to be describing the kind of "enrolment" of non-representational theories. Bennett (1995) even uses the word "assemblage" throughout the text, but not in the same way as Waterton and Dittmer (2014); it is used more casually to

describe arrangements that are usually absorbed by a more familiar Foucauldian language around the museum’s capacity to "instruct” the population in specific ways (pages 47, 69, 95, 102, 169). Similarly, Beel (2017), in describing the museum as a space of governmentality, writes that “the museum as a Foucauldian space performs a ‘soft disciplining’ power that *presses on* the visitor or participant” (p. 462; emphasis added). Like Bennett (1995), Beel (2017) moves too quickly past the operations of this “pressing on”, which we think needs more attention, as it may at once help enhance governmentality but also provide an arena for the biopolitics of affect (Anderson 2012). It may as well be the space for something else to emerge entirely (see also Lord 2006 and Hetherington 2011 on Foucault’s “heterotopia” and the museum).

As a space of “becoming”, the assemblage for Waterton and Dittmer (2014, p. 123) does not simply reproduce power, but instead opens to the future in an uncertain but potentially radical way. They remind us that despite the manipulative powers of curation, “there nonetheless remains an element of the unforeseeable or emergent at play when it comes to the triggering of emotion and affect” (p. 136). At the same time, this approach is open to multiple realities and eschews any one-dimensional or totalizing vision. Waterton (2014) reminds us that the experience of heritage spaces like museums is multifaceted and difficult to fully predict and control:

> “In this review, then, I take heritage to encompass not only museums, monuments, landscapes, battlefields, sites and places but also the feelings of affinity we might have with them – the empathy and connection – as well as their counterparts: the alienation, boredom, anger and rejection. In other words, I am

> interested in the situational affective contexts of heritage” (Waterton, 2014, p. 824).

These challenges are especially pertinent when dealing with museums that take on issues of violence and trauma. As we will see, work in this area has continued to bring together the foundations of the “new museology” and its concern for social justice with the turn towards affect, in particular. The soft combat of museums is, in some ways, most relevant for museums that focus on military themes and other state-orientated processes like colonialism and slavery. The powers of soft combat are called upon to contain the residual forces left over by the deployment of “hard” military power, or other violent means.

III Engaging Violence and Trauma

For Gillen (2014) the museum is important for geopolitics, especially in tourism and leisure geographies that include explicit practices of statecraft, insofar as they “are produced by governments for politically expedient ends” (p. 1307). As such, museums generate a platform for the state to perform its “sovereignty” (p. 1312, drawing on Lepawsky, 2008). Gillen (2014) analyzes the War Remnants Museum in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, and highlights the ways that its narration of what is called the “American War” in Vietnam makes several explicit political moves. Using photographs and other displays, the museum “discredits” the United States as the aggressor while defending the legitimacy of the Communist Party and shining “an affirmative light on its rule” (p. 1307). These museum strategies create “narratives that define the nation and territorialize state rule” (1312; also see McLean, 2005). Gillen suggests that museums like

these have obvious geopolitical dimensions to how they are curated and managed, making them relevant far beyond the "dark tourism" literature (also see Gillen, 2018).

Gillen's (2014) summary of the literature, however, begins from a distinction between this kind of research and a "more-than-representational approach" (p. 1309, citing Thrift, 2008). An excessive focus on the affective and everyday dimensions of tourism, Gillen (2014) warns, can "distract" (p. 1310) researchers from engaging more fully with the ways that tourism becomes "politically expedient" (p. 1307). This stands out to us today, as much research since has moved in the opposite direction: understanding the politics of museums and other tourism/heritage/leisure sites *requires* an engagement with the affective and emotional aspects of their materiality. In addition to Waterton and Dittmer (2014) cited above, others like Dowler (2013), Lisle (2016) and Miller and Del Casino Jr. (2018, 2020) have put forward an approach to the geopolitics of tourism that explores this exact intersection, where the affective and emotional become the prime site of intervention by the state or other political forces (also see Mostafanezhad 2018 and Rowen, 2016).

The politics of affect and emotion, then, has been for the most part carried into explorations of museums and their intersection with citizenship, belonging and othering. Crang and Tolia-Kelly (2010) borrow from Sarah Ahmed (2000) to explore the "affective economies of citizenship" (p. 2316) at heritage sites such as the British Museum. In this approach, it is impossible to separate affect from politics. In other words, the way that certain museums work includes how that they make people feel and the impact those feelings have for issues around belonging, identity and

race, in particular. They argue “that the production and circulation of feeling and sentiment, rather than civic knowledge, are crucial in excluding and including different people” (Crang and Tolia-Kelly, 2010, p. 2315). Elsewhere, Tolia-Kelly (2016, 2019) draws on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and extends this critique of the museum’s “epistemic violence” by way of “misrepresentation” and the imposition of “imperial taxonomies” that frame difference (2016, p. 897). For Māori visitors in particular, Tolia-Kelly (2016) explores how the museum can be a traumatizing experience, one of “anxiety and alienation” (p. 902), as “There is a history and materiality to the affective atmospheres that emerge at the encounter at the museum” (p. 902). Simultaneously, Tolia-Kelly is involved with and documents museum practices in which communities are involved in curating the exhibits themselves, leading to a different kind of distinctly postcolonial museum experience (also see Tolia-Kelly, 2019).

While the British Museum’s “epistemic violence” flows through the curation itself in the case of Tolia Kelly (2016, 2019), other museums take on precisely the issues of violence and trauma through such analytics. For example, there is now a significant literature on “plantation house museums” (Modlin Jr. et al., 2011; Modlin Jr., 2008) and “southern plantation museums” (Hanna et al., 2018) in the U.S., where a dense politics of race and racism raises many of the same issues identified by Tolia-Kelly (2016). At these museums, the embodied practices of the site itself tends to emphasize and fully humanize the white “planter class” while simultaneously discouraging a similar relationship to the black slaves who are often ignored or misrepresented (see Modlin Jr. et al., 2011, p. 4, among others). In more recent years at some museums, this continues despite the conscious efforts of some museums to redress this disparity. Here is

where the affective components of the museum experience become paramount. While the museums are credited for including information about slavery, the overall effect of the tour creates an unequal affective scenario that privileges white experiences and bodies while continuing to marginalize black bodies and experiences. Just including information and facts is not enough to decenter whiteness. Modlin Jr. et al. (2011) refer to this as an "affective inequality" that structures the historical politics of race in these spaces, thereby linking the representational practices and performances of the tour guides themselves to this powerful embodied location where visitors' emotional and affective reactions form part of the political fabric of engagement. Their focus is on the "docent-visitor" relation, in which the power of the museum is generated in its most significant sense, insofar as new subjectivities can either emerge, or are restricted from emerging.

How else has this kind of violence been addressed in the museum setting? Turner and Peters (2015) consider another challenging kind of museum that attends to violence and trauma, but through the idea of atmosphere. Drawing on Bjerragaard (2015) and Waterton and Dittmer (2014), they consider the "Carceral atmospheres" of two prison museums in the U.K. For them, the literature on atmosphere allows a consideration of the ways that distinct elements of the museum combine to produce a cumulative effect on the visitor. In visiting the museums and their ghostly reinventions as more-or-less spectacularized ruins, Turner and Peters (2015) struggle to relate the findings back to the geographical issues around incarceration and state power. In fact, this opaque link is part of what they find dissatisfying about the museums, that although they are productive of powerful carceral atmospheres for the visitor, their larger

purpose remains vague and even dubious (cf. Bonnes and Jacobs, 2017). This is particularly true when the museum turns the suffering inflicted on the prisoners into a consumable object by way of simulation (Turner and Peters, 2015, p. 321; also see Miller and Del Casino Jr. 2018 on "negative simulation").

Affective techniques like these can likewise aid museums in communicating political messages. At the British Army Royal Engineers Museum in the U.K., Tidy and Turner (2020) adapt the "intimate geopolitics" of Pain (2015) and other feminist scholars to uncover the subtle ways that British imperial violence is normalized in the curation. While much of the museum details science and engineering feats, it is also powerfully narrated by what they call an "organizing object: one that anchors, orientates and indexes the broader museum collection, its comprising objects, and those who visit or might be included/excluded from it on particular terms" (p. 137). This object is a small pet dog named "Snob", "collected by British soldiers from a Crimean battlefield in 1854" (Tidy and Turner 2020, p. 119) and became their mascot. Today, it exists as taxidermy and in a case in the museum, but also as a cartoon figure that guides the visitor. By injecting this "loveable", "cute" and "family friendly" figure into the curation, the result is a set of "affective relations" (p. 138) that blunt the force of the museum's sordid reality (imperial violence). The deployment of this object dilutes the violence and trauma of empire and allows it to be absorbed into a consumer-orientated atmosphere. The dog, then, because it produces these feelings, transforms into "a container for British state violence in the past and present" (p. 137). This is a perfect example of soft combat in action, as the props of the museum work on the visitor directly and seek to modulate how they might feel and think about war.

Soft combat is perhaps somewhat limited to these domains, where the military state is attempting to shore-up civilian support for real or "hard" combat. This all leads to the question of what museums *should* do.

IV Embodied Persuasion

Witcomb (2013) considers the museum as a site where national identity might be "negotiated" and actively "produced", rather than simply "reproducing established narratives about it" (p. 259). As such, Witcomb (2013) pays attention to several museums in Australia where the museum space has come to occupy this unstable location. That is, several of the museums examined work precisely to "unsettle" the visitor in a way that challenges hegemonic assumptions about national identity in the context of Anglo-settler colonialism and its architecture of racism. More specifically, Witcomb (2013) examines

> "A small number of displays in recent Australian museological practice that aim to foster a critical engagement with the past and its legacies in the present. I argue that they do so by modeling the process of historical inquiry through the use of affective strategies of interpretation" (p. 256).

Interestingly, these practices deploy a kind of "poetics" to engender "empathy" in the visitor, similar to Modlin Jr. et al. (2011) and others above. While optimistic about these practices,

Witcomb (2013) is aware of a challenge they face: do they produce these affects only for those ready to receive them? It is less clear how Witcomb's examples are capable of dealing with reactionary responses (Ingram 2017), or even the simple lack of engagement from the population. After all, no one is required to visit a museum.

On the other hand, museums remain important civic institutions (Beel 2017; Morse and Munro 2018), especially for youth compelled to visit with school-affiliated activities (Phillips et al. 2015; McCreary and Murnaghan, 2019). In terms of the museum's growing role as an agent of social services (Morse and Munro, 2018, p. 362), museums are also potential sites of governmentality that work to encourage a new kind of subject formation through "empowerment" and "self-regulation" (Beel 2017, p. 462; drawing on Cruikshank's [1999] intrepretation of Foucault). If the governmentality of Beel's (2017) museum hinges on subject formation, soft combat and its biopolitics of affect are distinct because it begins with pre-subjective circuits of experience that may help activate governmentality, but might also escape it (Philo 2012; Anderson 2012; Waterton and Dittmer 2014; Miller 2015).

Others like Munro and Morse (2018), focusing also on how museums play greater civic functions, are more optimistic about museums as "spaces of care", adding caution against interpreting everything as confirmation of a theory (governmentality in this case) (also see Morse 2020). Also in this direction, Schorch et al. (2016) draw on Elijah Anderson's (2004) "cosmopolitan canopy" to consider these potentialities. Urban spaces of many kinds become these canopies that, for Anderson (2004), hold utopian potential for better understanding and

living with difference in multicultural societies. Not surprisingly, Schorch et al. (2016) explore this canopy at the museum and how it is operative at an affective level (following also Bagnall, 2003). The affective and interactive aspects of the museum led to some participants having a lasting cross-cultural experience. This allows them to craft a middle ground between non-representational theories of affect, and the politics of representation involved in human geographies (see Anderson, 2019 and Kinkaid 2020, among others). The museum space and its affective intensities shaped the conditions of possibility for the cosmopolitan canopy to form.

To conclude this section, we turn to museums that are explicitly political. Some museums are entirely dedicated to political party lines (see Gillen, 2014) or the prevailing assumptions of a military-industrial complex, as is the case for Miller and Del Casino Jr. (2018) at the Titan Missile Museum in Tucson, Arizona (USA). For them, a Cold War era-underground missile bunker and command center is transformed into a tourist attraction. The highlight is a simulation of a nuclear missile launch, a performance that adds a crucial emotive and affective dimension to the museum's overall ideological agenda of legitimizing nuclear warfare and the alleged superiority of militarized techno-science. Others like Reeves (2018a), Tidy and Turner (2020) and have extended similar studies into the politics of affect in this kind of museum space, expanding our understanding of how affect is involved in the "curation of conflict" (Reeves and Heath-Kelly 2020) and how tourism activities sometimes intersect with "totalizing security discourses" (Reeves 2018b, p. 219). Furthermore, these performances are often strongly gendered, as narratives around defending the territory/homeland constitutes masculinity, evident in the Air Force Museum in Sweden (Åse and Wendt. 2021), while Tidy and Turner

(2020) highlight how the “family friendly” space in the military museum relies on heteronormativity (p. 131).

To push forward soft combat, the next section turns to the Pima Air and Space Museum and “the Boneyard”, a unique military and tourist space in Tucson, Arizona, linked to the Titan Missile Museum discussed by Miller and Del Casino Jr. (2018) above. In some ways, our positionality as academics makes us outsiders to the military culture that comes under investigation at this site; neither of us served in the armed forces, but one of us is a U.S. citizen. As “civilian” academics, we are not confined to the official military narrative and discourse around U.S. military power. This allows us to set out from the beginning to understand what we consider a troubling possibility: the normalization of violence (Forsyth, 2019), and the capacity of militarism to infuse the leisure and tourism arena.

V Soft Combat at The Boneyard

The Pima Air and Space Museum opened in Tucson, Arizona (USA) in 1976, not far from the Davis-Monthan Air Force Base on the southern outskirts of the city. According to Stemm (2021), Director of Collections/Restoration at the Museum and author of “History of the Pima Air and Space Museum”, commanders of the base and its “Military Aircraft Storage and Disposition Center” had the idea for the museum. By the 1960s, obsolete aircraft from the World War II and 1950s eras were ending up there, and these commanders were compelled to preserve some of them as “aviation heritage of the country” (Stemm, 2021). Interestingly, these aircraft were put on display even before the creation of the museum, as they were first “placed along the base’s

fence line so that the public could see them through the fence" (online, no pagination). Today, the museum is an 80-acre complex, and includes 400 aircraft on display, as well as archives, photographs, art exhibits and the "Aviation Hall of Fame". The Davis-Monthan Air Force Base today remains active today and trains many fighter pilots deployed in conflicts around the world, including Iraq and Afghanistan. It also continues to house retired aircraft, being home to what is now called the "309th Aircraft Maintenance and Regeneration Group (309 AMARG)", also known as "the Boneyard". One of the most unique features of the museum is a bus tour to the Boneyard. Here, over 4,000 retired aircraft rest in the dry desert heat and are gazed upon by the curious visitor from the comforts of an air-conditioned bus. A guide – usually a retired Air Force veteran – provides narration over a microphone as the bus moves through many rows of aircraft (Figure 1).

Figure 1 here

Taking advantage of the abundant material that exists publicly online about this unique museum experience, including websites, blogs and travel videos posted on You Tube, we consider how the site enacts soft combat by the way it enrolls visitors into an embodied experience that frames the encounter with violence and trauma, thereby shaping how we might evaluate and make sense of such an encounter with the machinery of war. Building on Waterton and Dittmer (2014), Tolia-Kelly (2016, 2019) and others, we suggest the Boneyard uses tourism mobilities in the form of a bus tour to enculture pro-military feelings *en route*. Amateur videos available on You Tube allow a look into this military joyride around the 2,600-acre (11 km^2) facility, and we

glimpse how the embodied encounter unfolds through the sensibilities of road movie atmospherics and narration that seeks to *bring to life* dead warplanes in a banal yet phantasmagoric factory of military power. While these three videos edited the 75-minute tour significantly (28:27, 22:00, and 21:57 minutes), they provide a richly textured, if limited, glimpse into the Boneyard in action (Donovan 2017; Tag Along with Chet, 2015; Travelmentary TV, 2019).

Many of the aircrafts shown in the You Tube clips have a small plaque in front of them to identify their model, appearing to the uninitiated visitor as so many cryptic codes (S-2, ES-3A, H-3, TA-4J and so on). Sometimes, in smaller letters, a nickname appears ("Sea King", "Skyhawk"). The guide's voice – a confident male voice in each of three videos we analyzed – details the technical equipment laid before the visitors as the bus moves along slowly. While the script of the Titan Missile Museum is also highly technical (Miller and Del Casino Jr. 2018), what stands out at the Boneyard is a more tactical language. For example, there are many different types of aircraft there and the guide specifies what each was best used for (bombing; surveillance; radar jamming; transport, and so on). Along the way, we are *instructed* how to absorb the haunting fact that these machines were used for violence. As the bus moves from one aircraft described as an "anti-submarine marine controller", the guide's energy perks us when we arrive at what is next:

> "F-15 right next to it – everyone recognizes this, this is, ah, was America's air superiority, all-weather fighter. Actually, this one had a Gulf War victory – shot down a MIG during the Gulf War. And speaking of shoot downs, the F-15 has a

> pretty good record: its shot down 104 enemy aircraft and has sustained zero loses" (Travelmentary TV, 2019, minute 8:18).

The violence, then, is not avoided but is shrouded in masculinist bravado of "superiority" and "shoot downs". The tour is gendered in this foundational way (also see Åse and Wendt 2021), reinforced by two of the three guides referring to the pilots as "him". By turning the air war into something akin to a sporting match, we are coaxed into feeling "ok" about it all, much like Tidy and Turner's (2020) experience. The deadly payloads are sometimes mentioned, including nuclear bombs; cluster bombs; and uranium depleted shells that can "take out most armor" (Tag Along with Chet, 2015, minute 14:25). Yet as the bus moves along steadily, we hear no in-depth reflection on the conflicts themselves, or what kind of damage was left behind. The tour feels like a memorial to the aircrafts, the machinery of war, not to their many victims who are, for the most part, absent. Instead of trying to exclude and ignore this absence, we are instructed on how to deal with it, a position enhanced by the visitor being encased in a "tourist bubble" (Smith, 1978, p. 6) seated as "armchair" spectators (Larsen, 2001, p. 89) gazing at the rolling imagery of retired aircraft through the tour bus window.

By way of the mobile experience, we grasp the cumulative effect of the large quantity of warplanes, now grounded after a life patrolling the skies of the world. The warplanes are given additional life through the creation of lore. These planes are not dead; some are revived as "celebrities", providing an additional imaginary layer to their troubled materiality. Indeed, there is a special area labeled as "celebrity row" amid the many rows of lesser-known aircraft:

> “After we were inside the base, he gave us a plane-by-plane guide to “Celebrity Row,” a lineup of iconic aircraft retired here... I grew tired of craning my neck to one side (if you’re into fighters, grab a seat on the left side of the bus). My other heartbreak as a former “Warthog” crew chief: Endless rows of deadly tank-busting A-10 Thunderbolt IIs” (Sotham, 2014, online).

With this visitor, we find enthusiasm for an imagined celebrity of the fighter jets, as well as “heartbreak”, a more ambiguous expression without explanation. At the least, this is elicited by vastness of the site, which adds to its sense of grandeur. The size of the site is accentuated and made even more spectacular by the mobile technology of the bus, brushing us past “endless rows” of aircraft.

However, not all visitors were as enthusiastic as the returning crew chief. Traces of the negative – their deadly toll on the world – runs through other commentary and description. For Peter Hohenhaus, creator and author of a dark tourism website/blog (www.dark-tourism.com), the “sheer numbers” of the deadly aircraft, referred to as “huge killing machines”, proved overwhelming:

> “On the one hand what is to be seen is merely the end of the lives of all these huge killing machines, but their sheer number serves as a reminder of the military might all this technology represents. That's the creepy bit, really.

> Although I suspect that most visitors do not really see it that way and simply enjoy the techie side of it all” (www.dark-tourism.com).

Traces of the negative crop up, then, as “the creepy bit”. The large size of the site sinks in, signalling the latent power these aircraft still contain when assembled in such a way. Just because the Boneyard is not presented as a memorial does not mean an emotional battle is not being waged internally for the visitor. Admittedly, due to the editing, we do not get a sense of what the conversations or mood was like on the bus as a total experience. These potentially more difficult feelings are perhaps mitigated by the museum being a voluntary experience. Those who have experienced the trauma of war – including the pilots and crew – are perhaps not the most likely visitors. In one of the videos, participants on the tour chime-in and at times correct the tour guide, suggesting they too are veterans (Tag Along With Chet, 2015). We can also imagine powerful memories coming back to the unexpecting visitor. Haunting the tour, in any case, is the trauma experienced by the targets themselves and the wreckage these warcraft left behind (McGeachan, 2018). Instead of accounting for this wreckage, we marvel at the mega-ruin as an accumulation of “imperial debris” (Stoler, 2013), the hardware of empire that continues its geopolitical journey even as scrap (also see Landau and Pohl, 2021 on the “ruined museum”). While the aircraft are mined for parts, some models are destroyed immediately to as to prevent U.S. adversaries from acquiring them: “because Iran is flying those, we make sure they are shredded on site” (Travelmentary TV, 2019, minute 18:34). One guide also points out the awkward spacing of some B-52 jets, explaining how it has to do with complying with a

monitoring agreement with Russia involving satellite surveillance (Donovan 2017, minute 17:54).

The totality is that the ruinous military objects are made to come alive, insofar as their specific roles are replayed in the minds of the visitors. As the violence cannot be excluded entirely, visitors learn how to incorporate it into pro-military subjectivity that sees it as necessary, unproblematic, and largely technical (Gregory 2004). The overall effect is similar to Reeves's (2018a) findings at the London Imperial War Museum, that the tour "does not lead to emotional upheaval or critical reflection" (p. 117). Again, drawing on Reeves (2018b), this time from their work at Jerusalem's Holocaust History Museum, such practices can "reinforce, rather than challenge, totalizing security narratives" (Reeves 2018b, p. 219). This is perhaps not surprising, as it is a glimpse into how the military puts itself on display. Yet this is the point of Reeves (2018a, 2018b), Tidy and Turner (2020), and others interested in "intimate geopolitics": that these dimensions are the location of politics. Future work will focus on the totality of the tour and how it connects with the museum itself, and to what extent these discourses and narratives are reinforced or complicated.

VI Conclusion

Soft combat is about the power of the museum to absorb the visitor and influence them, particularly on topics surrounding state violence and trauma. This is a slightly different conceptualization than what has been offered in previous scholarship on the museum as a space of governmentality. At the Boneyard there is little evidence of governmentality flowing through

notions of “self empowerment” that Beel (2017) elaborates on as relevant for some kinds of museums. Instead, there is another kind of affective politics at play in the production of militaristic subjectivities that is more in line with Foucault’s later work on biopolitics (Anderson 2012; Philo 2012), thereby adding new dimensions to our thinking about what these spaces are and how they work. While a clear message is sent amid the workings of soft combat, this methodological approach is also attuned to how the environment itself generates traces of negativity, as the size of the sight encapsulates decades of military violence and can overwhelm the visitor. Soft combat attempts a powerful capturing maneuver, but the site itself is disruptive of any attempt to control it. Nevertheless, the Boneyard and other places like flow through leisure time, vacations, and days off work, shaping what we think we know about the use of deadly military force.

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