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## A new book gives a glimpse of the hidden infrastructure of torture operated by the CIA in its war on terror

Against my better judgement, I once visited the Museum of Torture in Amsterdam. An early pioneer in the field of medieval barbarity tourism, it proudly 'showcases' a grotesquely impressive array of torture and punishment devices, from the Inquisition chair (studded with spikes, naturally) to the guillotine, France's preferred method of despatching miscreants until 1981.

One obvious aim of such luridly titillating museological tableaux is to make us feel a bit better about ourselves. The average barbarity tourist emerges from their murky odyssey confident in the belief that state-sponsored torture, in its classic sense of medieval racking and whipping, belongs to a more primitive era of ignorance and superstition. Moreover, the concept of a torture chamber is no longer a gruesome reality awaiting those who have been judged transgressors, but now part of popular culture, de-fanged and osmosed into the colourfully permissive terrain of consenting BDSM fantasists.

Yet our medieval ancestors would still recognise in us the potential for unspeakable cruelty in the so-called national interest. Minutely codified by politicians, apparatchiks, the military and their willing subcontractors, this contemporary barbarity is much less obviously Grand Guignol and would thus make for a poor tourist attraction. Nonetheless, it does not escape scrutiny in a compelling new book documenting the global network of 'black sites' instigated and operated by the CIA at the height of its crusading post-9/11 war on terror.

*Negative Publicity: Artefacts of Extraordinary Rendition* is a collaboration between photographer Edmund Clark and counter-terrorism investigator Crofton Black. Sifting through the paper trails surrounding the process of conveying detainees around secret prisons, Clark and Black shed light on what was essentially a US government-sponsored campaign of kidnapping and torture. Between 2001 and 2008 an unknown number of people disappeared into this shadowy infrastructure, detained and



transferred without legal process. No public records were kept as prisoners were shuttled all over the world, from sites as disparate as Lithuania and Afghanistan. Many remain unaccounted for.

In its bureaucratic proscriptions for the treatment of detainees, the system of extraordinary rendition is beyond anything Kafka could have devised. And, as Kafka knew, horror is all the more horrific when cloaked in ordinariness, effectively hidden in plain sight. Most black sites were unremarkable, with buildings adapted as required. Interrogations could be (and were) carried out in hotel bedrooms. In one instance, a riding school in a Lithuanian forest (*pictured*) was extended with mysterious rapidity. Locals had suspicions, but none knew for sure it was a detention centre managed on behalf of the CIA.

Filtered through the super-realist gaze of Clark's photographs, everyday architecture assumes a profoundly *unheimlich* quality. 'This is a matrix of mundanity,' writes Eyal Weizman in his accompanying essay. 'Yet the minute we know secret things are happening around the corner, terror amplifies.' The photographs are accompanied by a paper trail of apparently innocuous documents: invoices, articles of incorporation, flight manifests, the business accountability of torture. A largely redacted CIA handbook of interrogation techniques is more explicit, with subsections that include 'stiff brush and shackles' and 'waterboard techniques'.

Raising fundamental questions about the complicity of governments in the erosion of human rights, *Negative Publicity* makes for uncomfortable reading. Through its admirably laconic account of what is done in our name, it carefully peels away the veneer of civilised behaviour, giving powerful expression to the appearance of disappearance. Insidiously infiltrating the everyday, torture is no longer a museum piece.

*Negative Publicity: Artefacts of Extraordinary Rendition* by Crofton Black and Edmund Clark with an essay by Eyal Weizman is published by Aperture.