

KEEP THE MEMORY ALIVE:
IMPERMANENT ACTS OF MEMORIALIZATION

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS
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This thesis will explore the phenomenon of temporary memorials as expression for marginalized groups through multiple case studies primarily from the United States but also with a brief look to Europe. After outlining prevailing themes and definitions of in cultural heritage management and memorial studies, there will be a series of case studies which demonstrate ephemerality in memorialization. The *counter-monument*, a term coined by Judaic Studies scholar James E. Young, is a memorial that uses passing action on the part of visitors to come to terms with a conflict and large-scale tragedy. The use of names on monuments and the deposition of personal and friable artifacts at those monuments by loved ones indicate the acknowledgement of complex individualized existence even within a national setting. Relatively small-scale construction of shrines

and personalized murals in often forbidden places provide a public forum to mourn and to confront the everyday realities of discrimination. Consequences of memorialization in the Digital Age include changes in storage and retrieval techniques that fundamentally alter what is and is not preservable. Although it only covers a small aspect of memory studies, this thesis explores a subtopic vital to practical application of contemporary theory in the social sciences. The information here will provide a springboard for further studies in multi-cultural and multi-social-class collaboration in physical memorial creation. It will promote the continuation of intangible cultural practices while maintaining peaceful societal functioning.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Memory studies, though they were not called such until fairly recently, are not new in academia. The ancient Greeks and Romans wrote on the subject, as did Renaissance and Enlightenment philosophers.¹ Our contemporary era is inundated with books and papers on the physical and philosophical processes of memory.² Contemporary memorial theorists such as James E. Young, an expert in the study of Holocaust memorials, and Marita Sturken, an expert in modern United States memorials, recognize that the space in which memory exists can influence *how* an individual or a group remembers events and the past.³ What is remembered and how that remembrance is conducted directly influences the existence of a culture and its continuation.

Young and Sturken, along with other scholars, have recognized the political and power value of creating and maintaining a memorial space, and by extension, how challenges to that dominant political and social structure can reveal themselves through the commissioning or modifying of monuments and memorial practices.⁴ However, these challenges are not restricted to merely changing the structure of a physical memorial. Rather, the approach to memorialization for social groups that are disenfranchised and otherwise discriminated against fundamentally reverses the approach of memorialization.

¹ Aleida Assman, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 2.

² Assman, *Cultural Memory*, 8. and Geoffrey Cubitt, *History and Memory*, Historical Approaches (New York, NY: Manchester University Press, 2007), 1.

³ James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (Yale University Press, 1993) and Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997).

⁴ Peter Jan Margry and Cristina Sanchez-Carretero, eds., *Grassroots Memorials: The Politics of Memorializing Traumatic Death*, Remapping Cultural History 12 (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2011) and David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1998)

Instead of creating large and permanent structures, marginalized groups have memorialized through temporary acts, such as touching, or deliberately using objects which will fade or disassemble, such as cloth.⁵ Furthermore, such transient memorials are likely to be repeated by those whose connection to the event or person is strong. Thus, a continuous connection to the event or deceased person is established for them, but that connection does not impose their feelings upon others. By conducting memorial acts that are ephemeral, either through temporary performance or the use of materials which are meant to physically disintegrate, there is an implicit rejection of the European and Euro-American obsession with saving tangible objects.⁶

This thesis will explore the phenomenon of temporary memorials as expressions of the continuity and uniqueness of socially and politically marginalized groups through multiple case studies, primarily from the United States, but also with a brief look to Europe. Chapter 1 will outline relevant terms and definitions as they relate to memorial studies. This first chapter will also outline the prevailing themes of politics in memorials in cultural heritage management and memorial studies as discussed by theorists Pierre Nora, David Lowenthal, Pierre Bourdieu, and others.

Analysis of the case studies will begin in Chapter 2. In an effort to express the continuity of a culture, an overarching social and political structure sometimes must react to a self-caused negative incident. The result for some groups is a state-sponsored memorial, but one which encourages the viewer to respond to it in an ephemeral way, for

⁵ Some memorials are specifically encouraged to be touched, such as the Memorial to Murdered Jews (see chapter 2). Others have developed a tactile existence, such as the Vietnam Memorial (chapters 2 and 3). Others, like the WWII memorial in Washington, D.C. and the Oklahoma City Memorial are constructed so that large portions are not accessible to the general public and therefore cannot be touched.

⁶ Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade*, 29.

example, by walking through and touching the structure as he or she passes by. Examples of this practice are to be found in various Holocaust memorials (*Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* (Berlin, 2005), *Memorial of the CID* (Dachau, 1968), *Monument Against Fascism* (Harburg, 1986), *Aschrott-Brunnen* (Kassel, 1989), the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (Washington, D.C., 1993)) both in Germany and the United States, and the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (1982), more colloquially known as the Vietnam Wall, in Washington, D.C. By building on the same case studies as Young and Sturken through examining the ephemerality of counter-monuments, this chapter firmly ties this thesis' analysis with their discussion of memorialization conducted two decades ago.

Chapter 3 expands on the discussion of the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial*. The use of individuals' names on monuments, such as the Vietnam Wall and the new official September 11th memorial in New York City, *Reflecting Absence* (2011), suggests that the organizations behind the creation of the structures put a premium on the individual lives which are represented by those structures. However, if this were the case, there would not have been so many individually addressed letters, objects, and flowers donated at these sites of mourning. These left objects allow for loved ones to continuously emphasize the complex life of the deceased, even after the larger social structure has attempted to subsume them into a more homogenized memory space through an all-encompassing memorial. The quick success of the *NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt*, constructed of multiple individualized panels, also indicates that even large public memorials are interacted with in an extremely personal way.

Chapter 4 looks at a more narrowly-defined marginalized group – the urban poor of the United States and southern Italy – and how their memorial practices embody both transient action and resistance to dominate societal ideals. Small-scale construction of shrines and personalized murals in often forbidden places provide a public forum to mourn and confront the everyday realities of discrimination. Although these memorials are made of materials that will disintegrate over time and can be destroyed quickly at the will of governmental powers, they both give voice to and elevate an otherwise powerless person to the position of active promoter of the marginalized community.

The final chapter will examine the new ways of memorialization emerging in the Digital Age and what they mean for those who use them. Increased access to mediums such as photography and film and archival and digital storage fundamentally changes what can be considered ephemeral, eternal, or even physical. However, as technology continues to change quickly, obsolescence of such technologies creates a barrier to accessing that which was considered to be permanently captured or stored. In this context, the only assurance of remembering an event or person is to have that memory continuously reside where it was created: the human mind.

Key Definitions

As historian Geoffrey Cubitt notes on the relationship between history and memory, definitions of words used in memorial studies, even such basic terms as “memory” and “history,” are often extremely loose, almost to the point of being useless, until specifically contextualized.⁷ Therefore these terms, as well as several others, must

⁷ Cubitt, *History and Memory*, 2-6.

be defined before delving into this thesis' argument concerning the relationship of memorials to memory and history.

Euro-American thought generally recognizes such a thing as a “past”, that which has occurred previous to the immediate moment and which will not be seen again. Past occurrences are relegated to memory, but memory is a nebulous concept. It runs as a continuum between “individual psychology at one end and the cultural dynamics of societies at the other.”⁸ To work within their various disciplines, scholars have therefore divided *memory* into two halves: the individual and the collective. This serves to distinguished ideas that are shared and ideas that are not shared, respectively. That which is not shared is generally disregarded in works of social science before the 1970s.⁹

Individual memory has generally been the domain of biologists, neurologists, and psychologists. While the science of memory is not the focus of this thesis, it is valuable to understand some of the core concepts of neural remembering when conducting memorial studies in the liberal arts. Science recognizes three parts of memory: the act of creating a maintainable memory (consolidating), the act of retrieving that memory (remembering), and the structures of the brain which support those acts.¹⁰ This thesis, and social science in general, focus on the former two “parts” of memory. The interdisciplinary *Memory Analogies Group* at the University of Illinois, consisting of a neuroscientist, a historian, a psychologist, and an anthropologist, have recognized this similarity in their respective

⁸ Cubitt, *History and Memory*, 6.

⁹ Cubitt, *History and Memory*, 10-11. Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1993), chapter 1.

¹⁰ Thomas J. Anastasio et al., *Individual and Collective Memory Consolidation: Analogous Processes on Different Levels* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), 2.

disciplines of social science and biological science. The definition of the neural process of consolidation, the act of converting “immediate and fleeting bits of information into a stable and accessible representation of facts and events, including a representation of the world and the entity’s place in it,” is nearly interchangeable with the definition of history, which falls on the collective side of memory’s continuum.¹¹

Collective memory, however, is a more complicated topic. The concept that groups of people experience memory originates with French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, a student of Emile Durkheim, in his book *On Collective Memory* (1941). Halbwachs’ original suggestion held that the individual, and therefore the individual’s memories, is shaped by larger societal pressures.¹² From this sprang multiple questions: is such a theory valid? If so, how much is the individual shaped by the collective? Can an individual break from the collective?

Collective memory can be broadly explained as cultural memory: events or actions in the past which a group of people use as a touchstone of social cohesion.¹³ However, broad theoretical definitions rarely work for real-world examples. As contemporary culture and media theorist Marita Sturken notes, cultural memory is not a thing, but rather, an act of “cultural negotiation” where “different stories vie for a place in history.”¹⁴ If this is the case, then what is this “history” being negotiated?

¹¹ Anastasio et al., *Individual and Collective Memory*, 2.

¹² Anastasio et al., *Individual and Collective Memory*, 48.

¹³ Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 1-3.

¹⁴ Ibid.

What differentiates history from other forms of collective memory is its broad sanctioning of a particular official point of view. People are familiar with history; schools indoctrinate students with it from a young age. History, for all intents and purposes, is an integral part of the social structure of society at large, one of those things that keeps a society or culture together and allows it to self-replicate. Social and governmental structure, however, is often described as a “top-down” way of maintaining order. As geographic scholar David Lowenthal noted, the rise of the nation-state in the eighteenth century saw an increased utilization of history and other cultural factors such as language to further patriotism and the interests of the state.¹⁵ To combat this, contemporary attempts at writing history are aimed towards remaining as objective as possible to the facts of past occurrences.¹⁶ There is then the unintended consequence of people interpreting very “protean” history texts as absolute truth.¹⁷ French historian Pierre Nora in *Les Lieux de Memoire* (1989) sees history as belonging “to everyone and no one, whence its claim to universal authority,” with a mission of suppressing and destroying what he calls memory.¹⁸

Nora’s use of memory emphasizes the social and active recollections of past events. In other words, living people embody memory by doing or at least knowing that they can do something to continue the memory. A cliché example of living memory, as it is often a cliché example of the word culture, is the act of traditional food-making.

¹⁵ Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade*, 63 & 110.

¹⁶ Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade*, 109.

¹⁷ Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade*, 105 and 116.

¹⁸ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire," *Representations*, no. 26 (Spring 1989): 9.

Making food is participatory and the knowledge of how to make it is transmitted directly from person to person by participating in production. Creating food from a recipe would not count; the transmitter is removed from the transmissée in both time and place, eliminating the social element and, by derivation, hampering the activity. To break the cycle of learning in person, then, is to not have a memory, but rather a history which is static.

To Nora, people of the modern period have removed themselves from their environments of memory and live in a broken world which not only leaves them in a volatile existential state, but also causes confusion over what to remember at all.¹⁹ In trying to regain a modicum of memory, people create *lieux de memoire*, a site of memory.²⁰ A *lieux de memoire* functions as a frozen bit of time; a moment or event is removed from the context of present life, and becomes a forced exercise in remembrance that is simultaneously self-referential and open to multiple interpretations.²¹ In English these *lieux* are usually referred to as memorials, but are memorials a manifestation of a history or an actual memory?

Unlike Nora, who sees memorial construction as a group's desperate attempt to recreate a shared lived environment, Judaic studies scholar James E. Young describes memorials as something at best useless, and, at worst, manipulative. To construct any memorial removes all sense "of the obligation to remember," and by extension allows

¹⁹ Nora, "Les Lieux de Memoire," 8.

²⁰ Nora, "Les Lieux de Memoire," 7.

²¹ Nora, "Les Lieux de Memoire," 12 and 23-24.

viewers to “become that much more forgetful” about the extension of tradition.²² Young goes on to say that “[b]y creating common spaces for memory, monuments propagate the illusion of a common memory”; common memories here are actually a fiction.²³ Rather than imposing shared human memories and emotion at a point in time or space, as in Nora’s idea of *lieux de memoire*, Young states that a space is created to “gather” individual memories and then “assign common meaning.”²⁴ From this assessment he rejects the idea that there is even such a thing as collective memory:

If societies remember, it is only insofar as their institutions and rituals organize, shape, even inspire their constituents’ memories. For a society’s memory cannot exist outside of those people who do the remembering – even if such a memory happens to be at the society’s bidding, in its name. For even though groups share socially constructed assumptions and values that organize memory into roughly similar patterns, individuals cannot share another’s memory any more than they can share another’s cortex.²⁵

However, it is too severe to say that societies cannot remember. As Nora and Lowenthal’s differentiation between history and memory acknowledges, the past can be static or it can be lived. A society remembers by having individuals pass information on continuously, by living and existing, and even by changing. This is why the more persistent aspects of culture are not objects, but rather, ways of relating to other people and the world. The preference for ideas rather than artifacts is even more apparent in marginalized groups. As Lowenthal observed, “[t]he marginalized are most apt to demote material legacies.”²⁶ Indeed, Young eventually admits that it is the manipulation of space which then manipulates the state of memory that is negative, not group remembering

²² Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 5.

²³ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 6.

²⁴ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, xi.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade*, 21.

itself: “Instead of allowing the past to rigidify in its monumental forms, we would vivify memory through the memory work itself – whereby events, their recollection, and the role monuments play in our lives remain animate, never completed.”²⁷

By this standard, then, many Western memorials do facilitate memory. Construction of massive sculptures or structures such as the Lincoln Memorial of Washington, D.C. (1922) and the Gateway Arch in St. Louis, Missouri (1965), are immobile, site-specific, and created to have popular appeal. Their connection to the event or person in question is tenuous, distant, or maybe even non-existent. These monuments, and others like them, require time, effort, and materials to construct; in short, they require the power and labor of people in order to physically manifest. An example of this power to create is the remodeling of the National Mall in Washington, D.C. in the 1930s, when the picturesque landscape was destroyed, along with hundreds of homes of minorities, in order to impose a neoclassical organization (originally designed by Elbert Peets in 1901), where the “space thus created a new kind of enlightenment, revealing the nation as [a] mysterious organizing force, rivaling nature itself.”²⁸

The divide of history and memory is, however, a primarily European and Euro-American one. Studies of groups which consider time to be cyclical rather than linear maintain that there is no need to construct memorials of any permanence, and in fact some even actively discourage it in order to keep the cycle of time going.²⁹ For example,

²⁷ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 15.

²⁸ Kirk Savage, *Monument Wars: Washington, D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 170.

²⁹ Ann Christine Taylor, "Remembering to Forget: Identity, Mourning, and Memory among the Jivaro," *Man*, n.s., 28, no. 4 (December 1993).

the Jivaro of the Amazon conduct rituals to dissociate deceased individuals from living individuals in order for the life forces of the deceased to return as new individuals.³⁰ Europeans and Euro-Americans, on the other hand, preserve and collect objects and ideas due to their inability to differentiate what must be continued and what must be forgotten, either individually or socially.³¹

Nor is collective memory even restricted to large collectives of people. As Cubitt argues, memorials may reflect “the uneven distribution of power within society, [but] it is also the field within which different groups and communities seek to establish the legitimacy of their interests and the terms of their past and continuing participation in the larger national society.”³² The powerful may build a structure or a monument to their desired form, but they cannot force participation in the making or reception of the memorial in the way they anticipate. As Young notes, “memorials by themselves remain inert and amnesiac, dependent on visitors for whatever memory they finally produce.”³³

This ambivalence of purpose places many memorials in a space between chaos and complete order, where meaning is assigned through improvisation, change, and personal narrative against the backdrop of memorial itself. This space between the individual and the dominant society has been the subject of much study in the last fifty years, with multiple explanations and names for modes of mediation between them.³⁴

³⁰ Taylor, "Remembering to Forget," 658-659.

³¹ Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade*, 29 and Nora, "Les Lieux de Memoire," 13-14.

³² Cubitt, *History and Memory*, 228.

³³ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, xiii.

³⁴ Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth* and Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1977)

Collectively, these theories are referred to as *practice theory*, a concept popularized by sociologist/philosopher Pierre Bourdieu with his description of *habitus*, individual life acting and reacting in an informed way to extant or perceived realities.³⁵ The continuous relation to a memory through ephemeral memorialization is an act within an individual's *habitus*.

Less theoretical about this phenomenon is anthropologist Renato Rosaldo, who refers to *habitus* as *nonorder*; the death of his wife Michelle Rosaldo in the Philippines in 1981 led him to fully realize the role of emotion in shaping an individual's thoughts and actions.³⁶ In fact, prior to his wife's death Rosaldo was unable to make the connections that his Ilongot subjects expressed between anger and grief, and their proclivity for headhunting as a way to mitigate those emotions. His first-hand experience with rage at Michelle's death finally gave him insight into the Ilongot, and by extension the uniqueness of an individual's emotional and intellectual position even within a larger social group. For Rosaldo and many others, the practical realities of living do not always match the stated rules or follow the anthropological model.

Rosaldo's personal tragedy is a reminder that life, in general, and the emotion of grief, in particular, is primarily "the practical matter of how to live with one's belief's, rather than the logical puzzlement produced by abstruse doctrine."³⁷ The smaller the group experiencing an event, the more acute this maxim. Doctrine assumes and requires multiple persons in order to exist. Subgroups within a larger ideological structure

³⁵ Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 72.

³⁶ Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth*, 102.

³⁷ Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth*, 6-7.

therefore are more likely to conduct actions that fulfill the present tangible need rather than merely fall back on the doctrinal prescription. However, as mentioned above, the current doctrinal prescription for memorialization in the United States and Europe has become the impossible goal of saving everything. There is a constant disassociation from the past through a “growing belief in a right, a capacity, and even a duty to change,” which has been brought on by commodification and capitalism.³⁸ As a reaction to this, subgroups who are often marginalized socially and politically, such as religious and ethnic minorities, express their grief through resistance against those controls in the form of ephemeral actions and objects when creating memorials.

Not everything and anything qualified as “temporary” can serve as a memorial. If that were the case, every thing ever retained even for a short period (in psychological parlance “labile” memory) would be permanently and immediately accessible, which is simply not the case.³⁹ Science shows that to be retained, a memory must be repeatedly related to something else.⁴⁰ Cubitt explains that societies recognize this as well. In maintaining a ritual calendar, a society makes “the rounds of their symbolic references,” which “periodically revivifies” their significance.⁴¹ Temporary memorials promote this repetition of action by needing to be continuously performed or replaced.

Given this, the memory space provided by temporary memorials rather than physical structures is therefore more accessible to marginalized people who have come to

³⁸ Nora, "Les Lieux de Memoire," 8.

³⁹ Anastasio et al., *Individual and Collective Memory*, 2.

⁴⁰ Anastasio et al., *Individual and Collective Memory*, 79.

⁴¹ Cubitt, *History and Memory*, 220.

value intangible means of identification and communication. Temporary memorials function as a parallel between individual memory and collective memory:

[T]hey are all formed by a process of consolidation, in which a set of labile items are held temporarily, relationships are established between them, and a stable representation is distilled from that system of relationships, all under the influence of the consolidating entity.⁴²

Individual memory and individual expressions of memory, then, are just as important to examine as collective memory and collective expressions. Acknowledging individual expression within a larger culture opens the door for further study of intangible heritage, and, by extension, the preservation and continuation of unique memorial practices.

⁴² Anastasio et al., *Individual and Collective Memory*, 253.

Chapter 2: Counter-Monuments

The purpose of a memorial is to stand as a symbol of an important event, person, or object that cannot be physically experienced. Thus a memorial is a ritualized substitute of presence; its purpose is to function as a “corporeal presence to mediate the absence.”⁴³ Usually it is designated as a commemorative space where the act of memorialization “fix[es] meanings over time by attaching them to physical monuments or places, and by repetition and restructuring in rituals of remembrance.”⁴⁴ Therefore a “failed” memorial, one that does not effectively mediate an absence, is not always a site of memory. Even if the memorial’s structure is preserved, a failed memorial does not preserve the feelings or other intangible cultural aspects associated with the event or person to which the memorial was dedicated.

The term “monument” is sometimes misused as a synonym for memorial; however, the former term carries with it the connotation of large size and grandiosity. James E. Young suggests that the word monument implies triumph and self-aggrandizement.⁴⁵ Young coins the term “counter-monument” (and “counter-monumentality”) to describe those places of memory which do not allow for the fixing of memory, whether through the location/object’s physical or emotional ambiguity.⁴⁶

⁴³ Marita Sturken, "The Aesthetics of Absence: Rebuilding Ground Zero," *American Ethnologist* 31, no. 3 (August 2004): 313.

⁴⁴ Tim Benton and Clementine Cecil, "Heritage and Public Memory," in *Understanding Heritage and Memory*, ed. Tim Benton (New York: Open University, 2010), 19.

⁴⁵ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 21.

⁴⁶ Young, *The Texture of Memory* and Gabriel Moshenska, "Charred Churches or Iron Harvests?: Counter-monumentality and the Commemoration of the London Blitz," *Journal of Social Archaeology* 10, no. 1 (February 2010): 7.

The counter-monument embraces what French historian Pierre Nora feels is the most important characteristic of a memorial: adaptability of meaning and significance:

For if we accept that the most fundamental purpose of the *lieu de memoire* [location of memory] is to stop time, to block the work of forgetting, to establish a state of things, to immortalize death... in order to capture a maximum of meaning in the fewest of signs, it is also clear that the *lieux de memoire* only exist because of their capacity for metamorphosis, an endless recycling of their meaning and an unpredictable proliferation of their ramifications.⁴⁷

Through their ambivalent forms and meanings, counter-monuments are extremely adaptable to any meaning that is assigned to them. When the social structure finds that it must memorialize a violation of its own contemporary ideologies, the memorial created is a counter-monument, which encourages ephemeral and personal interaction through movement and touch. Counter-monuments are commonly used in Holocaust memorials and in memorials to unpopular wars, such as the Vietnam War.

Holocaust memorials

Since its reunification in 1989, contemporary Germany has found itself in the unique position of memorializing those killed by its former government, the National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP)⁴⁸. Even before unification became a reality, there were calls by German citizens to build a national memorial for Jewish victims in the capital.⁴⁹ In 1990, a location of 20,000 square meters was set aside for the memorial in the heart of Berlin, one block away from the Brandenburg Gate, itself an eighteenth

⁴⁷ Nora, "Les Lieux de Memoire," 19.

⁴⁸ While it could be said that there is not a continuous connection between the Nazi government of the 1930s and 1940s and contemporary German government, the latter quickly took up the obligation of remembrance. James E. Young, "Germany's Holocaust Memorial Problem - and Mine," *The Public Historian* 24, no. 4 (Fall 2002): 66.

⁴⁹ Joachim Schlör, *Memorial to the Murdered Jews in Europe, Berlin* (New York: Prestel, 2005), 32.

century monument.⁵⁰ In order to select the memorials to fill the space, two art competitions were held, one in 1994 and one in 1997. The piece selected by nationally-sponsored jury from the 1994 competition, a tombstone-like concrete block with the names of victims carved into it, was highly criticized due to its grim tombstone-like appearance and was ultimately rejected.⁵¹ The competition winner from 1997, designed by Peter Eisenman and Richard Serra, was ultimately built in 2003 and opened to the public in 2005.⁵² The design of the *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* consists of 2,711 blank concrete stelae (2.98m*.95m*.5-4.7m) laid out in a grid across 4.75 acres.⁵³ An information center, not part of the original design, was placed in the southeast corner of the memorial to house Holocaust information, and to provide a venue for lectures, offices, and a bookstore.⁵⁴

The *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* is of course not the only Holocaust memorial, nor even the only one in Berlin. Various former concentration camps throughout Europe have struggled with creating memorials for their victims. The Dachau concentration camp in particular has had several challenges in creating appropriate and meaningful memorials.⁵⁵ Since its liberation in 1945, the site has been subjected to multiple memorial projects, some of which have been abandoned and others

⁵⁰ Ibid. and James E. Young, "Germany's Holocaust Memorial Problem - and Mine," *The Public Historian* 24, no. 4 (Fall 2002): 66.

⁵¹ Young, "Memorial Problem," 67 and Schlör, *Memorial*, 34.

⁵² Schlör, *Memorial*, 35 and 61.

⁵³ Schlör, *Memorial*, 45.

⁵⁴ "Berlin Opens Holocaust Memorial," *BBC News*, May 10, 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/4531669.stm>. Schlör, *Memorial*, 45.

⁵⁵ Kathrin Hoffman-Curtius and Susan Nurmi-Schomers, "Memorials for the Dachau Concentration Camp," *Oxford Art Journal* 21, no. 2 (1998).

which have been completed. Unfortunately, many of these have failed as memorials; they do not perform the duty of substituting a connection to the past in a way that is appropriate for the people who share the memory of imprisonment and its associated terrors. For several of these designed memorials, like the West-German government-sponsored “Watertower” (1950), which resembled a baptistry, and the Roman Catholic chapel and convent (1960) constructed on site, the obvious reason for failure stems from the use of Christian symbolism imposed on a site of primarily Jewish memory.⁵⁶ However, another possibility for their failure lies in their monumental nature. These Holocaust memorials are large, solid structures, built with an eye to German national redemption.⁵⁷ Instead, it is the memorial created by Nandor Glid for the Comité International de Dachau (CID) that has come the closest to functioning successfully as a memorial in that it “relieve[s] the burden of the past” and “bring[s] together the living and those who had survived the concentration camp.”⁵⁸

The *Memorial of the CID* from 1968 falls into the category of counter-monumental, with its abstract combination of barbed wire and the mutilated human form. Placed on top of a cement pedestal reminiscent of a wall, distorted stretched bodies form the meshed wire wrapped around two metal poles, while hands, feet, and heads become the barbs. The spikes of barbed wire offer a direct response to the redemptive “thorns” that top the Catholic chapel and the organized fencing of Dachau itself by showing the

⁵⁶ Hoffman-Curtis and Nurmi-Schomers, “Dachau,” 33-39.

⁵⁷ Hoffman-Curtis and Nurmi-Schomers, “Dachau,” 39.

⁵⁸ Hoffman-Curtis and Nurmi-Schomers, “Dachau,” 43.

reality of “segregation and extermination” as well as “murder and suicide.”⁵⁹ Located in the former assembly area of the camp, it was originally part of the assumed end of the interpretive site tour, thus leaving visitors on a negative note. Today, visitors experience the *Memorial of the CID* as one of the earlier stops on the tour, and as such it loses some of the raw emotional power it would have if it were left as a final point of reflection.⁶⁰

With the effectiveness of *Memorial of the CID* in mind, it is not surprising that many other memorials were built after it in Germany using the same ideas of counter-monumentality. Like *Memorial to Murdered Jews*, the *Monument Against Fascism* (1986) by Jochen and Esther Gerz in Harburg, a suburb of the city of Hamburg, is blatantly located in the center of a populated area.⁶¹ However, unlike the *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe*, which is a permanent sculpture, the lead pillar that is the *Monument Against Fascism* was meant to disappear. Located in a shopping center, the pillar was meant to be written on by the public with provided steel styluses, and was gradually sunk into the ground, along with all the public inscriptions, by the artists over the time of a few years so that almost no trace of it remains. In a similar vein, the *Aschrott-Brunnen* (1989), a monument built to replace a Jewish-sponsored fountain destroyed by the Nazis, in the city of Kassel is specifically designed to be underground. These monuments are counter-monuments in that they are purposefully hidden, demanding the viewer remember without a mnemonic.⁶²

⁵⁹ Hoffman-Curtis and Nurmi-Schomers, “Dachau,” 43.

⁶⁰ Hoffman-Curtis and Nurmi-Schomers, “Dachau,” 41-43.

⁶¹ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 28.

⁶² Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 30-31.

The *Memorial of the CID*, *Monument Against Fascism*, and *Aschrott-Brunnen* are the antecedents of *Memorial to Murdered Jews*, although the permanence and size of it might suggest otherwise. Unlike *Monument Against Fascism* and *Aschrott-Brunnen*, *Memorial to Murdered Jews* takes the negative memory associated with German guilt and transforms it into something that can be directly confronted through allowing it to hide in plain sight. Despite its size, *Memorial to Murdered Jews* is still a counter-monument because it disperses the memory of the Holocaust through its design. The fact that it is comprised of many small differently-sized parts rather than the large single block (which was, as mentioned above, the form of the rejected design) prevents the viewer from fixing memory to one specific point. It does not force a political or emotional agenda on the viewer, nor even a physical focal point. Likewise, its location in the center of Berlin between the Brandenburg Gate and Potsdamer Platz makes it a piece of a constantly changing city atmosphere rather than a memorial site set aside for intense reflection.

This capacity for a memorial to blend into everyday life is exactly what designer Eisenman intended.⁶³ The artist and the press consistently emphasize the “inter-actability” of the monument, something to be touched and moved through rather than a monument frozen in time. Any solid information regarding the monument, such as names of victims, is underground, requiring deliberate action on the part of the viewer to view it. Yet, it is the everyday participation of pedestrians that transforms something so horrific as the murder of six million people into something able to be psychologically processed. By interacting with the memorial, the emotions of shame, acceptance, and a desire to

⁶³ "Berlin Opens Holocaust Memorial."

avoid such atrocity in the future are imparted without causing to the viewer to be overcome by guilt or the desire to ignore the message.

Intriguingly, other Holocaust memorials created before *Memorial to Murdered Jews* also use literal stony fragments. The memorial at *Treblinka*, built in 1964 at the site of one of the most deadly concentration camps in Poland, is composed of seventeen thousand large stones surrounding a craggy plinth.⁶⁴ Several other memorials located in Poland incorporate pieces of shattered Jewish gravestones that were destroyed during Nazi control: in the towns of Kazimierz (1984), Wegrow (1982), and Lodz (unfinished - begun in the 1940s).⁶⁵ However, while the medium and forms are relatively the same, these Polish memorials do not reflect an attempt to create multiple fleeting feelings. One wonders how varied the approach to remembering at these sites can be since there are few, if any, local Jewish people there to supply a living meaning.⁶⁶ Tourists do come and visit these sites, but usually during a scheduled Holocaust tour sponsored by various Jewish associations. Many of these associations are international, such as the United Jewish Appeal and the American Jewish Congress, which presumes a self-selection for those seeking memorial structures and active participation. In Poland, most memorials to the Holocaust or former Jewish communities, funding, and visitors, come from Israel, Western Europe, and the United States.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 186.

⁶⁵ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, chapter 7.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 207.

Compare these European examples of counter-monuments to American memorials to the Holocaust. The largest memorial, the *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum* in Washington, D.C., is located about a block away from the other monuments on the grounds of the National Mall. While the museum rotates exhibits, Kirk Savage still finds it static, a building-monument that focuses on horror rather than the Holocaust itself. The structured visiting pattern, which includes progression from light and airy rooms to dark and tight ones, and the shocking nature of the exhibits, such as photographs of abused prisoners, prevent an opportunity for the visitor to change thought processes or behavior or even effectively remember what they just viewed.⁶⁸ James Young finds its closing galleries merely a story of American triumph, focusing on the immigration and assimilation of Holocaust survivors into the American populace, followed by a vista of other American monuments upon exiting.⁶⁹ The United States has no need for a national counter-monument to the Holocaust because the narrative of American intervention in World War II is one of liberation, victory, and heroism, despite whether that was actually the case. It is this positive narrative that makes it easier for the United States to dedicate a memorial to the Holocaust than to create a meaningful and appropriate memorial to American abuses such as African-American slavery or Native American decimation.

Young also compares the large physical memorials in Germany and the United States to the memorialization approach in Israel, the Jewish state created in 1948 by the United Nations. In an almost total reversal of the German approach to memorializing the

⁶⁸ Savage, *Monument Wars*, 286-287.

⁶⁹ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 347.

Holocaust, Israel has created a literal ephemeral memorial: a two-minute siren to go off at 8am on the day of remembrance called Yom Hashoah.⁷⁰ Despite this intangible form of memorial, the siren is still a counter-monument. In 1959, the memorial day of Yom Hashoah was strategically placed within the complex combination of Jewish and secular calendars to serve a greater nationalist narrative of rebirth and heroism for the Israeli state.⁷¹ The blasting of the emergency sirens carries connotations of national crisis, and thus national coming-together. Indeed, everyone in the country is subjected to the siren regardless of their religion or location during both the present time and World War II. The populace literally stops what they are doing; even those driving stop and exit their cars to observe the memorial-alarm. As Young argues, this two minute period is a co-opt, a “nationalization of many competing memories,” for in those moments there is a “risk of confusing the shared moment for a shared memory.”⁷² The Yom Hashoah siren of Israel is an intangible memorial which imposes one meaning on the population, calling forth a national narrative rather than an individualized one.

The Vietnam Wall

The United States also has its share of counter-monuments. One of the earliest and most famous is that of the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* in Washington, D.C., created in 1982 to commemorate American casualties from the controversial Vietnam War. The Vietnam War was one of the United States’ longest military conflicts, running from 1955

⁷⁰ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 276.

⁷¹ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 269 & 280-281.

⁷² Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 280-281.

to 1975, though ground troops were only in use from 1965 to 1973. The United States was allied with the South Vietnamese government against the North Vietnamese government and its Communist allies who aimed to make Vietnam a communist state. The war was, and continues to be, controversial due to multiple factors including, but not limited to, the draft, moral questions about the legitimacy of invasion and war, and disagreement with domestic and international policy. The chaotic removal of United States personnel from Saigon in April 1975, and the official take-over of South Vietnam by North Vietnam the next year, has led many to claim the war an American military loss.

In 1979, the non-profit group the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF) began raising money for a memorial to the Vietnam War. After acquiring a space on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. a competition was held to select a winning design. The commission was granted to Yale student Maya Lin, a Chinese-American woman from Ohio. Her design featured a 246 foot long polished black granite chevron-shaped wall dug into the earth inscribed with the names of those killed or missing in action during the course of the war. The polished surface serves as a shadowy mirror for the viewer who sees their own reflection among the more than 58,000 names of war victims. In her design submission Maya Lin made it clear that her wall of names was not meant to be a static:

The memorial is composed not as an unchanging monument, but as a moving composition to be understood as we move into and out of it. ... Brought to a sharp awareness of such a loss, it is up to each individual to resolve or come to terms with this loss. For death, is in the end a personal and private matter, and the area contained with this memorial is a quiet place, meant for personal reflection and private reckoning.⁷³

⁷³ Maya Lin, *Letter of Submission*, Design, accessed March 21, 2013, <http://www.vvmf.org/Design>.

Like the *Memorial to Murdered Jews*, the Vietnam Wall is made to be seen from multiple angles, walked along, and touched.

Even before construction began on the Wall, the design faced serious criticism from artists and military members. Its depth, its black color, and its lack of classical triumphant symbolism were considered to be shameful, effeminate, and discouraging.⁷⁴ A compromise for the design added a figural group of three soldiers a short distance away (completed two years after the Wall) called *The Three Soldiers*, designed by Frederick Hart, and another figural group of three female nurses tending a wounded soldier added called the *Vietnam Women's Memorial*, designed by Glenna Goodacre, in 1993. In essence, the controversy occurred because Maya Lin's design was a counter-monument that allowed for individual interaction.

In fact, without stating it explicitly, the VVMF refused to have a monument in the manner of Young's definition of monument, a memorial which is triumphant and/or excessively patriotic. The memorial the VVMF would fund had to meet the criteria of being "reflective and contemplative in character" and had to "make no political statement about the Vietnam War."⁷⁵ While having absolutely no political statement about an inherently controversial war is arguably impossible, this requirement certainly has a preference for the tone of the piece that would not be fulfilled by bold obelisks like the *Washington Monument* (designed by Robert Mills in 1848 – completed 1884). It could even be said that the members of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund were not

⁷⁴ Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 52-53.

⁷⁵ "Maya Lin's Award-Winning Design," Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, accessed March 21, 2013, <http://www.vvmf.org/317.cfm>.

expecting a triumphant memorial since such displays had slowly fallen out of favor since the 1920s and more quickly since the 1940s.⁷⁶ Furthermore, a standard monument could spark even more controversy amongst the public. With the design contest held only six years after the official end of the military fighting, the majority of veterans, along with the thousands of war protesters, were in their thirties. For these relatively young people, the memories of the war were still quite vivid, especially for those suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

However, it is the careful calculation that it takes to create a counter-monument that may in fact turn it into an exercise in monumentality. In their analysis of the *Massachusetts Vietnam Memorial* of Worcester (designed by the architectural firm Harby, Rogers and Catanzaro and dedicated in 2002), psychology student Zachary Beckstead and his team conclude that no matter what a physical memorial is made of or how it looks it will always have “socially mediated meanings” and therefore is a tool of social cohesion rather than an opportunity for personalizing experience.⁷⁷ This Vietnam memorial, located in a park, is a combination of natural and human-created elements: several large architectural and landscape elements including trees, a lake, flags, and stones with not only names carved into them, but also full letters from soldiers who served and died in Vietnam. Although this design would seem to imply great freedom of movement through the memorial, and therefore increased freedom of thinking and relating, Beckstead et al. acknowledge that space is in fact easily manipulated through

⁷⁶ Andrew M. Shanken, "Planning Memory: Memorials in the United States during World War II," *The Art Bulletin* 84, no. 1 (March 2002).

⁷⁷ Zachary Beckstead et al., "Collective Remembering through the Materiality and Organization of War Memorials," *Journal of Material Culture* 16, no. 3 (September 2011): 196.

site lines and walkways and that it may manipulate other people. Likewise, materials used in the construction are already charged with social meaning (e.g. the *black* stone of the Wall in Washington, D.C.) and can be used to manipulate the viewer.⁷⁸ Even a counter-monument is a tool of the designer and the larger cultural structure, though the purpose of such a design is purportedly healing and resuming productive society rather than to promote social cohesion through exultation.⁷⁹

The *Massachusetts Vietnam Veterans Memorial* is much larger and more complex than the Vietnam Memorial in Washington. Despite the additions to the memorial, which were an attempt to push monumentality and other classical constraints on the memorial, it is still the Vietnam Wall which dominates the visitor experience of the memorial, and the Wall is minimalist in the extreme. The *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* has only a few simple traits, all of them ambiguous: clean lines, dark color, and most importantly, names. The listing of names, as Sturken pointed out and this thesis will address below, is both everything and nothing.⁸⁰ The black coloration of the stone has connotations of mourning, but also connotations of pride and dignity, especially for the African American community who are colloquially referred to as “black” Americans. The reflective nature of the stone is a reflection of the nature of war and of the events of the past, and also a reflection of the viewer. Ultimately there is no one definition of grief, loss, or war to be found at the Vietnam Wall, which makes it easier to relate to as an individual and serves

⁷⁸ Beckstead et. al., “Collective Remembering,” 209.

⁷⁹ Beckstead et. al., “Collective Remembering,” 210.

⁸⁰ Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 61.

as a better mimic of the ephemeral than does the *Massachusetts Vietnam Memorial*, which purposefully tugs at specific emotions.

Certainly no one can argue the success of the Vietnam Wall. Kirk Savage says it single-handedly “rescued the public monument from what appeared certain oblivion.”⁸¹ For something so small and relatively simple, the Wall draws between 22 and 30 million visitors a year. People interact with the Wall, touch it, take rubbings, and although it was never intentioned as a deposition site, leave personal items along the top and bottom of panels, and in the cracks between them. There have been several traveling replica walls made (most notably *The Wall that Heals* (1996), handled by the VVMF) and the Vietnam Wall has also spawned copy-cat memorials, even within the National Mall itself.⁸² It could even be said that the Vietnam Wall has prompted the contemporary minimalist approach to memorials. Maya Lin, despite the controversies she sparked at the time of the Wall’s construction, is now revered as a top memorial designer, even sitting on the jury panel of the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation for the 9/11 memorial with James E. Young and others.⁸³

But just as all contemporary memorials are not counter-monuments, present success is not necessarily a predictor of future success. While the counter-monument trend started by the Vietnam Wall is an attempt to prevent stagnation of interpretation, differing interpretations of events start to drop off as a past event moves from individual

⁸¹ Savage, *Monument Wars*, 261.

⁸² Meredith H. Lair, "The Education Center at the Wall and the Rewriting of History," *The Public Historian* 34, no. 1 (Winter 2012): 39.

⁸³ Allison Blaise and Lynn Rasic, *A Place of Remembrance: Official Book of the National September 11 Memorial* (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2011), 130-131.

memory to the collective history of an event, and as particular topical threads are emphasized over others. The generation that fought both in and against the Vietnam War is aging. What will become of this incredibly emotional memorial when the people who knew the events first hand are gone? Will visitors still leave items at the Wall? What sort of items will they be?⁸⁴ Will the Vietnam Wall even continue to be a counter-monument? A new education center is being built on the opposite side of Henry Bacon Drive as the Wall, but only focuses on military action, and the deaths of particular individuals. In 2001, this education center was designed to contain memorials to some of the individuals on the wall, and also offer historical information on the war itself. It could accommodate 50 people at a time. By 2011, the design and content of the proposed center had sprawled to accommodate 350 visitors and has become a shrine to military action and personnel.⁸⁵ This change is a direct result of the 9/11 attacks, a cocktail of panicked patriotism and the need to justify yet another unpopular war. Will this additional act of monumentalism push the Wall into interpretive stagnation for future generations?

The Vietnam Wall in Washington, D.C. is designed so minimally that visitors can see any meanings they like in their blackened reflections. This keeps interpretations of the Vietnam Wall and the homefront protests as open as possible; the meaning is neither good nor bad, only what is placed on it through interaction. However, the ambiguity of counter-monuments is still open to nationalized standards of what is able and allowed to be remembered in the United States as well as more autocratic countries. Even materials

⁸⁴ For further discussion about adaptation of a memorial after those who lived with the memory have died, please see: Geoffrey M. White, "Emotional Remembering: The Pragmatics of National Memory," *Ethos* 27, no. 4 (December 1999).

⁸⁵ Lair, "The Education Center at the Wall," 40.

that hold multiple cultural meanings only hold so many of them. Additions or subtractions to the memorial can change the meaning and interpretation entirely, particularly after all those with a direct memory of the event have died, as may be the case with the Vietnam Wall's new education center.

It is for this reason that at the end of his book on the National Mall, *Monument Wars* (2009), Kirk Savage suggests that what is needed on the Mall are not more permanent memorials, but rather ephemeral ones, those lasting less than ten years. The goals of such an action would be prevention of ossification and the embracing of difference, what counter-monuments attempted to do in the first place.⁸⁶ Counter-monuments can only mimic the individualized fulfillment of fleeting memorial action on the part of the viewer; they cannot do it on their own. Understanding the role ephemeral action has in memorialization will lead to fewer failed memorials and better understanding of the intangible heritage practices than influence them.

⁸⁶ Savage, *Monument Wars*, 312.

Chapter 3: Individualizing

There has been a noticeable trend in the last thirty years for memorials to include the names of the deceased on the memorials themselves. This can be seen on the Vietnam Wall and *Reflecting Absence* and other 9/11 memorials such as, the *Flight 93 National Memorial* (unfinished) in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. The inclusion of names was intended and approved. However, the act of individualizing those names has run parallel to the trend; loved ones leave personalized artifacts at the location of, or as part of, the memorial. For example, the use of personal artifacts as a purposeful part of a memorial can be seen in the *NAMES Project Memorial Quilt* (begun in 1986), also known as the AIDS Quilt, which allows people to create individualized panels in honor of a person who died of AIDS. This chapter will argue that this trend of individualization is the result of more socially-marginalized peoples attempting to reclaim a person's memory from the homogenized traditional monument. By using personalized and often fragile objects, mourners reclaim the individual from the broad narrative they were absorbed into regardless of their actual participation. This chapter will explore the power of naming in memorials through case studies of the Vietnam Wall, *Reflecting Absence*, and the AIDS Quilt and the personalization of those names by non-governmental groups.

Claiming a Name

The act of leaving items at memorials is prominent at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and at the sites of the September 11th attacks in Washington, D.C., New York City, and Shanksville, Pennsylvania, though it also occurs at far less well-known sites as well, such as sites of traffic accidents throughout the United States. On reflection,

placing additional memento items seems redundant, particularly at the memorials which already have the name(s) of the deceased on them. Names are a common, if not essential, aspect of memorial practice. From simple grave plaques to towering stones, names serve to identify the person or event of commemoration. However, as Marita Sturken points out, “[t]he name evokes both everything and nothing.”⁸⁷ A name is an abstract; as with any noun it is a symbol, in this case a symbol of a human being. But human beings are notoriously complex. Names may be “symbolic harbingers of individual lives”, but they speak of nothing specific, serving only as “rhetoric of implicature.”⁸⁸ A name does not reveal all that is known or reflect the identity of a person, which is why at a number of memorials visitors feel the need to deposit, “photographs, letters, and other memorabilia in attempts to fill the names with individual significance.”⁸⁹ Without the personal objects, a name on a memorial becomes a meaningless symbol.

Maya Lin’s inclusion of the names of all casualties on the Vietnam War memorial broke the pattern of triumphal monuments on the National Mall in 1982. But the inclusion of names on monuments and memorials is not unique. Several World War I monuments in Europe, such as those at the *Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme* (1932) in France and the *Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing* (1927) in Ypres, Belgium, contain almost as many or even more names than are on the Vietnam Wall.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 61.

⁸⁸ Carole Blair and Neil Michel, "The AIDS Quilt and the Contemporary Culture of Public Commemoration," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 10, no. 4 (2008): 607.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Roughly 72,000 and 55,000 respectively. Maxine Borowsky Junge, "Mourning, Memory, and Life Itself: The AIDS Quilt and the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial Wall," *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 26, no. 3 (1999): 196.

What differentiated the Vietnam Wall from these earlier memorials was the public's almost immediate reaction to the Wall by placing mementos by it. As of early 2013, over 100,000 artifacts have been left at the Wall, not counting flowers or perishable food items.⁹¹ Some objects are direct political statements, like the return of a Medal of Honor by Charles J. Liteky to protest United States involvement in South American coups.⁹² Others' meanings, such as that of a blue high-heeled shoe, are nearly inscrutable without speaking directly with the person who left it.⁹³ Some of the objects left refer to the act of naming on the Wall itself, like the poignant note left by a Vietnam veteran in which he expresses the desire to know the names of those soldiers who died in his care.⁹⁴

It is through the inclusion of letters left at the memorial that the closest sense of personalization of the deceased is achieved. Words, like names, are themselves ephemeral. The act of writing makes them semi-permanent, but the nature of paper, especially modern non-archival paper left outside, is to disintegrate, making the letters left at the Vietnam Wall impermanent items. However, the objects and letters left at the Vietnam memorial are regularly collected by the National Park Service, and non-perishable items are catalogued and stored at the Museum Resource Center in Maryland, thus preventing their destruction.⁹⁵

⁹¹ Lair, "The Education Center at the Wall," 39.

⁹² Scott Boehm, "Privatizing Public Memory: The Price of Patriotic Philanthropy and the Post-9/11 Politics of Display," *American Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (December 2006): 1162.

⁹³ Laura Palmer, *Shrapnel in the Heart: Letters and Remembrances from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (New York, NY: Random House, 1987), xvii.

⁹⁴ Palmer, *Shrapnel in the Heart*, 25.

⁹⁵ Rachel Manteuffel, "The Things They Leave Behind: Artifacts from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial," *Washingtonian*, October 24, 2012, accessed March 21, 2013, <http://www.washingtonian.com/articles/people/the-things-they-leave-behind-artifacts-from-the-vietnam-veterans-memorial/>.

Several of the as yet undisclosed memorial mementoes will be on display at the Wall's visitor and education center, and other items, such as a teddy bear and a Christmas tree, were also placed in the extremely popular Smithsonian exhibit, *The Price of Freedom: Americans at War*.⁹⁶ These Wall items are specifically selected to be representatives of a whole group of mementos, and the person who selects them is fulfilling an requirement imposed by the funding agency, in these cases the National Park Service, rather than a true random cross-sectional and statistically-relevant selection. In the case of these exhibitions, the interpretation of the mementoes is through the lens of national patriotism and meaningful public action, although many of the letters and objects declare disenchantment with the government or the futility and arbitrary nature of death and war.⁹⁷ The disappointed political sentiments of the letters, however, have not stopped people from continuing to relate individually to the names on the Wall, indicating that while they are aware that what they leave may be hidden away or used in a way that they did not intend, they still have a drive to memorialize their loved ones with whatever resources they have.

The Vietnam Wall is of course not the only memorial to use names. The larger and more controversial 9/11 memorial *Reflecting Absence* (2011 - designed by Michael Arad) in New York City has taken the act of naming on memorials to new and intricate levels. The final design has the names of all 2,982 victims of 9/11, (those from Shanksville and Washington, D.C. as well as New York, as well as the six victims of a separate attack on the World Trade Center in 1993), carved into the bronze parapets of the dual waterfalls.

⁹⁶ Lair, "The Education Center at the Wall". Boehm, "Privatizing Public Memory," 1162.

⁹⁷ Ibid. and Lair, "The Education Center at the Wall". Palmer, *Shrapnel in the Heart*.

What makes these names at the World Trade Center site so different from those at the Vietnam Wall is their organization. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial organized names chronologically and alphabetically.⁹⁸ The 9/11 memorial in New York is far more sophisticated. After several years of discussion by the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation it was decided to place the names in a series of “meaningful adjacencies”, an organization method which took into account not only the location of victims during the attacks, but also specific requests from next of kin.⁹⁹ With over 1,200 requests made by families the arrangement of names on the memorial required specialized computer software to process and organize them.¹⁰⁰ Thanks to technology, human connection can be brought to the abstract names.

The future museum at the World Trade Center site will also include a hall of photographs of the victims and several individual profiles, though the design has not yet been specified.¹⁰¹ The museum will also feature artifacts recovered from the destruction of the World Trade Center and other sites, including personal possessions of both survivors and those who died, and a private room for survivors and friends and family of victims.¹⁰²

Before the memorial or museum were even in formal discussion stages, there were many impromptu and otherwise publicly-created memorials erected throughout New York City. Missing posters put up in the few days after the attacks, particularly those

⁹⁸ Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 46.

⁹⁹ Blaise and Rasic, *A Place of Remembrance*, 166.

¹⁰⁰ Blaise and Rasic, *A Place of Remembrance*, 169.

¹⁰¹ Blaise and Rasic, *A Place of Remembrance*, 184-185

¹⁰² Blaise and Rasic, *A Place of Remembrance*, 152.

in nearby St. Paul's Chapel and along emergency barriers, became perishable memorial plaques and sites of deposition for flowers, candles, and other items.¹⁰³ Left primarily by strangers, they represented the participation of society's mourning practices. Many of these objects were collected by museums and historical organizations, but they are what Marita Sturken refers to as "kitsch": mass-produced items that have a "prepackaged sentiment" where it is assumed "that this sentiment is one that is universally shared."¹⁰⁴ There was little if any personalization of the objects, although the attempt was to connect on a personal level with those who had lost loved ones.

Now over a decade later, the temporary public shrines for memorialization of the deceased have been cleared away and *Reflecting Absence* is finished, although as noted above, the museum and the surrounding structures have not been completed. To access the memorial, a visitor must book a time to visit, and once there must go through multiple security checks. The lines, the fences, the security searches, and other restrictions make it difficult to bring objects in, making the site less welcoming to receiving memorial mementoes than the Vietnam Wall.¹⁰⁵ It remains to be seen what will happen when the entire site is opened as a park, as the final plan has assumed.

Unlike the memorials in New York City and Washington, D.C., a number of Holocaust memorials do not have names. This is not surprising; the events of 1939-1945 are removed in time, records of many victims have been destroyed or lost if they ever

¹⁰³ Blaise and Rasic, *A Place of Remembrance*, chapter 4.

¹⁰⁴ Marita Sturken, introduction to *Tourists of History: Memory, Kitsch, and Consumerism from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero* (Duke University Press, 2004), 22.

¹⁰⁵ "Tribute Items," Visitor Information: Before You Arrive, accessed March 21, 2013, <http://www.911memorial.org/tribute-items>.

existed at all, and the sheer number of dead (over six million Jews along with millions of other “undesirable” people) defy listing on a memorial, as containment in a concentration camp was a stripping of identity, where names were denied and replaced by numbers tattooed on prisoners’ arms. For example, the *New England Holocaust Memorial* (1995 - designed by Stanley Saitowitz) in Boston has six million numbers etched into six glass towers, which are set above coal fires.¹⁰⁶ Its location near several stops on the Freedom Trail (a set of historical sites related to the Revolutionary War) and Boston City Hall place it among the more well-known buildings of early American government. But even here, where there are no names inscribed, there is still sometimes individual connection with the deceased. Occasionally pebbles are left on the low walls of the memorial in the Jewish tradition of grave decoration. It is a small gesture, but the act is a distinctly Jewish gesture of respect and mourning in the middle of an Anglo-American neighborhood.

NAMES Project Memorial Quilt

Opposite in form, but receiving an almost identical meaning to the Vietnam Wall, the *NAMES Project Memorial Quilt* provides the opportunity for individual expression. The boisterous and bright AIDS Quilt breaks away from the solidity of other national memorials. The idea for the *NAMES Project Memorial Quilt* was conceived of by gay rights activist Cleve Jones in 1985. By 1987, he and several others created the NAMES Project Foundation for the curation and care of the growing Quilt, which had almost 2,000 panels, each of which represented a person who died from AIDS, at its first display in Washington, D.C. in October of that year. Today there are over 48,000 panels,

¹⁰⁶ "Memorial Design," New England Holocaust Memorial, accessed March 21, 2013, <http://nehm.org/design/>.

containing over 94,000 names, and the size has grown to over a million square feet.¹⁰⁷ While the basic format is a three foot by six foot textile panel, the creators of the panels have incorporated everything from toys to HIV-infected blood to create individualized sections.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, a Quilt panel is even better at identifying an individual than a headstone. Historian and urban planner David Charles Sloane has noted that institutional memorial locations, particularly the cemetery, have become subdued places, whereas areas where the public has control over the memorial landscape, such as is the case for the Quilt, are far more active in both participation and production: “[i]n its exuberance, the Quilt differs from the late twentieth-century burial place, which often limits memorials to name and dates of birth and death.”¹⁰⁹ The panels are also regarded as permanent despite the fragile nature of cloth. Unlike the objects deposited at naming sites, the Quilt panels remain as they are once submitted. While individual panels may not be on view for a long time, nothing can be taken away from them.

The Quilt has been shown in its entirety at Washington, D.C. five times (1987, 1988, 1989, 1992, and 1996) and in smaller sections in Washington, D.C. in the summer of 2012.¹¹⁰ Small sections of the Quilt have been displayed around the country, and may be requested for display as long as the venue is indoors and has met other safety

¹⁰⁷ "About: The AIDS Memorial Quilt," The NAMES Project Foundation, accessed March 21, 2013, <http://www.aidsquilt.org/about/the-aids-memorial-quilt>.

¹⁰⁸ Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 183 & 197.

¹⁰⁹ David Charles Sloane, "Roadside Shrines and Granite Sketches: Diversifying the Vernacular Landscape of Memory," *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 12 (2005): 67.

¹¹⁰ "FAQ," Quilt 2012, accessed March 22, 2013, <http://quilt2012.org/faq/> and "Display Application," The NAMES Project Foundation, accessed March 21, 2013, <http://www.aidsquilt.org/host-the-quilt/display-application>.

requirements.¹¹¹ Although Jones has stated that the NAMES Project is apolitical, much as the Vietnam Wall was designed to be “apolitical”, the political implications of the Quilt cannot be denied.¹¹²

As the organizational title implies, the NAMES Project focuses on identifying persons who died due to AIDS- and HIV-related complications. Unlike the Vietnam Wall or *Reflecting Absence*, where the names are purposely inscribed in a uniform manner, each Quilt panel is already imbued with personality through designs and objects that refer specifically to the deceased. There are several reasons for the different approaches in design and material. Most obviously it is a factor of numbers of AIDS victims, the size of the Quilt, and the challenge of record keeping for an ongoing and increasing number of AIDS victims. The exact number of people who have died or continue to live with HIV/AIDS is not known, and deaths will continue, rendering it impossible to carve a record in stone or metal. Records would also be skewed because of the underreporting of the illness due to ignorance (the disease can lie dormant for many years) or fear of social stigma.

People with HIV/AIDS have been greatly stigmatized, particularly in the 1980s when it was unclear how the disease was spread. In these early years, it was popularly thought that AIDS could be contracted by mere close proximity to an afflicted person, through touch or contaminated air. Part of the purpose of the Quilt is to eliminate this stigma by identifying the person as a person and not just a “vessel of disease” to be

¹¹¹ "About: The AIDS Memorial Quilt."

¹¹² This is not to say that Jones did not believe that the creation of the Quilt had any political implication, but rather that the Quilt was not to be associated with any specific socio-political group. Christopher Capozzola, "A Very American Epidemic: Memory Politics and Identity Politics in the AIDS Memorial Quilt, 1985–1993," *Radical History Review*, no. 82 (Winter 2002): 91.

avoided or studied.¹¹³ The panels are purposefully body-sized and are made of “embraceable and tactile” material in order to restore physical form to the dead, particularly those who do not have graves and those who were denied human touch when fear of AIDS was at its highest.¹¹⁴ This substitution of an object for a person is not unique; humans regularly identify other persons and abstract concepts with a physical object or location, such as through flag symbolism. While carvings of names can theoretically fulfill this need, they are less intimate and, as mentioned above, only an abstract representation of an individual.

People with HIV/AIDS are often linked to other marginalized groups: minorities, the urban poor, homosexual men, drug users, and children.¹¹⁵ AIDS was first recognized in the early 1980s, just as these groups were creating politically viable social groups for themselves. The intense desire to categorize AIDS victims as one social group, the better to identify and avoid both the disease and the responsibility of care, created rigid and false groupings: “all gays are coded as white and middle class, all blacks and Latinos as potential drug users.”¹¹⁶ This has led into complex, and occasionally vicious, discourse on how to discuss and otherwise represent those with HIV/AIDS.¹¹⁷ These “identity politics”, however, are crucial to the other purpose of the Quilt, which is to inspire political action for social acceptance of infected persons and raise research money for

¹¹³ Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 152.

¹¹⁴ Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 197.

¹¹⁵ The people with HIV/AIDS in this lattermost group are often considered “innocent victims” as their contractions are primarily the result of tainted blood transfusions or prenatal infection.

¹¹⁶ Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 157.

¹¹⁷ Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 146-147.

finding a consistent treatment or cure.¹¹⁸ Political action was needed because the disease was associated with groups such as African-Americans and homosexual men, which were already discriminated against.

To sidestep the issue of hyper-categorization and stereotyping, the Quilt panels have become “hyper-individualized,” which challenge the homogeneity of classically-designed memorials.¹¹⁹ Rather, the panels, as well as the person they represent, form a community that is not defined by political identity categories. These related persons and their own associated communities all have their own view of the deceased. Additionally, the panel serves as a new community builder for loved ones, separate (although not necessarily distinct) from political and societal groups, a hub from which “[t]he complex web of a person’s life thus continues to weave after death” and links what would otherwise be disparate social groups.¹²⁰

Mere participation in the production of the Quilt can be seen as a refusal on the part of the victim’s family and loved ones to be identified with socio-political groups. One of the major critiques of the Quilt is that its sentimentality overrides any desire to be political about AIDS.¹²¹ More specifically, making a panel takes time, energy, and money, all of which could have been used for a more direct stand against the disease through political rallying or donations to scientific research.¹²² While it could be said that choosing to make a panel is less politicized than to become a vociferous advocate or

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 216.

¹²⁰ Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 209.

¹²¹ Capozzola, "A Very American Epidemic," 101.

¹²² Ibid.

fundraiser for research or social change, it is certainly more public and political than donating money to an organization. Therefore it can be said that a Quilt panel is memorial rather than monumental, more like a very fanciful headstone to be “as testimony, stating quite simply: This person was here.”¹²³

¹²³ Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 189.

Chapter 4: Expressions Among the Urban Poor

Thus far, this thesis has been dealing with large-scale memorials such as the 4.7 acre *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* or the nearly thirty acres that is the full size of the AIDS Memorial Quilt. However, memorials need not be expansive in size or even a small addition to an already-substantial piece. Urban spaces, particularly low-income spaces, are not often conducive to the scale of traditional memorials. In these settings, space reclamation and small-scale craft such as painting become memorial creations that, although temporary and unsanctioned, provide individuals with their mourning needs and also a public forum to display their differing cultural traditions. This phenomenon is not restricted to one country, but can be seen in several international settings, in areas as far apart as New York City and Naples. This chapter will delve into localized and non-professionally-made memorials for individuals as memorials within disenfranchised subcultures as an expression against government-imposed codes.

Skull Shrines of Naples

Veneration of the dead, that is, the bestowing of respect and honor on the deceased, is a memorial practice that is not unusual to members of the Roman Catholic Church. Relics, the physical remains of saints and other holy figures, can be found in great numbers and in many countries, from the United States to Ethiopia and beyond, though they are clustered in the shrines and sanctuaries of Europe. These sacred objects are considered to provide an effective conduit for a prayer to reach its intended target, usually the associated saint who serves as an intermediary between living humans and God. In the Catholic faith, it is believed that it is possible for saints to intercede on behalf

of the living because they are already in Heaven, whereas other deceased persons must participate in a waiting period called Purgatory, sometimes construed as an extremely negative place of punishment and pain, before being allowed into a permanent afterlife.¹²⁴

The Campania region of Italy, however, takes the idea of veneration one step farther. It is not merely the remains of saints who are venerated, but also the remains of average individuals. An extension of the belief in Purgatory, Neapolitan folk belief holds that death is a process and that the living and the deceased can intervene in each others' existences. Specifically, the living are attempting to curry favor with the deceased in a reciprocal relationship of prayers for the deceased to shorten time spent in Purgatory in exchange for supernatural assistance. Sometimes called a cult of the dead, the practice of venerating deceased individuals can be as simple as regularly leaving fresh flowers on a grave to elaborate secondary burials that enshrine bones and skulls in specific architectural features. Although technically forbidden by the archbishop of Naples in 1969 for being too superstitious, there is evidence for the continuation of this practice into the present.¹²⁵ Refusal to cease the practice of veneration indicates that this practice is important to the culture of Naples and other parts southern Italy. This importance is not only relevant to the culture's way of relating to the dead, but also to the living. The reciprocal relationship at the heart of veneration of the dead is closely related to the informal economic transactions that skirt government supervision. By engaging in

¹²⁴ Italo Pardo, "Life, Death, and Ambiguity in the Social Dynamics of Inner Naples," *Man*, n.s., 24, no. 1 (March 1989): 116.

¹²⁵ Tommaso Astarita, introduction to *The Living and the Dead: The Neapolitan Cult of the Skull*, by Margaret Stratton (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 13. "Purgatorio ad Arco: Traveler Reviews," TripAdvisor, accessed November 29, 2012, http://www.tripadvisor.com/ShowUserReviews-g187785-d2356423-r135593097-Purgatorio_ad_Arco-Naples_Province_of_Naples_Campania.html.

veneration of the common dead, Neapolitans extend these acts of “living” to the deceased, and thus create an afterlife in which the living can actively participate, in contradiction to more official Roman Catholic canon.

Because the use of skull shrines is fairly localized to Naples and southwestern Italy, a short history of the region is needed. The area surrounding Naples has suffered through a number of military and natural disasters throughout its four thousand year history. The city was often invaded (Romans, Carthaginians, various “barbarian” tribes, Byzantines, Normans, Hungarians, Spanish, Bourbon-French, Garibaldian Italians), the last time being the Germans in World War II. Mount Vesuvius was and continues to be a live volcano, causing eruptions and earthquakes into the mid-twentieth century.¹²⁶ Nor was epidemic disease a stranger to the city. Bubonic plague and cholera were frequent from the sixth into the twentieth century. The seventeenth century, Naples was already facing the challenges of high population density and unemployable masses when several natural disasters struck: two plague epidemics, two earthquakes, and a major eruption of Vesuvius.¹²⁷ It was then that the Naples area saw a significant upswing in the veneration of relics and creation of new patron saints for the city.¹²⁸ The Church of Madonna of the

¹²⁶ The last major eruption occurred in 1944, but scientific monitoring continues into the present should the volcano become active yet again.

¹²⁷ Lancaster, *In the Shadow of Vesuvius*, 90-91.

¹²⁸ Lancaster, *In the Shadow of Vesuvius*, 101, Ledeen, "Death in Naples," 29, and Astarita, introduction to *The Living and the Dead*, 7.

Souls in Purgatory (sometimes called the Madonna dell'Arco) was founded, and there were over 3,000 relics in the city, including 400 body parts.^{129, 130, 131}

The Neapolitan cult of the dead (aka “cult of the skull” or “cult of souls in purgatory”) assumes three major premises: that purgatory exists, that a soul’s release from purgatory requires prayer by the living, and that souls in purgatory can interfere with the world of the living.¹³² Those without family to pray for them or who have suffered a violent death could potentially be trapped in purgatory indefinitely. In such a case, the soul’s only chance for release is through veneration of its associated body by strangers. This is facilitated by building shrines to the dead, typically incorporating skulls or other bones, both above and below ground.

In short, there is a belief that the souls of the dead rely on the living in order to acquire a positive afterlife. There is an assumption that family will ensure the proper funeral rites and care for the grave(s).¹³³ Those without family or not identified by family must rely on others for care. While it might seem like performing ritual acts for these unknown dead would be an altruistic act, there is belief that the dead trapped in Purgatory wield supernatural powers and can affect everyday life.

Why should the dead, particularly those in Purgatory, have any sort of power? Why do average people, potentially and especially those who fell between the cracks of ordered society, have their remains venerated as much as any saintly relic? The answer

¹²⁹ Lancaster, *In the Shadow of Vesuvius*, 98.

¹³⁰ Lancaster, *In the Shadow of Vesuvius*, 83.

¹³¹ Astarita, introduction to *The Living and the Dead*, 8

¹³² Pardo, "Life, Death, and Ambiguity," 103.

¹³³ Pardo, "Life, Death, and Ambiguity."

may be elucidated by looking at this case by viewing it through the lens of the early theory of symbolic anthropologist Mary Douglas. In *Purity and Danger* she confronts the structuralist idea that humans are compulsive classifiers. Objects or entities that do not fit into already-created categories or blur the differentiation between categories are typically either condemned or regarded as something of great power.^{134, 135} By definition, Purgatory is a spiritual realm that is neither Heaven nor Hell, neither necessarily positive nor negative. Saints likewise inhabit a liminal space of being both wholly human and in full contact with the divine. The physical remains of these individuals, whether merely polished and placed on a shelf or encased in gold and jewels, are also liminal since they are conduits between the earthly and spiritual realms. Individuals stuck in perpetual Purgatory due to faulty burial are therefore regarded as powerful and, better yet, able to be negotiated with. Prayer ransom for the *pezzentelle* by non-relations requires return favors for the prayer-giver. These include, but are not limited to, assistance in school, romance, and money matters.¹³⁶

The shrines can be as simple as a box with bones in it and a date inscribed or elaborate with multiple images and sculpted pieces. Shrines in general tend to contain writing and elements of art.¹³⁷ However, it is the use of bones, especially skulls, that take

¹³⁴ Structuralism in the anthropological sense, as it is used here, assumes that all aspects of culture are interconnected and based solely within an inclusive system. Although its use as an anthropological theory has fallen out of favor, it remains a stepping-off point for much contemporary research, ie, what is the relationship between the structure and the individual?

¹³⁵ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin, 1970), 50-53; 116 and Pardo, "Life, Death, and Ambiguity," 116.

¹³⁶ Pardo, "Life, Death, and Ambiguity," 116.

¹³⁷ Beatrice Fraenkel, "Street Shrines and the Writing of Disaster: 9/11, New York, 2001," in *Grassroots Memorials: The Politics of Memorializing Traumatic Death*, ed. Peter Jan Margry and Cristina Sanchez-Carretero (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2011), 232.

these shrines to a different level of cultural acceptability. The display of body parts is generally considered transgressive in contemporary Western thought. It is associated with “primitive” religions of non-western indigenous peoples and acts such as headhunting, or with denying the humanity of enemies.¹³⁸ The Catholic Church dislikes the practice of creating skull shrines, forbidding it entirely in 1969, on the grounds that the shrines are too pagan, and therefore subverts their authority as ritual masters.¹³⁹ However, several of the shrines are still cared for, most notably the “Lucia” shrine at the Chiesa Santa Maria delle Anime del Purgatorio ad Arco, which has become something of a tourist attraction, the skull and its associated person (likely fictional) something of a celebrity. Forbidding skull shrines has done little to stop the veneration at the shrines and perhaps has even enhanced it.

The dramatic upheavals of the late-nineteenth century and the populace’s reaction to seek spiritual assistance through mediation with physical remains of the dead parallel the war and disease of the seventeenth century quite closely. Contemporary Naples has a negative reputation of crime, poverty, and danger.¹⁴⁰ Economic exclusion from the north of the country through lack of train systems caused economic depression, slums (with associated outbreaks of disease), and the establishment of organized crime by the beginning of the 20th century.¹⁴¹ It was in this period that the adoption of care for

¹³⁸ Simon Harrison, "Skull Trophies of the Pacific War: Transgressive Objects of Remembrance," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, no. 12 (2006).

¹³⁹ Astarita, introduction to *The Living and the Dead*, 13.

¹⁴⁰ Lancaster, *In the Shadow of Vesuvius*, 2 and Ida Susser, "The Anthropologist as Humanist," foreword to *The Broken Fountain*, by Thomas Belmonte, 25th anniversary ed. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2005), xl.

¹⁴¹ Lancaster, *In the Shadow of Vesuvius*, 200-205.

unclaimed skulls from the Cimitero della Fontanelle first began.¹⁴² Yet another surge in veneration occurred during and after World War II.¹⁴³

In times of need some Neapolitans, even those in the contemporary era, resort to the power of the liminal and the supernatural, accessed through the shrines. Times of need, however, appear to occur relatively often in Naples. A major earthquake in 1980 caused damage that was not repaired until the mid 1990s, and unemployment remains a major problem.¹⁴⁴ It is in such situations where the national government is not regarded as fulfilling its duty of care towards its citizens that German ethnographer Thomas Hauschild finds that populaces resort to more lineage-based and informal economies and practices, including saint veneration.¹⁴⁵ Indeed the informal economy is no secret of Naples. The manufacturing and selling of false luxury goods, as well as smuggling were the slightly more savory sides of a city that also had a reputation for Camorra corruption, prostitution, and drug distribution.¹⁴⁶

Lineage and other personal connections are evident in mortuary customs. Wakes and funerals are more elaborate and better-attended depending on the social importance of the individual, in other words, the more connections they had in life.¹⁴⁷ The value of having a wealthy and socially-respected relative is so high that it is not unusual for a

¹⁴² Ledeen, "Death in Naples," 28.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Lancaster, *In the Shadow of Vesuvius*, 242-243. Lancaster, *In the Shadow of Vesuvius*, 245 and Pardo, "Life, Death, and Ambiguity," 104.

¹⁴⁵ Thomas Hauschild, *Power and Magic in Italy*, trans. Jeremy Gaines, EASA 13 (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2011), 21.

¹⁴⁶ Lancaster, *In the Shadow of Vesuvius*, 238 and Pardo, "Life, Death, and Ambiguity," 104. Thomas Belmonte, *The Broken Fountain*, 25th anniversary ed. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2005).

¹⁴⁷ Pardo, "Life, Death, and Ambiguity," 111

family to hire people to pose at the funeral as other important persons.¹⁴⁸ The duty of leaving flowers falls on both consanguine relatives and affines, symbolizing and continuing a relationship that could potentially have been lost on the death of the connecting person, even though great distances may be involved.¹⁴⁹ The gifting of flowers to the dead is also referred to in terms similar to food and feasting, another strong connector in maintaining personal ties.¹⁵⁰

So what then is actually being seen when one takes an academic look at Neapolitan burial practices? Going back to Douglas and her analysis of liminality and the sacred, seemingly magical practices such as exchanging favors with the dead are exercises in small-scale familial structure, an attempt to bring order to a fundamentally disordered world. It is not necessarily expected that ritual will change anything, but it makes people feel as if something can be done, and at the very least reminds them of the power they already have to manipulate the environment.¹⁵¹ Hauschild elaborates on this correlation in his preface to his study of magic in southern Italy. As he says, “[c]ulture is a great reserve against the world of commerce” and can be seen in simple acts of reciprocity and “in the dedicated care of human graves, which have become completely worthless in economic terms.”¹⁵² In other words, the continuation of kin and friend networks and their correlations with supernatural entities despite the orders of the

¹⁴⁸ Ledeen, "Death in Naples," 28.

¹⁴⁹ Goody and Poppi, "Flowers and Bones," 150-152.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 74-75 and 79

¹⁵² Hauschild, *Power and Magic in Italy*, xv.

government and the Church, which is itself a sort of government, can be thought of as a calculated act of dissent against a supervisory structure.

Wall Murals

Networks of loved ones banding together against the government is also the key to memorials the impoverished urban citizenry in the United States have developed. In the late 1980s and the early 1990s, inspired by graffiti art and, intriguingly, the Vietnam Wall, memorial murals began appearing on walls in inner cities of the United States.¹⁵³ It was at this time that street violence was reaching its highest point and AIDS was considered to be a rising epidemic. The murals are to be viewed on multiple levels: they are literally located outside on street-level and also should be regarded as folk-art in the classic sense that the artist has had no professional training. Their content varies considerably, although common themes include funereal imagery (e.g. tombstones, candles, flowers, etc), Christian imagery, violence, portraiture, the written word, and pop-culture and consumer items. The murals are made predominately for the young and underprivileged, victims of violence, accidents, and medical conditions. Because they are outside and tend to be large in size they are subject to public viewing and also to the ravages of time and weather. They can be marred almost instantly, and unless they are regularly cared for the images soon disappear under the ravages of weather or merely being covered-over.

¹⁵³ Mevin Delgado, *Death at an Early Age and the Urban Scene: The Case for Memorial Murals and Community Healing* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 59 and Martha Cooper and Joseph Sciorra, *R.I.P.: Memorial Wall Art* (Thames & Hudson, 1994), 10.

Before discussing memorial murals specifically, a general definition of an urban mural must be established. What differentiates a mural from general graffiti art? Why is the former considered a beautifier and the latter an act of vandalism? Professor of social work Melvin Delgado and his colleague Keva Barton believe the answer lies in several interconnected social factors: “Murals differ from tagging by their coordinated effort at involving a community, the nature and extent of project planning, and the location in communities.”¹⁵⁴ In short, it is the public nature of the creation process which elevates the mural beyond vandalism. Geography scholar Stefano Bloch agrees, a mural is only as permissible as the public living around it, tellingly not the government, allow it to be.¹⁵⁵

As mentioned above, memorial murals are generally created for individuals who lived as a member of the urban poor. Statistically, these groups have a shorter life expectancy in general than other Americans due to high rates of violence and disease. In 1998 alone there was at least one murder a day in the hundred largest low-income housing projects across the United States.¹⁵⁶ Professor of social work Melvin Delgado, building on the statement of others, analyzes urban memorial murals in comparison to the Vietnam Wall memorial.¹⁵⁷ The Vietnam Wall is a public space for those who died within a violent environment, and incidentally many of those victims were residents of poor or minority neighborhoods due to draft waivers that favored the educated and wealthy. As discussed in this thesis, the Vietnam Wall has garnered much acclaim and sparked many

¹⁵⁴ Melvin Delgado and Keva Barton, "Murals in Latino Communities: Social Indicators of Community Strengths," *Social Work* 43, no. 4 (July 1998): 347-348.

¹⁵⁵ Stefano Bloch, "The Illegal Face of Wall Space: Graffiti-Murals on the Sunset Boulevard Retaining Walls," *Radical History Review*, no. 113 (Spring 2012): 111-112.

¹⁵⁶ Delgado, *Death at an Early Age*, 38.

¹⁵⁷ Delgado, *Death at an Early Age*, 57.

movements and debates on race, gender, the role of public art, and the responsibilities of the government. The memorial murals can function in the same way. For, “[o]ne death, although unimportant unto itself, rarely has the power to bring together strangers. A monument, however, does have that power.”¹⁵⁸

The “RIP” murals, although impermanent, function as a monument for their duration. They also function monumentally as a record of events. The necessity for this record is twofold according to Delgado: the extremely high rates of death for a particular generation at a young age creates a gap in traditions and other forms of heritage and also marginalized groups are often denied a written history of events.¹⁵⁹ It is the latter issue that has caught Delgado’s attention:

If the community is marginalized, segregated, attacked, and undervalued by the broader society, then murals must reflect this reality in their content, and seek to capture and record major historical events in a community’s life. Since traditional sources of recording history are often unavailable to marginalized groups, particularly low-income groups, murals serve this vital function.¹⁶⁰

The choice of using murals for this task of history-recording rather than utilizing another potentially more permanent art style is complex. There is of course, the concern of cost, something that is not treated lightly in low-income areas. A mural, quickly created with cheap materials, such as standard spray paint, have a maximum cost of a few thousand dollars.¹⁶¹ The relatively simple Vietnam Wall, in comparison, cost eight million dollars to build. A personally-commissioned mural also offers the chance for significant amounts of individualization. In fact, some even contain portraits of the deceased or their

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Delgado, *Death at an Early Age*, 40.

¹⁶⁰ Delgado, *Death at an Early Age*, 69.

¹⁶¹ Delgado, *Death at an Early Age*, 92

beloved possessions in addition to more generic mourning imagery. But perhaps the most important reason for using murals is their historically rebellious character.

While murals are both a form of art and a display of public mourning, they defy the traditions of “high” art and certain mourning conventions. An individual cannot physically possess a mural, nor any piece of public art, as art in the traditional sense is something that is ultimately to be possessed.¹⁶² A mural painted without consent enhances this difficulty: the artist does not own the location and the property owner does not own the art. While large government-sanctioned monuments are also public art, they are often highly regarded: it is easy to find the monuments and easy to find information on their (likely artistically trained) creator through books or official websites. Murals, on the other hand, are “democratic art” which “have challenged the traditional upper-class exclusivity of art” through use of motifs and symbols which are specific to the area or socioeconomic level.¹⁶³ Cartoon characters and brand consumer goods painted in bright colors challenge high art expectations.¹⁶⁴ Other themes of the murals include ethnic pride, “police brutality, arson, alcohol and other drug abuse, prison, [and] U.S. imperialism,” which are far more specific to low-income and urban communities than to homogenized suburban zones.¹⁶⁵

The creation of memorial murals can be seen to parallel the creation of small shrines to the deceased, particularly those dedicated to people who died in traffic

¹⁶² Delgado, *Death at an Early Age*, 68.

¹⁶³ Ibid

¹⁶⁴ Cooper and Sciorra, *R.I.P.: Memorial Wall Art*.

¹⁶⁵ Delgado and Barton, "Murals in Latino Communities," 349.

accidents. In fact, sometimes they are part of the same small memorial complex, the former serving as a backdrop to the other. These roadside shrines are not architectural, but consist of flowers, photographs, stuffed animals, signs/writings on paper, and potentially personal possessions of the deceased. However, unlike loved ones attempting to reclaim the memory of an individual from a mass tragedy, the “spontaneous” shrines on roadsides, as they are called by folklorist Jack Santino, are community political actions.¹⁶⁶ Like the murals they draw attention to a civil issue, ranging from public health, to vehicular safety, to police brutality.

Photographer Martha Cooper and folklorist Joseph Sciorra find these temporary and semi-permanent memorials, both the shrines and the murals, to be related to the same ideas of Purgatory that the skull shrines of Naples represent. At the beginning of the mural trend, a large majority of the artists were Latino, implying a Roman Catholic background or at least familiarity with several of the religion’s folk concepts.¹⁶⁷ On New York City streets as on Neapolitan ones, Catholics believe a sudden death is a “bad” one, leaving the deceased in the undesired state of Purgatory. Street murals and shrines ask for prayers for the deceased from people who did not know them, though in the United States there is no implication of venerators receiving anything in return.

¹⁶⁶Jack Santino, "Between Commemoration and Social Activism: Spontaneous Shrines, Grassroots Memorialization, and the Public Ritualesque in Derry," in *Grassroots Memorials: The Politics of Memorializing Traumatic Death*, ed. Peter Margry and Cristina Sanchez-Carretero (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2011), 99.

¹⁶⁷ Cooper and Sciorra, *R.I.P.: Memorial Wall Art*, 10.

Like the skull shrines in Naples, technically many of these murals are forbidden.¹⁶⁸ On public walls they are sometimes considered vandalism by people not of the community and who therefore likely did not know the deceased and did not participate in the creation process. If done on private property without the owner's permission trespassing can be added to the list of charges (though most artists will seek out the owner and get permission).¹⁶⁹ The police generally regard such acts as criminal.¹⁷⁰ The murals become even more contentious when the local citizenry believe that the deceased died due to police brutality and display that belief in the mural through text and imagery.

These public displays of a group's relationship to the dead in the forms of shrines and painted murals are available for viewing by all social classes, but are made and used by the lower classes. The locals are the ones who continuously engage with the shrines and murals by making continuous visits to pray or by conducting their everyday business within view of them. Although these memorials are temporary and unauthorized, the constant engagement provides an extended sense of community lasts far longer than a single immense monument. By reclaiming spaces, even relatively small spaces, within a dense and diverse urban setting, these marginalized groups display not only their distinctiveness within the larger society, but also their pride in that uniqueness.

¹⁶⁸ There are such things as publicly commissioned murals, though these generally go through some sort of vetting process before the paint goes on the wall and can be changed afterward at the discretion of the commissioning body rather than the artist (Delgado and Barton, "Murals in Latino Communities," 354.)

¹⁶⁹ Delgado, *Death at an Early Age*, 91.

¹⁷⁰ Delgado, *Death at an Early Age*, 71.

Chapter 5: Contemporary Changes

When speaking of memorials and the ephemeral, there is a large “elephant in the room,” namely, that a memorial is any attempt to preserve or otherwise permanently note ephemeral life. There have been an abundance of memorials created, temporary and otherwise, in the last twenty years in the United States and Europe, so much so that French anthropologist Béatrice Fraenkel has begun calling it a “new culture of disaster.”¹⁷¹ People are seeking an immortal presence.¹⁷² In this hyper-memorial era, is anything ephemeral any longer? And if it is not, how does this affect the political symbolism of temporary memorials?

Objects and acts that were once considered temporary are now concretizing through the changing faces of technology and social institutions. As access to these new ways of relating to memory increases, the practice of memory in subaltern groups becomes subsumed into the mainstream, and thus the individualizing power that they granted decreases. Yet, as technology shifts to ever new mediums, items that were viewed as permanent through the act of visual recording, for example through photographs, film, and digitization, have actually become ephemeral as the means of display have become obsolete. Examples considered here are photography and the digitization of information in its various forms.

¹⁷¹ Fraenkel, "Street Shrines and the Writing," in *Grassroots Memorials*, 229.

¹⁷² Assman, *Cultural Memory*, 335.

Museumification

A common concern of heritage experts is the idea of *museumification*, that objects, acts, and ideas that should not be institutionalized and packaged for a generic audience are in fact being treated that way.¹⁷³ It is the same critique as the argument against monumental memorials: that what is not lived or re-enacted will stagnate and eventually be forgotten.¹⁷⁴ But the assumption in the museumification argument is that there are appropriate and inappropriate things to preserve, usually physical items. These physical things have both a physical structure and at least one symbolic meaning. When making the decision to place an object in a collection or museum both of these factors must be taken into account, but it is usually the importance of the latter which comes up when speaking of museumification. In short, is it appropriate to spend time and money attempting to physically preserve that which was not meant to be preserved? Smithsonian scholar James B. Gardner does not encourage excessive preservation which removes the symbolism of the object, as evident in his comment on the collection of artifacts from spontaneous 9/11 memorials: “As those memorial materials became museum objects, they arguably ceased to be what they were, instead becoming part of our institutionalized memories, isolated from the dynamic in which they were created.”¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ Paulette Dellios, "The Museumification of the Village: Cultural Subversion in the 21st Century," *Culture Mandala: The Bulletin of the Centre for East-West Cultural and Economic Studies* 5, no. 1 (November 2002), accessed April 2, 2013, <http://epublications.bond.edu.au/cm/vol5/iss1/4>. This is a large concern of Native American groups, and there are many examples of return requests from these groups, even before the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) went into effect in 1991. For a fuller discussion of the role and treatment of objects in museums please see: Jonathan Haas, "Power, Objects, and a Voice for Anthropology," *Current Anthropology* 37, no. 1 (February 1996).

¹⁷⁴ Young, *The Texture of Memory*.

¹⁷⁵ James B. Gardner, "September 11: Museums, Spontaneous Memorials, and History," in *Grassroots Memorials: The Politics of Memorializing Traumatic Death*, ed. Peter Jan Margry and Cristina Sanchez-Carretero (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2011), 292.

Unfortunately it is that very dynamic which demands preservation although the very essence of that dynamic is in its temporariness. Temporary memorials, those created with impermanent materials (paper, plants, textiles, human remains, etc), have the appearance, and by extension the emotions, associated with religious and spiritual shrines.¹⁷⁶ The problem is that once an object is deemed “sacred” in some way through its association with death and mourning, it is difficult to get rid of: either it must be dealt with ritualistically or it must become un-sanctified. In an increasingly cosmopolitan and secularized environment, placing an object in a museum has become the new ritual disposal of a sacralized object.

The items of the Vietnam Wall were already being ritually disposed even before its completion; there is a potentially apocryphal story of someone throwing a Purple Heart medal into the wet construction concrete.¹⁷⁷ The National Park Service became the caretaking organization of the Wall in 1984 and began curating the objects people left, some of which had been collected (but not thrown away) by maintenance staff as early as 1982.¹⁷⁸ By 1986, the items left at the Vietnam Wall were being collected, catalogued and stored in a warehouse called the Museum Resource Center in Maryland with environmental control, although the atmosphere was more tomb than research library.¹⁷⁹ Overall the impression of the collection as a whole (not those selected for public viewing

¹⁷⁶ Fraenkel, "Street Shrines and the Writing," in *Grassroots Memorials*, 229-231.

¹⁷⁷ Pamela Beth West, "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Collection: Collection Overview," Museum Resource Center, last modified June 5, 1997, accessed March 21, 2013, <http://www.nps.gov/mrc/indexvvm.htm>.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Palmer, *Shrapnel in the Heart*, xvi-xvii.

-- see chapter 3) is of too sacred a nature to be eliminated, but not appropriate to be displayed.

Just as for the Vietnam Wall, artifacts and memorial objects from September 11 are likewise entombed and ritualistically held by site managers. The Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. began its discussion of what to collect and preserve from the event on September 13, and were ordered by Congress to collect items related to September 11 in December.¹⁸⁰ Several museums in New York City such as the Museum of the City of New York and the State Museum of New York collected entire sections of fencing, complete with paper, textiles, and other easily destroyed materials.¹⁸¹ The National September 11 Memorial Museum at the World Trade Center includes an underground museum with artifacts contributed by the above-mentioned organizations as well as individuals. However, the museum is not open and has been delayed by funding issues and weather damage. Only a handful of durable artifacts, such as a firefighter's helmet, are on display in a Visitors Center/gift-shop a few blocks away at Albany Street. Other attempts at true "museuming," that is, educating, displaying, and drawing meaning through the tangible objects of 9/11 conducted by the National Museum of American History and the New York Fire Museum have transformed the exhibits into emotional expressions instead of places of critical thinking.¹⁸²

And it is not just the museums themselves that participate in museumification. The AIDS Quilt, originally practically the epitome of subaltern protest, was given a Save

¹⁸⁰ Gardner, "September 11," in *Grassroots Memorials*, 286-287

¹⁸¹ Gardner, "September 11: Museums, Spontaneous," in *Grassroots Memorials*, 292.

¹⁸² Gardner, "September 11: Museums, Spontaneous," in *Grassroots Memorials*, 296-300.

America's Treasures grant by the federal government for preservation purposes in 2005.¹⁸³ The NAMES project now employs a professional textile conservator who also works with several New York City museums.¹⁸⁴ The memorial murals of the inner city have not been museumified, but graffiti art in general is swiftly becoming mainstream. Formal mural artists such as *Tats Crew*, a Bronx artist collective, now composed of primarily middle-aged painters, have commoditized their skills for advertising agencies.¹⁸⁵

Even physical remains of the deceased have become something to gawk at rather than contemplate. The Neapolitan catacombs of San Gennaro, San Severo, and San Gaudio are open for touring as are the ossuaries of Cimitero della Fontanelle and Chiesa Santa Maria delle Anime del Purgatorio ad Arco, as part of Naples' *Maggio de Monumenti* program. The Fontanelle was opened to visitors in 2010 after a clean-up and a barrier erected to prevent access to the bones, in essence museumifying what once was a very active and personal relationship. Madonna dell'Arco is easily accessed and it is possible for people to go under the church itself to see shallow primary burials and several skull shrines. Tours are given in Italian and there is reading material English.¹⁸⁶ Other cemeteries, and not just those in Italy, charge money to visitors to see the remains of the dead.

¹⁸³ "About: The AIDS Memorial Quilt."

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Krishna Andavolu, "Protest and Memory," *Obit*, June 9, 2009, accessed March 21, 2013, <http://obit-mag.com/articles/protest-and-memory>.

¹⁸⁶ "Purgatorio ad Arco: Traveler Reviews," TripAdvisor.

Once an object or an action has “gone behind glass” in a museum setting it takes on a more specific social role, that of projecting the narrative laid on it by museum personnel. Many large and famous, and better respected, museums are largely public institutions, sponsored by some level of government. Once the control of the museum is removed from strictly local networks, there is a decrease in the concern for the needs and wants of the previous possessors of the items in their care. Prior to the passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) of 1990, which requires museums with federal funding to identify, catalogue, and potentially return their Native American artifacts, there were many examples of institutional disregard for the differing religious and philosophical views of permanence held by some Native American groups.¹⁸⁷

Another issue with using a museum as a home for memorials is apparent in the museum attempts to preserve their physical presence. In order to better maintain the physical integrity of a memorial, its disparate parts (such as plants, paper, and balloons) need to be treated in different conditions with different methods; what is a safe preservation chemical for metal may not be safe for paper or textiles. However, as Gardner notes, the disaggregation of parts has the potential to destroy the sum meaning that is greater than the parts.¹⁸⁸ And even if each piece of a memorial were removed and preserved, there are very few things which would last without continued care. Items become lost or the museum does not have the resources to keep up with physical conservation. Not everything can be physically saved in a collection due to constraints

¹⁸⁷ Haas, "Power, Objects, and a Voice".

¹⁸⁸ Gardner, "September 11: Museums, Spontaneous," in *Grassroots Memorials*, 291.

and possible redundancy. It is at the discretion of museum and other institutional personnel to decide which objects will be preserved and to what extent. Therefore, these curatorial professionals have the “power” to preserve memories and thus to influence others in the future.¹⁸⁹

Democratic Immortality

The power to physically preserve memories, however, has increasingly become something in which the average person can participate. Most obvious is the use of photographs to memorialize the appearance of an individual. When photography was new in the nineteenth century, that was one of its main purposes: to document the likeness of a person to hold as a keepsake, particularly when the person being photographed was already dead. The Victorians in particular practiced this “memento mori” photography, propping the deceased in a lifelike position in order that their “livingness” as well as their appearance could be preserved. As photography as a process became easier in the twentieth century, people could have many images of themselves or others.

Contemporary spontaneous memorials, such as those that sprang up in the wake of 9/11 in highly viewable and public areas, are often full of photographs of the deceased in various stages of life. While photography seems like an excellent way to make permanent a deceased individual’s physical appearance, photographs, the type with film negatives (for digital photography see below), are extraordinarily fragile. The finished product can rip or fade, particularly if not stored in an archival setting. The negatives can also be ripped or they can become chemically damaged while processing. A video can capture

¹⁸⁹ Gardner, "September 11: Museums, Spontaneous," in *Grassroots Memorials*, 296.

movement and sound, but likewise before digital processing the film itself could become damaged through normal environmental and chemical processes.¹⁹⁰

But are these semi-permanent documents of memory objective or even accurate? Some philosophers regard photographs as “the most reliable record of a past that no longer exists – it is the lasting impression of a moment that has gone forever.”¹⁹¹ However, much still relies on the viewer. A photograph or film, like any “reality” is subject to subjective interpretation, and as a frozen moment is deprived of context. As Aleida Assman observed, “the simultaneously precise and vague memory of the image will take on a phantom life of its own as soon as it is separated from its framing narrative.”¹⁹² There is even the potential that eventually if the photograph continues to exist permanently, the objects “visible,” or the encoded meaning in the objects, will change until they are unrecognizable.

And that is only the difficulty of a “true” photograph. Photographs and film could be faked, doctored, or otherwise modified through optical tricks to change the perceived reality of the moment even before computer software. And whether real or not, they easily influence how and what people remember. The first chapter of Marita Sturken’s 1997 book *Tangled Memories* analyzes the phenomenon of confusing fiction and reality in remembrances of the Vietnam War, the Kennedy assassination, the Challenger space shuttle explosion, and Los Angeles races riots of the early 1990s. Even people present at events conflate actual memory with images, videotape, and even fictional depictions of

¹⁹⁰ Assman, *Cultural Memory*, 339-340.

¹⁹¹ Assman, *Cultural Memory*, 209.

¹⁹² Assman, *Cultural Memory*, 210.

the event.¹⁹³ This mass confusion over facts and events increases as less and less people exist with first-hand knowledge of the event, to the point where young people only know the fiction depicted in television and movies, or else the clips that have been used again and again by the news media.¹⁹⁴

As the twenty-first century progressed, technology has become ever more ubiquitous. Computers have proliferated, as has their ability to store monumental amounts of visual data. The internet allows international access to all sorts of information. Mobile phones are everywhere, and many of them have the ability to not only take pictures and video but also post those images online to social networking and image sharing sites such as Facebook, Youtube, and Tumblr within a few minutes. How does the digital age effect memorialization? More specifically, can ephemeral memorialization exist in an age when the most fleeting moment can be captured on camera and permanently stored in the digital realm? This section will explore the effect on the ephemeral memorials described earlier in this paper.

It is easy for nearly anyone with access to a computer to find images of tangible monuments; a few keystrokes in an internet search engine can bring up hundreds of photographs if the monument is famous enough. This holds true for the large Holocaust memorials and the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial*, which have official websites organized through their funding group. The Vietnam Wall has several digital incarnations, including the Virtual Wall, which display not only the names, but also photos and various insignias

¹⁹³ Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 20.

¹⁹⁴ Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 86 and 90.

belonging to the deceased person if such information is available.¹⁹⁵ But does seeing an image of a memorial produce the same effect as actually being there?

The short answer is no. As noted in Chapter 2, some memorials, notably performance-focused counter-monuments, rely on physical presence in order to project ambiguity. The individualized practice and reaction in a physically confined context is what makes a counter-monument useful. At least in the United States, where internet regulation is relatively loose and does not generally limit access to most sites, the context in which a memorial is experienced is next to non-existent. The image of a counter-monument drawn from the internet no longer has a governmental superstructure behind it. Depending on the image, the scale of the monument is lost along with texture, and most importantly, environment.¹⁹⁶ The environment surrounding the memorial, also known as “the approach,” has been well documented as a significant aspect of any monument, and although less well noted, so is sound and scent. It is an entirely different thing to read a list of names from one’s laptop screen while sitting in one’s home than to stand in the elements and touch stone.¹⁹⁷ The former is alienating; the latter engages people and allows them to physically express themselves.

Digitization has also removed physical touch from other memorials. In 1994, the NAMES Project began photographing every Quilt panel and recording that information

¹⁹⁵ The Virtual Wall, accessed March 21, 2013, <http://www.virtualwall.org>.

¹⁹⁶ This can be seen readily at the official website for the New England Holocaust Memorial. The introduction page has a black-and-white image of the top of the memorial taken from below (<http://nehm.org/intro.html>), which does not encompass the environment at all. Whereas at the link with directions to the monument is a color image of the monument at a distance (<http://nehm.org/location/>), which, while showing the environment, does not allow for the details to be seen. Looking at one image but not the other would give a viewer a very skewed idea of the memorial.

¹⁹⁷ Beckstead et. al., “Collective Remembering”.

on compact disks, which were then sold to fundraise (although cutting edge at the time, that medium is now becoming obsolete).¹⁹⁸ This essentially eliminated the need for a panelmaker to create a second panel to keep, as some were doing, and also indirectly eliminated the need to see the Quilt in person at all.¹⁹⁹ It is not such a surprise that the last full showing of the Quilt in Washington, D.C. was in 1996, only two years after digital archiving was put to use.²⁰⁰ Today the NAMES Project has not just one, but two applications for smart phones that allow almost anyone to have access to all panels at all times.²⁰¹ There is also an oral history project sponsored by the NAMES Project and the Savannah College of Arts and Design called *Quilt Stories*, which collect the stories behind the panels and make them available to listen to online and on cell phones.²⁰² By interacting with the Quilt in a purely visual manner, the tactility Cleve Jones sought when creating it is completely removed. By viewing the Quilt on a screen as small as six square inches the impact of numbers, the idea of the Quilt as having the visual appearance of a graveyard, also no longer applies.²⁰³

Even memorial action at a spontaneous memorial has been modified by the presence of ubiquitous internet access. As the physical memorials for 9/11 were cleared away from New York City streets, several museums and universities provided internet forums in which to continue the mourning process. The Museum of the City of New York

¹⁹⁸ Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 218.

¹⁹⁹ Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 198.

²⁰⁰ "About: The AIDS Memorial Quilt."

²⁰¹ "Homepage," The NAMES Project Foundation, accessed March 21, 2013, <http://www.aidsquilt.org>.

²⁰² "Homepage," Quilt Stories, accessed March 21, 2013, <http://quiltstories.org>.

²⁰³ Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 196.

sponsored “Virtual Union Square” and the Smithsonian National Museum of American History in conjunction with the City University of New York and George Mason University created the September 11 Digital Archive, both of which accepted writings and images.²⁰⁴ The latter has also made available 425 voice messages and 20,000 comment cards from the National Museum of American History’s September 2002 exhibit *September 11: Bearing Witness to History*.²⁰⁵

There are two notable differences between these digital memorials and their tangible counterparts. Most obviously is the loss of the physical component. No flowers or candles can be left at a digital memorial; although there are programs which can render three dimensional objects digitally, the control of these images requires access to them and at least some training in generation software, and the objects only manifest themselves as a two dimensional image. The “shrine” appearance of spontaneous memorials is not possible. But digital memorials are not spontaneous either. These digital memorials are in the control of New York City and federal organizations.

But what about individually-sponsored online memorials? Melvin Delgado describes an online memorial as a correlate to memorial murals. Even as early as 1999, people were creating online memorials as public memorial space for as low as two hundred fifty dollars, far less than even a cheap mural.²⁰⁶ Like the murals and AIDS Quilt panels, these memorial spaces can represent the life of an individual far better than a

²⁰⁴ Gardner, "September 11: Museums, Spontaneous," in *Grassroots Memorials*, 296-297.

²⁰⁵ Gardner, "September 11: Museums, Spontaneous," in *Grassroots Memorials*, 300-301.

²⁰⁶ Delgado, *Death at an Early Age*, 79.

typical funeral ritual or gravemarker. But again, the items or sentiments present are restricted to what can be conveyed on a computer.

The potential individualization of such small memorial sites, however, has been hampered by the rise of social networking sites such as Myspace, Facebook, and Google+. Individual profiles, although open to nearly everyone, are created and maintained within the company's template primarily by teens and young adults, the same demographic that is primarily the subject of memorial murals.²⁰⁷ The profile exists unless specifically deleted by someone who can access the account. In the case of an account-holder's sudden death, the account remains extant indefinitely unless someone deletes it for them. However, loved ones may not wish to or be able to close it, and the profile becomes a digital spontaneous memorial. People can write public or private messages to the deceased and post photographs or images. However, the retention of the template of the profile, and therefore all structure of these impromptu digital remembrances, is subject to a corporation's decision. Although Myspace has gone defunct, Facebook continues growing and changing. For example, the template for Facebook has changed multiple times and seemingly at random, often to the chagrin of account-holders, and altering what is visible and invisible to various publics. There is also the debate of whether these corporations or the account holders are in fact the owners of what is posted on these sites. In a certain legal light, any memorial on these profiles is owned by an economic powerhouse.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷ Amanda Lenhart et al., *Social Media and Mobile Internet Use among Teens and Young Adults* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2010), 2-3 and 17-22.

²⁰⁸ Christian Fuchs, "The Political Economy of Privacy on Facebook," *Television and New Media* 13, no. 2 (March 2012): 143-145.

With all the new ways of capturing and maintaining a memory people often forget to ask what happens when these processes of memory become obsolete or non-functional. Already it has become difficult or impossible to view film taken fifty years ago. If by some chance the film has not degraded, the projector that can accommodate it has broken or no one knows how to make it play again. As technological change continues at an ever-increasing rate it has even become difficult to retrieve images digitally stored on compact disks only seven or eight years ago. If these records are indeed to remain permanent, they must be constantly updated into ever-new media, and every time re-encoding occurs the chance of errors and destruction increases and authenticity decreases.²⁰⁹ The authenticity of the original digital record can even be brought into question. The ease with which increasingly large numbers of people create and alter digital content allows for many opportunities for fraud or other projections of misinformation of facts.²¹⁰ It sometimes seems that the only way to actually preserve is to go back to the beginning of recording.

²⁰⁹ Assman, *Cultural Memory*, 340 and Roy Rosenzweig, "Scarcity of Abundance?: Preserving the Past in a Digital Era," *The American Historical Review* 108, no. 3 (June 2003): 746-747.

²¹⁰ For example, the user-edited web encyclopedia Wikipedia, although extremely useful to the general public, does not employ verification rigorous enough to allow it to be used as a reference for scholarly work. Rosenzweig, "Scarcity of Abundance," 743.

Chapter 6: Final Thoughts

Creating a memorial space is an expression of power. Larger, more permanent structures are the product of more dominant powers, those of a government or an expansive religious organization. However, this does not mean that groups with lesser power must memorialize their dead in the provided forms. The marginalized groups discussed in the preceding thesis (Holocaust victims, average soldiers, AIDS victims, and the urban poor in the United States and Italy) have fundamentally reversed the approach to memorialization. As a rejection of the European and Euro-American obsession with saving tangible objects, these groups memorialize through temporary objects and actions. By using easily-destroyed objects and intimate actions, such as touching, those who mourn are forced to repeat their actions. Science has shown that repetition increases the permanence of a memory in both individuals and groups, and thus works to strengthen the community. These repetitions are the reason the more better-sustained features of a culture are not material objects, but instead are methods of building connections to other people and the world.

Counter-monuments do not evoke the triumphalism of traditional monuments, but rather take on ambivalent physical forms which encourage the projection of meaning. They purposefully occupy the space of non-order between official presentation and individual expression. The first memorials at Dachau failed because they were too invested in a single set of (Christian) symbols, which were neither easily reinterpreted nor appropriate to the group being represented. The *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum* and Israel's Yom Hashoah siren, although impressive, also fail for the same

reasons. They are extraordinarily patriotic in expressing the ideals of their respective countries, but fail to allow for individual understanding and expression. It is the *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* in the pedestrian heart of Berlin which best allows for temporary but repeated individual experience of the memory of the Holocaust.

The *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* in Washington, D.C. is also a counter-monument. Much like the *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe*, it can be approached from many different angles, has an abstract form, and encourages touch. However, it is the names engraved on the reflective surface of the Vietnam Wall that hold the most power to incite individualized memory. Names themselves are ambiguous; they are merely symbolic sounds. As a response to this, people who had loved ones represented on the Wall began a process of reclamation. Over the years they have engaged on an intimate level with the dead by leaving letters and personal possessions at the Wall. It is anticipated that people will engage with the 9/11 memorial *Reflecting Absence* in this way, but because the site is unfinished this is still merely speculation.

The *NAMES Project Memorial Quilt* amplifies this desire to personally engage with the dead by allowing the loved ones of deceased AIDS victims free reign to design and create their own portion of the Quilt over an indefinite period of time. Because AIDS victims were repeatedly politicized due to the disease's early association with homosexuality and drug-use, families often used Quilt panels as an opportunity to highlight the individuality and personal connections of the victim rather than make a direct political statement.

However, not all memorials need to be large in scale. In urban centers where space is at a premium, the disenfranchised poor have developed methods of simultaneously mourning and identifying themselves. The poor of Naples have been creating shrines with skulls and bones in them since the seventeenth century with the hope that the dead will intercede with the living. Caring for the dead in this way is a vernacular practice that is forbidden by the Catholic Church, but emphasizes reciprocity between individuals. Therefore the skull shrines become an act of quiet dissent, indicating a preference for and trust in personal connections.

The memorial murals in the urban centers of the United States are another type of memorial expression of the poor. The murals are bright and colorful, and often include images of items of specific importance to the deceased. They often contain a subtle political message, often about violence, disease, and the other realities of poverty. Murals painted without permission of property owners face destruction, and their artists face criminal charges. But the murals continue to go up, and people continue to engage in daily activities within sight of them in defiance of law and discrimination.

As the Digital Age begins, there are new methods of memorialization, many of them open to everyone. What was once the ephemeral ritual of leaving flowers has become a museum display. Cemeteries and murals have become commoditized, with site owners and managers charging viewing fees. The ubiquity of digital cameras and the internet has made it so every moment can be recorded. However, it remains to be seen if these new methods of memorialization can fulfill the needs of mourners, or if they can

even be used at all. The rapid pace of technology has already put the future readability of several mediums into question.

In Chapter 3, there was a discussion of the preservation of words, themselves ephemeral, through the act of writing. German literary theorist Aleida Assman sums up the power and failings of writing as a memorial tool eloquently:

Writing is not only a means of immortalization; it is also an aid to memory. The process of writing on something, or inscribing into something, is the oldest and – despite the long history of all media – is still the most salient metaphor for memory. However, although writing is both a metaphor and a medium for memory, it has also been seen as its enemy and destroyer, for the very act of writing creates the danger of eroding memory by handing over responsibility to the external medium.²¹¹

Thus, even the beginning of record-keeping suffers from the failures of modern attempts at preservation: once the remembering is out of human minds, it becomes something uncontrollable, open to the interpretation, interference, and scrutiny of others.

To return to the questions of Chapter 5: Is anything ephemeral any longer? If it is not, how does this affect the politicking of temporary memorials? As a post-modern answer to the first, the ephemeral does, and does not, exist depending on the definition used. Even the most well-conserved object can still be destroyed, but the most fleeting human thought can be captured and passed on repeatedly. Indeed, the fact that ephemeral memorials even exist is because there also exists a record of human feeling.

Consequently, a governmental or societal structure can create a standard of what is and is not acceptable in creating memorials, and its subjects can subsequently accept or reject that standard. Since it is impossible to know or even construct the illusion of knowing everything, all groups – those in power and those not – are forced to choose what to remember and preserve. Groups without power choose the more personal and

²¹¹ Assman, *Cultural Memory*, 174.

selective route to memory through ephemeral acts and objects in their interactions with all memory and history.

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