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Theatres of Violence: Memory, Architecture, and the National Space

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in Theater, Dance, and Performance Studies

by

Kelli Ann Coleman

Committee in charge:

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September 2024

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2008-2017: Graduate Student Assistant, Walter H. Capps Center for the Study of Ethics, Religion and Public Life at University of California, Santa Barbara

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## ABSTRACT

Theatres of Violence: Memory, Architecture, and the National Space

by

Kelli Ann Coleman

This book examines the intersections of violence, memory, and material space and how it could contribute to a nuanced understanding of a material dimension of performance theory. Categorizing violence as performance offers insight into the dangerous repercussions of performances, as well as those that remain, reanimate themselves, and ‘scrutinize’ themselves in everyday life. My case studies, The Washington National Cathedral (Washington, DC), The National Civil Rights Museum (Memphis, TN), and the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre (Sandy Hook, CT) are cross-historical cases that offer poignant sites to investigate the repercussions of the performance and re-performance of violence in the United States, specifically at sites that have been deemed “national” vestiges of memory.

A performance studies-based analysis of sites of violence and the material remains challenges the notions that “original” is equal to “authentic,” since violence has no legible beginning and/or end. Performances are layered, collapsed, and in these utterances codified social norms and mores are determined. Acts of violence affects how we construct our societies, as well as the way we carry on within them. I use the term “theatres of violence” when addressing these sites of violence to allude to the various dimensions these

performances take: somatic, temporal, material, and sacred. The fourth dimension, or the sacred dimension of performance, is built in the gaps between the somatic, temporal and material. Sites of violence, particularly sites of collective trauma, are transformed into sacred spaces, and that sacrality dictates how bodies move, how time is collapsed and simultaneously extended, and how material is maintained and signified. Theatre, in this regard, refers to the dramaturgical framing of spaces in which violence is being considered. Additionally, “Theatres of Violence” refers to the role of theatre as a space of collective gathering and draws on the metaphysical processes in which theatre is used to debate culture within community through ritual. Memorialization is not a *response to* a violent act, but rather a *contribution to* its role in culture, and its archives. These theatres of violence are spaces where these various contributions are played out. Although official narratives are produced, these debates remain. By reading the in-betweenness of theatres of violence—the careful design of curated museums constructed on the footprint of trauma—scholars can understand how various hierarchies are established and reaffirmed in production of social norms and expectations of behavior within public spaces.

## **Introduction**

### **Theatres of Violence: Memory, Architecture and the National Space**

#NotOneMore is the hashtag that went viral after the Isla Vista massacre on May 23, 2014, that left six dead and fourteen injured. The viral campaign was launched after the large memorial service held for the victims at the University of California-Santa Barbara. In front of thousands, a grieving father begged for change for the sake of his slain son. He demanded action that would ensure, "not one more." I watched him that day, sitting amongst my fellow students, teachers, friends, and colleagues. Despite deep sorrow, there was a vivacious spirit of community, a camaraderie that was echoed from each corner of the campus. Yet, there was also a great feeling of hopelessness; somehow this had happened here. The tragedy was being shared, occupied, and dispersed to those watching from home, while we sat listening to a father reeling in the tragedy of more young people being killed by guns. Sadly, many more victims of gun violence would follow.

This book is not an explicit analysis of the Isla Vista tragedy, yet the killings lurk in the pages, the stories, and the spaces that are examined throughout. When I began this work, I had an interest in the intersections of violence, memory, and material space and how they could contribute to a nuanced understanding of the material dimension of performance theory. "Performance," as a subject as well as a mode of analysis, was intended to weave through the work and tie each case study together. Violence was a deferred concept at the time, regarding my sites of examination, either residing geographically or temporally distant, or distant enough, from my own time and place. My case studies, The Washington National Cathedral (Washington, DC), The National Civil Rights Museum (Memphis, TN), and the



Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre (Sandy Hook, CT) are cross-historical cases that offer poignant sites to investigate the repercussions of the performance and re-performance of violence in the United States, specifically at sites that have been deemed “national” vestiges of memory. I began with the artless premise that scholars have traditionally explained memorialization as a function to heal an individual and/or national wound. Arguing that this mode of analysis suggests that violence merely disrupts a particular narrative, and engaging with sites, or relics, of violence offers means to cleanse, or purge the emblematic cleave. My proximity to the murders in Isla Vista, as well as to the student and community response, challenged my premise, and my understanding of violence as a subject of analysis, and de-stabilized the framework that “performance” pieced together regarding memory, material space, and nationhood. It turns out that violence is the subject of this work, my protagonist that links each performed space together. Categorizing violence as performance offers insight into the dangerous repercussions of performances, as well as those that remain, reanimate themselves, and ‘scrutinize’ themselves in everyday life.<sup>1</sup> This book is not meant to challenge those who see performances as a response to violence to “heal,” as I

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<sup>1</sup> I specifically use Max Weber's term 'routinized' in this context since it refers to outbursts in society (in his case study he refers to as charisma) and details how such moments then create institutions in society that normalize, or "route" the powers into everyday life deemed normal. Although there is no final definition of charisma made by Weber it is generally recognized that charisma is ephemeral and transitory, and is inherently transitional, moving toward becoming something other than what it is at any moment. Weber claims that charismatic authority must move in one of three directions: toward dissolution, toward traditional authority, or rational-legal authority. Charisma thus incorporates this dilemma: to survive it must change, but in changing it must give up its definitive, essentially charismatic qualities. I apply his use of the term to my research regarding the charismatic power that is inherent in violent acts, specifically those deemed "national" events. See, Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organizations*, trans. A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons (Oxford University Press, 1947), 358-392.

initially believed. I'm afraid the through line has the potential to be far more treacherous: violence performs until it is performative.

In this analysis, I focus on violence as it is memorialized in public discourses and produced in physical locals. As Architecture theorist Bechir Kenzari notes, "Even a casual glance at the repertoire of built environments reveals that structures...either sanction violence or give it a spatial ground to thrive."<sup>2</sup> Unlike most built environments, memorial spaces, especially those built on top or around a national trauma, are set apart, which grants them a sacred power. For the sake of a realistic scope, I chose case studies that are categorized by large outbursts of violence in which the general public deems a tragedy (the implications of this something to be discussed in a later chapter.) In the case of Isla Vista, the shooting, and the response to the shooting in acts of material and cultural memory have been explored. However, microaggressions that are prevalent on campus and gendered systematic harassment are inherently connected to the shootings too, since the shooter left a detailed manifesto doubling down on his hatred of women and intended violence against them. Microaggressions and rape culture are most certainly forms of violence, but for the sake of this study, I look directly at the response to this tragedy that resulted in the death of one or more victims. To be clear, this book does not specifically unravel the complex forms of oppression that play a hand in these various instances of violence. While I do touch on racialized and gendered violence within the book, I do it to paint a clear picture of the physical space, and to describe the violence that erupted each one into existence. Instead, this work considers the ritual process of curating and managing the memorial spaces as well as

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<sup>2</sup> Bechir Kenzari, editor, *Architecture and Violence*, (Actar, 2011), 15.

the implication of these spaces as sanctified artifacts for spectators to consume, participate in, and potentially construct "nationhood" that is sewn equally from the threads of history and memory.

Michael Rothberg's theory of "multidirectional memory" provides a compelling framework for rethinking how we engage with collective memory. By highlighting the interconnectedness of different traumatic histories and challenging simplistic victim-perpetrator narratives, Rothberg encourages a more nuanced understanding of how past events continue to shape our present realities.<sup>3</sup> One of his significant contributions is his theory of the "implicated subject." This theory revolves around the idea that individuals are inevitably implicated in systems of power, violence, and oppression, even if they are not directly involved or aware of their participation. In other words, individuals inherit the legacies of past injustices, whether they are aware of it or not. Rothberg calls for creative scholarship to decentralize memory, or nuance dominant narratives by opening space for marginal voices and experiences.<sup>4</sup> As I engage with these various sites, I am firmly aware of my potential culpability and privilege in my analysis and consumption of these spaces. Rothberg emphasizes the ethical responsibility of individuals to acknowledge and confront their implications in systems of power and violence. As I walk through these spaces, I take you, the reader along with me, to always ground the analysis in the present. I use this strategy to allow space for critical engagement not only with the sites but with my positionality as an implicated subject. At certain sites, this book takes a discursive tour into racialized and gendered violence(s). As the spectator, I am drawing attention to the legacies of past

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory* (Stanford University Press, 2009), 1-27.

<sup>4</sup> Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 27.

injustices and how they continue to confer power and privilege, but I do not claim that any violence can be universally understood; this analysis is focused on the material remains of violence and how it can nuance our understanding of performance in theory and practice.

Additionally, the role of the "implicated subject" is not fixed in any sense, but a reflexive relationship with self-vis-à-vis these spatial memories. While this book begins with the shooting in Isla Vista, the mis-en-scene for the entry into this analysis, the kernel of interest for this research began much earlier. I have had a fascination with memorial spaces, and the artifacts they produce, for as long as I can remember. I vividly remember being in elementary school and using my small allowance money to purchase a piece of the Berlin wall; my small piece has moved with me from house to house, and now occupies a space in a small box of other collectibles that I feel the equal compulsion to keep and could never just throw away. During a long drive with my family, we stopped in Dallas to visit the Sixth Floor Museum at Dealey Plaza. While the museum covered the life and legacy of John F. Kennedy, it seemed to be death that brought the throngs of visitors to that very spot. While I had never heard of trauma tourism, or dark tourism, at that age, I was certainly a fan of these peculiar spaces that seemed to be overflowing with endless narratives of history. It felt authentic, a small slice of a preserved past, legitimized by the droves of spectators who had already walked through the memorial long before I was taking those steps. I continue to be fascinated by sites of violence, but after this journey of looking closely, peeling back the curtain into deeply painful tragedies and indescribable loss, I see the importance of writing about the complexities of sites of violence, and the creative potentials they may hold in serving a collective purpose, but I also see the immense ethical challenges to avoid disparaging the memories of those lost, or to re-wound victims. I have been inspired in my

methodology by Diana Taylor's notion of "¡Presente!" which calls for a persistent intentionality in the experience of traumas, and traumatic spaces and places. She writes:

History, tradition, religion, and trauma, for example, are not coterminous with the events that gave them rise, whether it be the birth of the savior or a blow or a defining event. The effects and effects come later. In other ways, too, we do not all live in the same moment...Performance, as we shall see, serves a vital role in opening spaces to breathe and come into presence as a strategic "we" to reimagine other ways of acting and thinking in the world."<sup>5</sup>

The potential for a creative "we" is a daunting task in the contemporary world, so, even if it means inevitable failure, my goal is to "let the spaces breathe" to the best of my ability.

Violence is categorized as a behavior in its definition, either recognized by a physical action against someone, or a volatile emotion. In this sense, violence cannot be measured, but by its destruction, whether physical or mental.<sup>6</sup> The violence, as an act, is ephemeral, but its effects remain. Violence is measured by the response to it, and the traces it leaves behind, that stretch beyond the material and somatic, but also the metaphysical. As a result, no objective measurement of violence can ever be made. The violence in Isla Vista is not a replica of another moment in time. The act is solely unique, despite its commonalities with other events in U.S. and global history. Gun violence has proliferated across the country to such a degree that more than one hundred shootings at schools were reported in the year 2015 alone.<sup>7</sup> The killer in Isla Vista specifically targeted women among his victims since he

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<sup>5</sup> Diana Taylor, *¡Presente!: the Politics of Presence* (Duke University Press, 2020), 20-22.

<sup>6</sup> "Violence Definition and Meaning" Webster's Dictionary Online, last modified September 5, 2024, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/violence>.

<sup>7</sup> "242 School Shootings since 2013" Everytown Website, accessed on 9/21/2019, <https://everytownresearch.org/school-shootings/>.

believed that they had not treated him fairly.<sup>8</sup> Violence against women by men due to perceived mistreatment is nothing new. Yet, no two moments of violence can be compared without recognizing the impossibility of such a comparison. Paradoxically, violence(s) are always intrinsically caught up in each other, histories reproduced and reexamined in new forms. The shooting in Isla Vista was itself, as well as the murders that came before.

You might be now considering several shootings that have occurred in the past decade along with the Isla Vista story. Statistically, there have been so many that it is likely that you are familiar with a victim or have visited a town in which a mass shooting has occurred. Perhaps you will recall these acts along the way—where you were when they took place, and how they affected you—since they are so close at hand in public memory. The residents of the United States have the unique tradition of experiencing the uncanny familiarity of mass shootings. In the days following we talked about shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School, Virginia Tech, and Columbine; the memories folded through our own tragedy but also invoked past violence in Isla Vista that drew out familiarities and challenged any careful explanation. Any potential taxonomy, or diagnosis of violence made with comparison, would always find itself troubled by its differences.

The reactions to Isla Vista's tragedy made it clear to me that there is no moment that can ever be entirely *after* an act of violence. Violence remains and makes itself visible through relentless performances in the footprint of its carnage, and beyond. A performance studies-based analysis of sites of violence and the material remains challenges the notions

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<sup>8</sup> Enrico Gnaulati, "The Isla Vista Shooter: This is Not the Autism Spectrum" in *Atlantic Monthly*, May 29, 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2014/05/the-isla-vista-shooter-suffered-from-pathological-narcissism-not-autism/371768/>.

that "original" is equal to "authentic," since violence has no legible beginning and/or end. Performances are layered, and collapsed, and in these utterances codified social norms and mores are determined. To be clear, I am not attempting to measure violence, but rather to see how these performances of violence become normative in the mechanisms of collective public life. Acts of violence certainly affect laws and governance, but also the particularized expressions of public and private identities. In other words, it affects how we construct our societies, as well as the way we carry on within them.<sup>9</sup>

### **Theatres of Violence**

I use the term "theatres of violence" when addressing these sites of violence to allude to the various dimensions these performances take: somatic, temporal, material, and sacred. The fourth dimension, or the sacred dimension of performance, is built in the gaps between the somatic, temporal, and material. Sites of violence, particularly sites of collective trauma are transformed into sacred spaces, and that sacrality dictates how bodies move, how time is collapsed and simultaneously extended, and how the material is maintained and signified. Theatre, in this regard, refers to the dramaturgical framing of spaces in which violence is being considered. Additionally, "Theatres of Violence" refers to the role of theatre as a space of collective gathering and draws on the metaphysical processes in which theatre is used to debate culture within the community through ritual. Like Raymond Williams's "structures of

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<sup>9</sup> For example, after each mass shooting stocks for publicly traded gun and ammunition corporations skyrocket as people purchase more weapons for their private use. These institutions bolster support and public influence for further deregulation, and more guns are added to the caches of private ownership. While the public response of what to blame is in flux, the increase in gun sales and ownership is constant.

feeling"<sup>10</sup> The term "theatres of violence" is meant to resonate as architectures (material places) of feeling (competing, debated, negotiated), where narratives of collective experiences emerge from multiple experiences that remain unresolved. In the case of memorialization of violence, ritual processes are mechanisms that are mobilized in conjunction with violence. Memorialization is not a *response to* a violent act, but rather a *contribution to* its role in culture, and its archives. These theatres of violence are spaces where these various contributions are played out. Although official narratives are produced, these debates remain. By reading the in-betweenness of theatres of violence—the careful design of curated museums constructed on the footprint of trauma—scholars can understand how various hierarchies are established and reaffirmed in the production of social norms and expectations of behavior within public spaces.

I watched first-hand as the memory was being materialized in Isla Vista, and the material was being sacralized. Students and community members quickly began producing performances of commemoration. Space and place were incredibly volatile and open to a variety of possible meanings and interpretations as the physical spaces were managed in their new forms: a bullet hole could be seen in a store market window, blood stains on the sidewalk, broken glass from the perpetrator's car that was caught in a crossfire with police. The material remains these physical objects, suddenly occupied meaning that could not and cannot be understood by its form, or its given signifier. In the days after the six students were killed, the remains were slow to be collected, disturbed, or relocated. I take into consideration the management of the physical wound, and the implications of how meaning is constructed

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<sup>10</sup> See Williams, Raymond, *The Country and the City*, Chatto and Windus & Spokesman Books, 1973.



in a physical, located space that is endlessly unstable. Memorialization is not a response to a given tragedy but functions as a means to proliferate the violence in public discourses, and codified rituals. In this way, violence is not removed, or purged, but is re-distributed. This is not to suggest that these practices are not important markers of resistance, endurance, and hope. Instead, it is important to consider the structures in place that dictate how a group can/should engage with its violence in their communities, and the contexts in which they are curated. This can attest to how some narratives are deemed appropriate, and how others are removed from archives of collective memory. For example, a statue of a woman falling was constructed in commemoration of the attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11th. The statue of the woman in free fall, after having likely jumped from one of the windows of the tower, showed the frailty of human form. It was promptly removed and replaced with an image of an emergency worker carrying a small woman out of the rubble. While this example is obvious, the choice of American strength and cohesion over the raw expressions of our morality, these tropes are told in the materials that are charged by acts of violence, and mis-en-scenes are created as competing memories are debated.

In Isla Vista, students erected make-shift memorials; flowers and signs were placed in front of the deli where a young man was shot inside. Impromptu memorials with teddy bears, notes written to the victims, anti-NRA posters, handmade crosses, and candles appeared almost immediately after the tragedy and grew at each location where a student was injured or slain. The temporary memorials created a specific map of the tragedy, each site serving as a continual reminder that safety is not a given in this space. Scholars often analyze these impromptu memorials as unique indicators of the current memorial culture in the United States. Usually, the immediacy of the creation of these spaces is suggested to be a symptom

of a "mania" in current culture regarding our memorialization practices. Erika Doss in her prodigiously researched work, *Memorial Mania*, framed the acts of memorialization within the tropes of affect. While this was an astute analysis, her work was framed on the notion that we are memorializing at a much faster speed now, and that public feeling is essentially always under the spell of manic regarding our memorialization practices. She writes, "Today's memorial making is "excessive, frenzied, and extreme—hence *manic*." <sup>11</sup> David Linenthal is another scholar of memory studies who engages with commemoration practices in the wake of "national traumas," and he too considers current practices within a manic framework and argues that these practices are meant to encourage empathy, and eventually catharsis. In this regard, manic memorialization is a result of a desire to purge the wound. While Linenthal's ethnographic research on the Murrah Building bombing, as well as the construction of various 9/11 memorials across the country, certainly shows the healing power of engaging in memorial practices. <sup>12</sup> I argue that it eclipses alternative possibilities for the role of memorialization beyond the desire to heal, and suggests that there is an "end" moment to acts of violence that are pinpointed by the beginning of memory and reflection.

Implicit in these readings is that these items are left at sites of violence to produce an empathetic response and foster healing within the community. I see these temporary memorials, the kitsch items of bears, flowers, notes, etc. as being inducted in the performances at sites of violence, and reading this mode of memorialization mischaracterizes how physical spaces continue to perform violence. Wounds are not created in one instance

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<sup>11</sup> Erika Doss, *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America* (University of Chicago Press, 2010), 2.

<sup>12</sup> Edward Linenthal, *The Unfinished Bombing: Oklahoma City in American Memory* (Oxford University Press, 2003).

but proliferate and alter themselves until they camouflage themselves into the environment. This becomes clear in the careful management of these artifacts as they are maintained, moved, and/or replaced when an "official" memorial is erected in its place. In the case of Isla Vista, the non-perishable items were collected and stored on campus so they could be featured in the curated memorial that would be presented on campus. This is not unique to the scenario of Isla Vista: the artifacts at the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, DC are collected at the end of each day and are stored in a space in one of the nearby Smithsonian.<sup>13</sup> In the case of Sandy Hook Elementary School, the many condolence letters sent to the school in the wake of their tragic shooting were saved and eventually incinerated and used to create the concrete for the new school being built in its place.<sup>14</sup> The material contributions to the space after the initial violence were inducted into the broader performances of violence. My interest is not in the supposed behavior of memorialization that has been deemed manic, but in how these processes are eruptive performances of violence that persist in the present or the ritual functions, and how they carve out sacred space.

The implications of "performance that remains," both its possibilities and potential dangers, must be considered in these spaces, where violence is both exposed and disappeared.<sup>15</sup> The temporal aspect of performance is multifaceted and dynamic. It

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<sup>13</sup> Allen, Thomas B., *Offerings at the Wall: Artifacts Collected at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Collection* (Turner Publications, 1995).

<sup>14</sup> Kyle Lyddy and Pat Llodra, "Guidelines for Submitting a Design For the Construction of a Permanent Memorial to Honor the Lives Lost at Sandy Hook School on December 14, 2012," Sandy Hook Permanent Memorial Commission, June 27, 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (Routledge, 2011).

encompasses various theories and perspectives. Performance studies research investigates how performances evoke and negotiate different temporalities, including memory and history. Performances serve as sites of memory where past events, narratives, and identities are reimagined, reenacted, and contested. Through performances, individuals and communities construct temporal narratives that reflect their collective memories, histories, and aspirations. Memorialization serves a ritual function. Ritual performances are often characterized by repetitive sequences and structured temporal frameworks that shape collective experiences of time. There is a given rhythm or pace, that structures the flow of performance and influences audience engagement. However, with theatres of violence, the first acts of commemoration are enveloped with the aftermath of the devastation. The violence seeps out of the wound and finds itself constructing the performances of commemoration. In this regard, the rhythm is determined by the carnage itself. It is no surprise that each year to commemorate the attacks of 9/11 there is an endless loop of the towers falling and the chaos that ensued. Each year there is the barrage of souvenirs that are displayed pieces of twisted steel, plucked from some unwelcomed place, that now serves as the metaphysical music of that day.

Performance is dimensional, and materials that perform have often been overlooked in their power to determine spaces and movement of bodies and the mapping of social life. When Peggy Phelan declared that the ontology of performance is its ephemerality, she was referring to the temporal dimension of performance, and its impossibility to repeat (as Weber would report similarly on charisma). Rebecca Schneider nuanced Phelan's argument and provided an important analysis of how performance remains through various traces that collapse time, the material dimension was only considered at the peripheries. The material

dimension, the physical spaces that perform, dictate understanding of time, and space, and determine the movement of bodies, offers a new lens for those interested in performance studies to engage in how violence and performance create charged spaces that can point to potential dangers of performance that remain. I focus on the materials dimension of performance as my entry point to examining these structures of commemoration and exploring the possible modes of affective consumption offered to spectators.

Material remains also serve as physical markers that can emphasize the overlapping roles of nostalgia and anachronism. Nostalgia and anachronism are not merely static concepts but are enacted and performed within cultural contexts, shaping our understanding of the past and influencing present-day narratives. Svetlana Boym described nostalgia as "a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's fantasy...[it] is a double exposure...of home and abroad, past and present, dream and everyday life."<sup>16</sup> Nostalgia, as a performative act, involves a selective and often idealized remembrance of the past, imbued with emotional resonance. Boym is careful to note that despite its pervasive presence and functionality, it is "something of a bad word" or heatedly denied when it's acknowledged. There is a sense of pleasure that is produced by nostalgia, and when perceived through theatres of violence, they inherit an element of the macabre, since it is essentially a history that is produced without the burdens of responsibility to truth or fact. Through performance, nostalgia can serve as a means of preserving cultural heritage or constructing a shared sense of belonging by invoking familiar tropes and symbols from the past. I find Boym's notion of "reflexive nostalgia" to be particularly useful since it involves a more critical and contemplative engagement with history and memory. Rather than seeking to restore the past,

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<sup>16</sup> Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, (Basic Books 2001), xiii-xiv.

reflexive nostalgia is interested in understanding and interpreting the past's meaning, acknowledging its complexity and ambivalence.<sup>17</sup> This highlights the way nostalgia has incredible purchase in the production of personal and collective identity. The material remains of violence are handled with incredible care and become imbued with incredible social-symbolic powers.

In considering the way these material remains "perform" within these systems of memory, their undeniable physical reality gives to their inherently anachronistic existence. After all, the material remains are managed and set apart. They are relentlessly being re-shaped, but ultimately, they claim an authenticity of the past. They are both frozen in time and perpetually present. Jeremy Tambling points to the value of deliberate anachronism within performance. He argues that they can not only advance storytelling, but can reveal the constructed nature of historical frameworks, and can create what he calls "temporal displacement," which allows for a challenge to our personal and collective perceptions of how time and history are perceived.<sup>18</sup> Considering these sites of violence as performances, allows scholars to consider how they disrupt linear narratives of history and challenge established notions of temporal coherence. In performance, anachronism emerges when elements from different historical periods are juxtaposed or when contemporary perspectives are imposed onto historical contexts. The interplay between nostalgia and anachronism is inevitable in these social dramas and they invite us to interrogate how the past is mediated, performed, and contested within cultural practices. Keith Moxey describes this phenomenon

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<sup>17</sup> Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, (Basic Books 2001), xiii-xiv.

<sup>18</sup> Tambling, Jeremy, *On Anachronism*. (Manchester University Press, 2010), 11.

as an act of reframing historical memory. He states, "Memory, like history, cannot escape the effects of the context in which it was rehearsed. Both memory and history can be characterized by acts of will, impositions on the chaos of the past of order and significance that cannot be found in the present."<sup>19</sup> By examining the performative dimensions of nostalgia and anachronism, we gain insight into how individuals and communities negotiate their relationship to history, memory, and collective identity in an ever-changing world. Furthermore, I address the entanglement of sacrality and civil religion in performance that hold various implications for theater scholars, practitioners, and audience members as they navigate through the remains of trauma.

### **National Space**

It is especially important now to consider memorialization and violence in the context of the current political scene, or more aptly, "the current mood of the country." National traumas cause both physical and material effects (injuries and mortalities, and economic crises), that impact an individual's way of being, but also larger notions of national identity. Trauma reveals prevailing problems of cohesiveness and citizenship while simultaneously reconstructing additional problematic narratives of national identity. The United States is deeply bound to its traumatic experience, and the symbolic "America" is inevitably tied up with notions of the sacred. At sites of violence, where they are set apart, and made as 'other,' sacred spaces are produced.<sup>20</sup> I am careful not to conflate performance and ritual in my

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<sup>19</sup> Moxey, Keith, *Visual Time: The Image in History*, (Duke University Press, 2013), 142.

<sup>20</sup> I rely on religious studies sociologists who investigate "religious" or sacred manifestations in everyday culture to think about sacred outside of a preconceived notion of a God, or gods. While the United States is equally tied to its Christian identity in its debate

analysis. While it is indeed true that rituals are performances, not all performances should be deemed rituals. I further challenge any assertion that ritual is merely repetition, and performance is simply behavior performed twice.<sup>21</sup> The sacred dimension of performance is the struggle over memory, which reveals certain perceptions and limits to any defined collective. As Catherine Bell notes, “Ritual is always contingent, provisional, and defined by difference.”<sup>22</sup> The meanings of these materials are on the move but still exist within the structures of power. Bell's approach to ritual as a situational and strategic activity can only be recognized and understood precisely about other activities, much as the significance of any symbol can only be understood vis a vis its relation to other symbols. As John MacAloon notes in his work on the origins of the Olympic games, nationhood is legitimized for both participants (in his case, athletes), and spectators (viewers), through the shared experience of the symbolic power of the spectacle.<sup>23</sup> There is a moral and theological purchase in curating spectacles that stake a claim in legitimizing nationhood. Since violence is inherently taboo, these spaces are

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over national identity as it is to its traumatic experiences, I choose to explore how religious fervor binds people to a nation as rapidly as it would bind them to any other kind of institution, like a church for example. In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Sociologist Emile Durkheim states, “Religious beliefs are the representations which express the nature of the sacred things and their relations with each other or with profane things. Rites are the rules of conduct which prescribe how a man should comport himself in the presence of these sacred objects.” See Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields, (The Free Press, 1995), 56.

<sup>21</sup> "Twice-behaved behavior" is Richard Schechner's groundbreaking definition of performance which greatly expanded the field of study to include “restored behaviors.” See, Schechner, Richard, *Between Theatre and Anthropology*, (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985).

<sup>22</sup> Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford University Press, 1992), 20.

<sup>23</sup> MacAloon, John, *This Great Symbol: Pierre de Coubertin and the Origins of the Modern Olympic Games*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1981.



deemed other yet exist within the boundaries of legitimate space. The physical remains of the actual event along with the 'official' constructed memorial are liminal planes that encapsulate the infinite play between space and place. Our social drama is contextualized in this interplay, and communities emerge. An investigation into the dramaturgy of these sites— their curatorial intentions, as well as the visitor's possible consumption of the space dictated by the movement through the strategic architecture, and the various modes of seeing— suggests that the careful construction of these 'theatres of violence' moves the tourist through tableaux of sacrifice, where the consumer can both gaze into the open void of the wound and be disrupted by the erasure of the sacrificial body. The memorialization can point to a slippage between the constitution of individual identity and the collective. The allure of these sites indicates their potential to produce emotive responses that then reaffirm an individual connection to a collective.

This aligns with the large masses who made a pilgrimage to Isla Vista following the shooting. Strangers arrived in droves to view the blood-stained streets and bullet-ridden windows. All the while, additional performances of memory continued. The unique location of the University of California, Santa Barbara, being situated adjacent to the ocean inspired a memorial that had dozens of students paddle out, form a circle, and join hands in honor of the victims. Local and national news crews hung around the campus and Isla Vista community snapping images and collecting sound bites. As days went by, more information about the shooter came to light. Narratives were emerging: "The violence was due to mental illness;" or "a hatred of women;" "racism;" or intersecting possibilities. He was a loner, an outsider, and the discussions regarding the last time someone saw him, or the time he did this, or that, lingered about the campus. The news continued to share the developing story with the world,

and in that regard, it was framing the story for us, this community, who were in the wake of tragedy. We recognized ourselves through the lens of the national media. I was not among the students that paddled out to honor the victims, I do not know what was said, or how the group was formed. I do know that the gesture encapsulated something unique about our community, its locale, of course, the sea being accessible, but also that there was a sense that a commemoration was needed that was specific to the physical culture of the community. The sorority where the young women were shot planted trees in honor of the victims. The university placed a series of lights across campus, a reminder of the large candlelight vigil that took place two days after the murders. Large chalkboards were erected across campus where students could write notes to those who were lost, as well as comment on the enduring spirit of Isla Vista. The examples are endless; musician and alumnus, Jack Johnson performed a surprise concert on the campus later in the year to recognize the tragedy. As some memorials were discovered and shared on the news, other impromptu memorials would be produced. The negotiation between the local and the national was being played out.

Students in the Department of History at the University of California, Santa Barbara were given campus space and faculty mentorship to create a memorial for the tragedy. Edward Linenthal, an alumnus from the Department of Religious Studies, and a scholar of memorials in the United States and memorialization, even assisted the students in creating the space. Contemporary curatorial practices were employed. A pair of shoes from one of the victims was put on display because "she loved to dance." A skateboard with notes to another one of the victims was also one of the objects of commemoration, along with candles, flowers, and teddy bears pulled from the temporary memorials that had been found across campus. These acts of reflection were certainly poignant, but they did not provoke a

response that would make it impossible for this to happen again, it could not move past the point of processing what had happened and giving it images and explanations.

Until the tragedy at Isla Vista, I had not considered that there are expectations placed upon communities following their tragedies, especially when they become a part of "national" memory. In this sense, I further move from the "memorial mania" thesis that argues that this mania represents a current national psyche. Instead, the nation itself is reconstructed in the wake of its traumatic events. Rather than purging a national wound, as this paradigm of healing would suggest, these sites are highly managed places that determine what violence is deemed aberrant to justify violence(s) that are deeply embedded within national identity. Why are some tragedies given national attention, and others ignored? Why was the shooting in Isla Vista national news, but the daily shootings in other areas unreported? Memorialization is hierarchical, as it turns out, and collective recognitions must compete with the various publics that make up the social marketplace. Memorials cost money to construct and require space, which inevitably girds inegalitarian architectures, both in its planning and execution.

It may seem crude to consider collective memory as a product in this regard, competing against other versions of itself. It may be even worse to think of people engaging with sites of violence as a consumer. However, the potentials for understanding how these memories are debated, collected, disseminated, and internalized far exceed the tropes of trauma theory that leave the re-performance a dizzying and inescapable cycle. Instead, it offers insight into the potential pleasures of engaging with sites of violence and the power of debating and contributing to its memorial representation. A consumer has agency, after all. They may take it or leave it. This notion is not to suggest that certain communities lack

memory and memorialization. That would be a major disservice to the many communities that have found creative and powerful expressions of memory for their tragedies. But, within the context of considering what is deemed “national” traumas, exclusionary practices structure the narratives and spaces. This book takes these specific structures, theatres of violence, as its primary study, but I also investigate the inevitable counter-memorials that are produced in these volatile spaces. I see these theatres of violence as being dialogical, constructing their meaning within the unresolved debates between memorials and counter-memorials. Performances can serve as sites for imagining alternative temporalities and futures. Performances can disrupt linear conceptions of time and open spaces for envisioning radical possibilities and utopian visions. By challenging dominant temporal norms and ideologies, performances can inspire social change and collective action toward more just and equitable futures. Or, at the very least, it may challenge spectators and participants to ask themselves how can respond to these acts of violence knowing that we are inevitably embedded within them.

In Isla Vista, memorialization offered a ladder for those enmeshed in the tragedy to climb out of their individuality into a shared collective. An “imagined community” like the ones Benedict Anderson describes, where this collective experience gave enough distance from the experienced tragedy to consider its meaning.<sup>24</sup> Healing cannot be measured objectively, it is too individual, too deeply innate within to be described with language. But now I understand that violence, too, is experienced, and collective understandings are negotiated and mediated through the various experiences of individuals. After the murders in

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<sup>24</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, 2006).

Isla Vista, I now take into consideration why healing would become such an important factor in interrogating sites of violence for scholars. What is the point of our work, if not to benefit those that have suffered such great tragedy? Why study violence at all, if it will not somehow mitigate it, or its effects? Violence is never exhausted in each space. Instead, it must be excavated and carved out, again and again.

### **Chapter Overview:**

#### **“The Bully Pulpit: Debating Civil Religion at the Washington National Cathedral”**

In my first case study, I examine the ideological borders of religion and politics and how they are constructed and framed in the commemoration of violence. Unlike the case studies that will follow in the next chapters, this cathedral is not a memorial built upon the footprint of a violent act. The Washington National Cathedral's self-reflexive mythos of the American character gives insight into the apparatuses of nation-making. Violence is claimed as a "past" in the various stories on display, marked by its absence. The violence represented at the cathedral is happening just off stage, an "ancient past" or a "just before" that is traceable in the narrative but cannot be faced head-on. By examining the performance archives of the National Cathedral in Washington, DC as well as its constructed space I reveal the function of performance of violence to rearticulate fields of belonging. The Cathedral began construction in 1907 and continued for over 100 years. At the center of Christian mythology is the sacrifice of Christ. In the Cathedral, the display of Christ's suffering is deliberately weaved with the presence of a liberal Episcopalian clergy, the commemoration of American soldiers, the tomb of President Woodrow Wilson, and the

performance archives, thus actualizing an array of deeply entangled ideological narratives. The "national" aspect of the space becomes enmeshed with a theological narrative. For example, the chapel for fallen soldiers is filled with storytelling-stained glass. The predominant image is that of Christ in heaven looking down on American soldiers who were fighting in WWII, a representation that links the militaristic force of America to the core values of civil religion in the United States. Therefore, how do spectators read the theatrical performance of an archive of political speeches that are presented within the cathedral? How does a close reading of the various performances in this charged space offer a new understanding of the genealogy of American politics where the emotive and theological have taken center stage?

### **“Forensic Dissent: The Crime ‘Scene’ at the National Civil Rights Museum”**

I will examine here the struggle over and the management of the memory of Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968). I devote my primary analysis to the National Civil Rights Museum (NCRM) in Memphis, Tennessee since the site memorializes the singular life of King as well as the struggle for civil rights from slavery to the present. The NCRM is a particularly interesting case study since it expanded its boundaries in 2002 from the balcony where Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated to the boarding house across the street where James Earl Ray (1928-1998) supposedly fired the deadly shot. This expansion has now included the shooter in its scope and specifically highlights the act of murder. The museum was dedicated in 1991 and immediately became known as the most "powerful" memorial of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States.

I believe the most apt expression of this mode of mapping is with an investigation of the crime "scene" as it sits today. During a recent visit, I was confronted with the temporal and spatial *slip* that both re-articulated and re-inscribed the original conception of the Lorraine as "home-away-from-home" to its present disposition of "home-without-home" which was being performed on the NCRM's border. On the corner of Mulberry Street and Butler Avenue, I noticed an obtrusive collection of tarps, furniture, and plastic signs. It was early in the morning, in November, and the museum had yet to open to the public. I tacitly wandered up and down Mulberry Street as the rain began to trickle down. Then, from behind the far end of the NCRM's back corner, I saw a small-framed woman emerge and head to the dilapidated huddle at the corner. What got my attention first was her peculiar dress. It was about forty degrees outside that day, so warm clothing was necessary as one moved from one shelter to another, yet Smith's attire suggested a longer commitment to the forces of the weather. I examined her dwelling and noticed a large black sign propped up behind the couch, and a half-rolled white sign that was carefully positioned under a heap of trash bags that read in large, orange letters: "POVERTY IS VIOLENCE." Then, she crawled into the plastic tent she had configured and disappeared out its site. This confrontation had formulated a particular preface to the museum that highlighted the juxtaposition of the sterilized museum setting, and the "typological homeless" settlement that engaged in a spatial interplay that plainly articulated that the "theatrical" arrangement of memory comes to a jarring halt at the property line.

While it took decades for the site to be consecrated officially as a national site of memory, pilgrimages to the site began immediately after the murder took place and continue now. In 1991, the \$9.2 million, 10,000-square-foot NCRM opened with the assassination site

as its centerpiece. The balcony is both the starting point and ending point of the exhibit. The museum combines interactive audiovisual devices with conventional exhibit practices to engage visitors in the major events of the civil rights movement and beyond. The large building is constructed behind the facade of the exterior of the motel, leaving the iconic balcony and rows of doors entirely intact.

The multi-temporal nature of museums representing recent and different traumas is a further aspect that requires analysis. The construction of these sites pulls from various instances in history, while also building upon itself to "improve access to history" for spectators. In addition, the display of violence becomes a souvenir. Harvey Young discusses the black body as a souvenir. He writes: "The souvenir, the fetish, and the remain, the body part that recalls and remembers the performance of which it is a part... [it] renders visible the body from which it was taken." How does the NCRM contribute to Young's analysis when the souvenirs on display are the gun used to fire the shot and the bullet that was removed from MLK's body? If the performance remains intact because of these souvenirs, then the act of murder becomes the "trace" always already present in the performance. A comparison of the NCRM and other MLK memorials would offer insight into the politics of memory and the distribution of power regarding representation.

### **“Spatial Wounds and Spectacles: Architectures of Violence at Sandy Hook Elementary School”**

On the morning of December 14, 2012, a gunman forcibly entered Sandy Hook Elementary School, located at the bottom of a small private road, in a residential neighborhood of Newtown, CT., and killed twenty first graders, and 6 educators. However,



the chapter focuses less on the events of that tragic day at Sandy Hook Elementary but rather examines what has happened at the site since. The school was shut down, the road was blocked off, and an investigation ensued, all the while, the nation was looking on. With the ever-growing pilgrimages made to the site, impromptu measures were taken to ensure that the space would remain marked as ontologically different," or "set apart" from the rest of the surrounding space. Signs were erected to threaten legal action against anyone who trespassed, and the crime scene was carefully monitored by police surveillance. And, even to this very day, even with the criminal investigation complete, the site is strategically maintained. This ritualization of the space, it's being marked as different, is akin to what Jonathan Z. Smith calls, "Structures of Temporality," at which point the sacred is given through "marks of distinction" and can overcome place-ness in performance. Here, I would even go further and state that spatial wounds are managed through various rituals in which the sacred is transformed into convenient secular devices (like, Crime Scene/Justice, Victim/Innocence, Criminal/EVIL, etc., etc.), and these typologies have purchased over both bodies and space. After all, the physical spaces and material objects that *remain* at Sandy Hook determine, in both architectural and legal terms, where and how a spectator's body can move within and across the space.

To illuminate the manifold cultural and dramaturgical implications in this structure, I explore the materials that constitute the space as "epistemic remains" of violence, in other words, remnants of the past that insist on surviving into the present. By examining the complexities and multivalent scenarios at play at Sandy Hook, my analysis seeks to explain how architectural materials—steel form, glass, bolts, brick, rust, asphalt, etc.—can be complicit with performances in which violence and national memory are intersected. Furthermore, I

would like to explore how the careful management and re-deployment of the spatial wound are being modified and utilized to manage social identities and ideologies that are problematically rooted in the memorialization of violence. More broadly, I would like to apply the use of Anthony Vidler's notion of what he calls "warped space" to sites of violence to see how the dialectic between object and subject both responds to and informs national agendas that have real power over citizens. So, the objects have power. Now, I am not suggesting that these objects are, in fact, subjects, but rather mobile interlocutors that can potentially condition spectators to engage critically with past events in very particular ways. I prefer to emphasize the volatility of objects and landscapes to suggest that spaces are not only activated by the presence of a spectator; spatial wounds, such as Sandy Hook, are already charged by haunted vectors that make uncontested claims to their cartography. Finally, I would like to see how these factors then point back to the scholar and engage with the matters of ethics and research regarding sites of violence. One effect of memorializing violence congruent with national identity is that it cultivates processes of belonging based on adherence to certain normative narratives and outcomes; the physical memory-scapes and artifacts frame the absurdity of such insider/outsider categories since the crime "scenes" at sites of violence are endlessly citational. As a result, these scenes cannot be untangled from the cross-historical disparities that are not only manifest in an architectural dénouement but also the eruptive traces of memory invading the present.

### **“Conclusion: Technologies of Memory at Sites of Violence”**

My conclusion will review the major points of the dissertation regarding performance and trauma and reiterate how I am filling lacunae in the fields of Performance Studies and

Religious Studies. Namely, how this research moves the analysis of memorials from a means of healing to a larger concept of ritual performances that legitimize the myths of the state. Furthermore, I wish to identify the struggles for individual representation within a vast collective as it is displayed at these sites of commemoration. I address the performance of violence and its functions within a larger scope of contemporary American politics. The political discourse in the United States has become thoroughly imbricated in violence and trauma; therefore, I will examine instances in contemporary politics where the performance of trauma links to the construction of political allegiances. Specifically, I will turn my attention to Glenn Beck's use of the National Mall for the "Restoring Honor Rally" (2010) in which he recycled and revised former narratives to service a particular, conservative, political narrative. The result of the national midterm election in 2010 indicates that Beck's rally, designed within and through the material landscape of the National Mall, mobilized conservative voters. Performance Studies as a field often claims a foundation in progressive activism; however, the current rhetorical canon of American politics suggests such massive polarity that activism is no longer engaging with the opposition. In a sense, liberal protest is often "preaching to the choir," and, therefore, is limited as a tool for social change. I consider possible new forms of progressive activism that find its place at ideological borders, or within theaters of violence.

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## Chapter One

### **The Bully Pulpit: Debating Civil Religion at the Washington National Cathedral**

“Welcome. No Matter your background, your faith, or your reason for visiting, we welcome you to the Washington National Cathedral.”<sup>25</sup>

The groundbreaking of the Washington National Cathedral was a spectacle. President Theodore Roosevelt, dressed in a black three-piece suit, addressed a crowd of over 20,000 people. Behind him the church choir filled rows and rows of bleachers that seemed to stretch up to heaven, their white robes offering an ethereal lightness to the hard edges of the president’s frame, a meeting of the sacred and the profane, heaven and earth. Roosevelt dedicated the “foundation stone” on September 29, 1907.<sup>26</sup> Officially designated as the Cathedral Church of St. Peter and St. Paul, this house of worship was to be a prophecy fulfilled; as early as 1772 Pierre L’Enfant envisioned “a great church for national purposes” in his design of the capital city,<sup>27</sup> and by 1990 the “final finial” was placed in the presence of George H.W. Bush. As in the style of many English cathedrals, the name Washington National Cathedral is an informal designation intended to underscore its civic role in the life of the nation.

The Canterbury pulpit was one of the first furnishings gifted to the cathedral in 1907 when construction began. On my first visit to the cathedral, the docent explained to the group that her church has hosted so many prestigious speakers, from the Dalai Lama to Martin

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<sup>25</sup> From the pamphlet, “the Self-Guided Tour at the Washington National Cathedral,” <https://cathedral.org>.

<sup>26</sup> Official Commemorative Guide, Washington National Cathedral, <https://cathedral.org>.

<sup>27</sup> Official Commemorative Guide, Washington National Cathedral, <https://cathedral.org>.

Luther King, Jr., that they could say without question that they had “a bully pulpit,” only second to the White House. Aptly, it was Theodore Roosevelt himself who coined the term, “bully pulpit” in reference to his office being a terrific platform from which to advocate an agenda.<sup>28</sup> His use of the term ‘pulpit’ was a nod to the symbolic power of the executive branch, as well as the deep connections to religion in the making of the character of the United States. The staff at the cathedral used the term to both describe the power of their platform, since the church continues to take formal stands regarding social justice issues, but it also refers to the literal presence of the pulpit, with sort of a wink, and grounds the narratives of the cathedral within physical relics. This touches on the peculiarity of the space; there is an unrelenting backdrop, yet, the pulpit stands in the middle, an anchor for the infinitude, the past, present and future as referent.

Sociologist Robert N. Bellah defines American civil religion as a set of symbols, beliefs, and rituals that serves to unify people under the umbrella of “America.” For Bellah, civil religion serves a pluralist agenda, and organizes a collective within a moral consensus that serves both broad theological and philosophical principles, along with seemingly minute concerns of everyday life. We claim our civil religious saints and martyrs through ritual, oftentimes overlooking the fact that so many of these transcendent figures would fare poorly under scrutiny. But myths are often invulnerable to reality, particularly when an act of violence is central to a story. Since the cathedral serves to uphold its mission to be a “spiritual home for the country”<sup>29</sup> as well as an acting Episcopal diocese, the cast of

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<sup>28</sup> Official Commemorative Guide, Washington National Cathedral, <https://cathedral.org>.

<sup>29</sup> Official Commemorative Guide, Washington National Cathedral, <https://cathedral.org>.

characters are deeply entangled; in one corner George Washington, and the other Jesus Christ; the entombed Woodrow Wilson on one side of the main nave, the bust of Rosa Parks on the other, while the popular film villain, Darth Vader, carved as a gargoyle, keeps watch outside.<sup>30</sup>

While Bellah recognizes that civil religion is not a benevolent force, he sees it as a necessary means to persevere through, what he calls, “culture wars,” which manifest across generations.<sup>31</sup> The cathedral boldly embraced its role as a mechanism for civil religion at that ceremonious laying of the first stone. After all, it was made of a combination of a rock taken from Bethlehem, the historic site of Jesus’s birth, along with a massive block of American granite; then, the foundation stone was covered with mortar using the ivory-handled mason’s trowel that George Washington used to install the cornerstone of the US Capitol.<sup>32</sup> From there, it got on to the business of reenacting its claims of the American character through historical representations and reenactments, a pursuit it continues to this day.

This is what makes writing about the cathedral so challenging. Its 100-year-long history has seen a litany of prominent figures, engaged with various social debates, and crossed new thresholds of taste and style. The sheer size of the space – the sixth largest cathedral in the world, the second largest in the United States – offers an overwhelming archive of data to excavate; the property is 57-acres, boasting 9 chapels, 231 stained-glass

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<sup>30</sup> David Chidester, *Authentic Fakes: Religion and American Popular Culture*

<sup>31</sup> Robert N. Bellah, “American Civil Religion” *Dædalus*, Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, from the issue entitled, “Religion in America,” Winter 1967, Vol. 96, No. 1, pp. 1-21.

<sup>32</sup> Official Commemoration Guide, Washington National Cathedral, <https://cathedral.org>.



windows, and 112 gargoyles amongst many other objects that accumulate 150,000 tons of material that sits atop Mount Saint Alban.<sup>33</sup> The space is used multiple times a day for services and gatherings; each event documented, transcribed and tucked away in the historical archive. Each day offers a new path to follow, a new thread to pull. When Peggy Phelan decisively named the ontology of performance as its “disappearance” she laid bare the unrelenting passage of *time* that negates the possibility of repetition; but in the cathedral, it is *material* that is unrelenting, and its form demands repetition.<sup>34</sup> The spectator is also an actor in this scenario. Bodies move through the space, and in their unique seeing and moving determines the performances that are produced. The spectator serves equally as an actor, as it reads and interprets the spatial-temporal spectacles as they manifest in that given time and place.

Unlike the case studies that will follow in the next chapters, this cathedral is not a memorial built upon a footprint of a violent act. The Washington National Cathedral’s self-reflexive mythos of the American character gives insight into the apparatuses of nation-making. Violence is claimed as a “past” in the various stories on display, marked by its absence. The violence represented at the cathedral is happening just off stage, an “ancient past” or a “just before” that is traceable in the narrative but cannot be faced head-on. This is the work of the theatre. Samuel Weber regards this as the “secret,” the death(s) we know of, but do not see on stage, as a means of seduction rather than constraint for the spectator.<sup>35</sup> The

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<sup>33</sup> Official Commemoration Guide, Washington National Cathedral, <https://cathedral.org>.

<sup>34</sup> Phelan, Peggy, *Unmarked: the politics of performance* (Routledge, 1993), 147-149.

<sup>35</sup> Samuel Weber, *Theatricality as Medium* (Fordham University Press, 2004), 11.

imagination can cast aside restrictions and open itself to the possibilities of the space and the various characters within, anachronisms be damned. This aspect of spectacle and paradox, rooted in its very foundations, has been upheld in the architecture and design across the 83-year-long-gestation period, and has resulted in a distinct spatial language that drips of the uncanny.

While writing about the cathedral I became keenly aware of the seemingly instinctual need to animate the characters that are cast in glass and stone. Every time I am in the cathedral, I think about what must come alive at night when visiting hours are over, and the clergy have gone home. Imagine, these prominent characters represented in various forms, moving about for the night only to find their place again before the sun rises. A somber sense of tradition persists through the dogma and structure, and the grandiosity of the space secures its legitimacy as a place of reverence, but then a turn around the corner can result in a sort of fever dream – the secular world collided with the sacred. Theatricality abounds; the scenarios are endless. At first, I would go back and strike all forms of anthropomorphism of inanimate objects from my writing about the cathedral, and from all memorial landscapes for that matter, but now I see that just built-up unnecessary barriers, and caused unwanted delays. I succumbed to my feelings about these various *objects*, and those feelings covered a great spectrum. In many instances a description or analysis could only fail, and a mis-en-scene could emerge to curate the edges of such feelings. If the temporal dimension of performance is marked by its inevitable disappearance, the material dimension can be understood in terms of *affect*.<sup>36</sup> Putting the debate aside of whether *all* material performs, the logical extension of

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<sup>36</sup> Doss, *Memorial Mania*, 17.

“all behavior is performance,” I simply argue that materials *can* and *do* perform. And, as civil religious symbols they serve as repositories of public feeling. The performative possibilities of materials are vast; it can lead to a person standing in the presence of the object, or kneeling, all the while public feelings are ignited and inscribed. As *les lieux de memoire*,<sup>37</sup> or a site in which memory is crystalized, the cathedral demonstrates a distinction between memory and history, since the tangible expressions of story, the material tableaux, are so vast, each spectator is reduced to their given perspective, which can be alienating and/or revolutionary in the context of nationhood. As an act of “enframing,” to use Heidegger’s term, humans are reduced to the point where they become subjugated by their own reduction. He was specifically concerned with the role of technology in which man moves toward a state of total reduction. However, these visual rendering of story, these materialized mythologies that are present in the cathedral can also serve to dually critique the act of reduction.<sup>38</sup> The fact that they are unto themselves “reducible” in their material form, but yet meaning cannot fully be tackled head on, points to the metaphysical loophole present in all curated social structures of power.

Demographics are actualized through the social action of ritual. It is collective affect that serves as the “sacred canopy” of a society. Therefore, the cathedral and its many parts often take-up human qualities in this analysis, since we all have feelings about *objects*

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<sup>37</sup> Nora, Pierre, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” *Representations*, No. 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory (Spring, 1989), pp. 7-24.

<sup>38</sup> Martin Heidegger, “Technology in the Age of Man,” in *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays* (Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2013).

whether they remain, relics, or what some would consider everyday artifacts. I would expect that another spectator would have feelings different than my own, of course, but that does not negate the inherent power of affect in the role of identity formation and nation-making conjured from the given object. The life-size bust of Eleanor Roosevelt invoked a deep sense of satisfaction for me when I found her sitting above the Human Rights Porch, but that was eclipsed by a larger sense of shame. I did not notice her until many years into my research—I had somehow *failed* to see her. I think about what could have been if I had found Eleanor at the beginning of all of this, the fields of vision that would have opened, the stories she would have shared, if only she was with me sooner. (I'm still deeply sorry for that, Eleanor.) My experience precludes there will be another scenario, but she is still an American civil religious saint, despite the differences. In some senses, that is the point entirely. So, while diving into the genealogies of the cathedral, I decided, when objects began to speak, I would let the scene play-out. Each reading re-opens the narrative of what the cathedral is “doing,” and casts new characters and deploys new dramas. The spectators' perceptions imbue the spaces meaning, but ultimately these remain a partial reading of the space. The space continues to perform new narratives that are waiting to be seen, and the affective story is always subject to change.

Nostalgia, in performance, often manifests as a longing for a perceived past, a yearning for a time or place that may never have existed in a tangible way but is constructed through memory and imagination. This longing is frequently embodied in rituals, reenactments, and representations that evoke a sense of familiarity and comfort associated with bygone eras. Nostalgic performances can serve various functions, from creating a sense of continuity and belonging to resisting or critiquing dominant narratives of progress and

modernity. In the Cathedral's fervent attempt to be "the nation's church" they invited familiar narratives of America. Nostalgia was an overt strategy, but with the slow march of time, the creeds of the American experience made twists and turns, and the material representations remained, such honorary displays of confederate leaders, Woodrow Wilson laying quietly by, and on and on. Anachronisms here disrupts linear conceptions of time and challenges the boundaries between past, present, and future. Anachronistic performances may emerge as acts of rebellion against normative historical narratives, as playful engagements with temporal disjunctions, or as instances of cultural appropriation and misrepresentation. The sheer scope of the Cathedral makes for a playful yet disturbing choreography through the ripples of American Civil religion as it re-inscribed itself through time.

### **Sacred Landscapes/Secular "Hot Spots"**

The task of cultivating civil religion to serve as a unifier seems of the utmost importance in the current age. Bellah aligned the cultivation of civil religion along with trends of religious institutions of the early nineteenth-century where it had been "predominantly activist, moralistic, and social rather than contemplative, theological, or innerly spiritual."<sup>39</sup> In that regard, the Cathedral submits itself to serve such a hopeful vision of American Civil Religion, theoretically.<sup>40</sup> But, while Bellah could sit comfortably from the

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<sup>39</sup> Robert Bellah, "American Civil Religion," 1-27.

<sup>40</sup> I don't say hope to be condescending in any way, Bellah's enthusiasm for the mission of civil religion was cultivated during the Vietnam War and modes of deep cultural unrest in the country; he did not say "culture wars" hyperbolically. But systems can be reinscribed, and if civil religion ran along the lines of 19<sup>th</sup> century in his reading of the 1960's, then we need to consider how civil religion would understand itself today along its religious institutions of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

pre-data-driven-mania of the 1960's and harken on broad trends that stretched across a century, current modes of analysis have to grapple with civil religion being cultivated in the boom of the technological age, which has been exasperated by a global pandemic. Civil religion in this current era is being tested. This analysis will engage with specific performances in which the referent is at stake; when social, cultural, and historical maps are redrawn to that are removed from the complexity and diversity that constituted them in the first place.

Although the cathedral's material landscape remains mostly unchanged, they are inevitably needing to establish legibility of their mythos of America within movements presented ever more rapidly due to advances in technology, i.e., #MeToo, #BlackLivesMatter, or #NotOneMore, to name a few. With the growing demand to engage with the complexity and diversity that constitutes the stories of our past, the performances of violence at the Washington National Cathedral offers insight into how new narratives are not only negotiated, but how they interact with that lurking myths of America always seeking to find itself again in its dramatization and collective participation. While secular and religious discourses have had to exist side-by-side, they are upheld by the assumption of what Benedict Anderson calls, "homogenous time," which imagines various groups within a "totality of individual lives that compromise a (national) community in which there are no privileged persons or events, and therefore no mediations."<sup>41</sup> At first glance, it seems the discourses of secular and religious tropes are playing out in terms of a system of totality, as Anderson describes, but a simple step back from the cathedral, being located in the posh

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<sup>41</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 187.

Washington, DC neighborhood, just a block away from the home of the Vice President, and one finds a subtle reminder that it is privately owned, strategically controlled, and carefully constructed. It does not escape Talal Asad's critique of capitalist nations-states<sup>3/4</sup>that secularism in the West is occupied by "mutually suspicious and grossly unequal power and prosperity, each possessing a collective personality that is differently mediated and therefore differently guaranteed and threatened."<sup>42</sup> In a global-technological-neo-liberal age, traditional discourses which are cultivated over a period of time and negotiated in the public sphere, oftentimes now exist in abbreviated utterances, or even sound bites, that become so disembodied they lose their familiarity altogether. How does civil religion operate within secular spaces without having its cues from religious institutions? Civil religion in this hyper-speed begins to operate as a *(re)actionary* function with potentially detrimental effects.

The cathedral offers innumerable genealogies; it demands to be examined as a holy space, a theatre, and a site of memory. And, located at just right of center at the intersection of arms and body, is that "bully" pulpit<sup>3/4</sup>the beating heart. From the Canterbury pulpit one can look left, right, above, and below. The floorplan of the cathedral is allegorical to the crucifixion of Christ<sup>3/4</sup>a long center nave, with two transept "arms" to form the shape of a cross. The stations of the cross appear in visual form along the left nave, Jesus moving toward his death and Man's salvation. The enormity of the space is an aspect of how the material performs. Our field of vision is limited, we can only see so much, and we have only so much time to commit to such a seeing, fragmented seeing gives to an implicit not seeing.

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<sup>42</sup> Asad, Talal, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford University Press, 2003), 7.

As a site of tourism, the cathedral has prepared for the inevitable challenge of its scope, and thus cultivated a cohesive strategy to bring any interested visitor in and through the space (whether in-person or online)<sup>3/4</sup>dubbed “hot spots,” strategic spaces are highlighted as points of viewing at the exterior and the interior of the cathedral.<sup>43</sup> These “hot spots” connect a sacred landscape that is determined less by a clear definition of sacred-ness, but is “sacralized” as the result of the cultural labor of ritual, in specific historical situations, involving the hard work of attention, memory, design, construction, and control of place.<sup>44</sup> I could find no explanation of how they landed on the term, “hot spot,” to guide their visitors (nor whom, exactly, that “they” would be), yet, the mapping of the space in such terms resonates within the dually secular and sacred discourses that are contingent upon a spectators literacy. Perhaps it is only logical that the pulpit stone itself is carved into scenes depicting the painstaking labor of translating the Bible into English. It offers a means of literacy, a way of seeing the space in its scenarios of affect. It is “bully” for who it hosts, but as the means to anchor itself in the many potentials of meaning, it continues to live up to such a description. Additionally, the mapping of these “hot spots” serves as allegory to how sites of violence across the United States become the points of mapping for the broader sacred landscape of America. They find themselves in their footprint, as the next chapters will demonstrate, but they also find themselves speaking in and amongst the materials of the cathedral.

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<sup>43</sup> “Washington National Cathedral,” accessed September 8, 2024, <https://cathedral.org>.

<sup>44</sup> David Chidester and Edward Linenthal, *American Sacred Landscapes* (Indiana University Press, 1995), 8.



The pulpit is an affectual cipher of the “bully” pulpit. It serves as both a character in the story, but also the central “hot spot,” the point of return, and re-return. Engaging in these performances is not to be taken lightly since they imbue a sacred dimension. In this case, when discussing the “sacred” it is not the dogma of the Episcopal church, or the Cathedral’s stance as a “house of God,” but rather the aspect of performance that elevates physical material beyond its signifier and recast it with power beyond its understandings. The cathedral boasts that it is “a pulpit for the Nation,” stating that the mission of the cathedral is to bring national and international leaders together to nurture interfaith understanding and address pressing national and global issues.<sup>45</sup> The genealogies of violence move into focus at certain historical moments, but they always start in the present, our jumping off point into the remains of the past. Perhaps there is an ongoing effort to reflect on narratives that have engaged in the violence of forgetting, in which the diversity of people, and the complexity of place, demand that the stories broaden themselves for repetition. No space is without its troubling past, but what performances or actions are taking place to honor the referent?

*Cathedral Age*, the cathedral’s in-house magazine often refers to pulpit as being a space of “living history,” and tour guides are quick to share that Martin Luther King, Jr. gave his final Sunday Sermon from that pulpit, just four days before his assassination at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, TN. At the onset of his sermon, “Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution,” King recognized the significance of the place in which he stood, stating, “I need not pause to say how very delighted I am to be here this morning, to have the

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<sup>45</sup> Commemorative Guide, *Washington National Cathedral*, <https://cathedral.org>.

opportunity of standing in this very great and significant pulpit...”<sup>46</sup> King goes on to say, “it is always a rich and rewarding experience to take a brief break from our day-to-day demands and the struggle for freedom and human dignity and discuss the issues involved in that struggle with the concerned friends of goodwill over our nation.”<sup>47</sup> Taking on a not-so-veiled approach to engage his primarily white audience, he relayed the story of Rip Van Winkle, who climbed a mountain top to take a long sleep, and in it, he missed the revolution. He asked this well-meaning audience to stop sleeping, and engage in the fight to eradicate racism, and stay awake. From where he stood at the pulpit, to his left were stained-glass windows honoring confederate leaders Stonewall Jackson and Robert E. Lee, and just a few windows away the re-retelling of Lincoln ending slavery in America plays on. While I have no way of knowing if King saw those images, he certainly understood the power which sacred symbols had in cultivating public feelings. He stated:

In 1863 the Negro was told that he was free as a result of the Emancipation Proclamation being signed by Abraham Lincoln. But he was not given any land to make that freedom meaningful. It was something like keeping a person in prison for a number of years and suddenly discovering that that person is not guilty of the crime for which he was convicted. And you just go up to him and say, “Now you are free,” but you don’t give him any bus fare to get to town. You don’t give him any money to get some clothes to put on his back or to get on his feet again in life.<sup>48</sup>

In the act of speaking to the meaning of civil religious symbols, King reminds his audience that nation making is non-egalitarian. As Catherine Bell notes, “Ritual is always contingent,

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<sup>46</sup> Transcripts via The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University, accessed July 11, 2020, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/publications/knock-midnight-inspiration-great-sermons-reverend-martin-luther-king-jr-10>.

<sup>47</sup> Transcripts via The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute.

<sup>48</sup> Transcripts via The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute.

provisional, and defined by difference.”<sup>49</sup> The meanings of these materials are on the move, but still exist within the structures of power. Bell’s approach to ritual as a situational and strategic activity that can only be recognized and understood precisely *in relation* to other activities, much as the significance of any symbol can only be understood vis a vis its relation to other symbols. Instead of the position of Richard Schechner or Victor Turner, in which ritual processes lay open for participation, and renders social formations momentarily “moot” (the liminal phase),<sup>50</sup> Bell prefers the term “ritualization,” since it highlights ritual as a form of privileged action and cannot be understood in the simple binary of belief and behavior, the individual and the collective, the sacred and profane. Simply put, “ritualization is first and foremost a strategy for the construction of certain types of power relationships...”<sup>51</sup>

“Remaining Awake During a Great Revolution” is far from King’s most popular speech. It may have not even been transcribed had it not been in such close proximity to his death.<sup>52</sup> On April 4, 1968 King was shot and killed as he was emerging from his room at the

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<sup>49</sup> Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 20.

<sup>50</sup> While Turner is responsible for the term “the liminal phase” both Turner and Richard Schechner worked at the theory of ritual as anthropologists, and in their case often as outsiders looking into scenarios, they felt they needed little input from the insiders about. Turner’s *A Ritual Process* is helpful to think about movement, Rites of passage, of ritual, and the power of collective identity, it fails to point to this aspect of privilege that Bell focuses on for her work. Jonathon Z. Smith also draws attention to the act of ritual as a “taking of place,” alluding to the “labor” of ritual, which comes with power structures and relationships in its presentations.

<sup>51</sup> Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 197.

<sup>52</sup> Dr. King’s final sermon “I’ve been to the Mountaintop,” given on April 3, 1968, the evening before his death, is often viewed posthumously has his prediction of his own death.

Lorraine Motel. His death permanently changed the Lorraine, but his death also found its way back to the cathedral. On April 5, thousands came to the cathedral to mourn his death, and each year since a celebration is held to commemorate the legacy of Dr. King. As a civil religious martyr, he remains in integral part of how the cathedral understands itself, a place where King is honored for his sacrifice. In 1984 a stone bust was created of Dr. King, a replica of him giving that final Sunday sermon, mid-sentence, from the bully pulpit. Standing at the pulpit a look down the main nave to the right, there is Dr. King speaking back at the pulpit from his pulpit, he is simultaneously situated and removed. “Once the mimetic has sprung into being, a terrifically ambiguous power is established” there is the power to represent, as well as falsify, mask and pose.<sup>53</sup> Dr. King became MLK when a bullet moved through his body, but his figure is represented in that moment before. He has been alienated as a symbol in his mimesis.

A year after the stone bust of MLK was installed, Ronald Reagan won the re-election for his second term in office, and it was Billy Graham standing at the bully pulpit, offering the customary inaugural prayer. The practice of hosting an inaugural prayer service at the cathedral began with another Roosevelt, FDR, in 1933, and the practice continued for nearly every election since, most recently for President Joseph R. Biden. By 1985, Billy Graham had become a fixture of inaugural ceremonies, having been present for the occasions as far back as Dwight D. Eisenhower. Since his early revivals in the 1940’s and 1950’s, Graham

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<sup>53</sup> In his reading of Caillois and Benjamin, Taussig explores the role of mimesis as a function of transcendence what he playfully calls “spirit mischief.” While his statements are hyperbolic since he applies it to the entire world without careful consideration of geopolitical autonomies and genealogies, the “play” aspect of mimesis apt. See Taussig, Michael, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Sacred: A particular History of the Sacred* (Routledge, 1993), 42-43.

had found his audience amongst Evangelicals who had come to see themselves being ostracized from society as a result of their Christian faith and wanted to bring their private faith back into public life. But they were also uncomfortable with the theological liberalism of church reformers who embraced modernist thought. They sought to unite Protestant conservatives in a broader movement, New Evangelicalism, which they hoped would maintain a commitment to historic Christian tenet while actively engaging in the prevailing culture. Graham would become the leading figure in this movement, which went on to eclipse mainline Protestantism as the dominant force in American religious life.<sup>54</sup> Then, from the mid-nineteen-seventies and through the mid-eighties, evangelicalism, led by Reverend Jerry Falwell, began a steady march rightward into the embrace of the Republican Party. The movement came to be defined as social conservatism.

On January 20, 1985 the AIDS epidemic had killed 8,406 Americans, affecting primarily gay men. (1985 would eventually show an 89% increase in deaths that would continue to rise). Ronald Reagan, sitting next to his wife, Nancy, had yet to make any mention of the rapidly spreading virus as he sat in the cathedral that day, listening to Graham. Reagan rarely attended church while in office, citing security concerns, but made sure to attend this honorific. With the tensions of the Cold War brewing, Graham told Reagan and his administration, “During the next four years, many of you here today will have to make decisions of state perhaps greater than any of those made by your predecessors...because of modern technology, you will hold in your hands the destiny not only of America but of the

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<sup>54</sup> Michael Lou, “How Billy Graham Lost his Way” *NEW YORKER*, accessed on December 14 2022, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-lost-revival-of-billy-graham>.

entire world.”<sup>55</sup> Graham had spoken against nuclear proliferation in 1982, and took his opportunity to echo his sentiment of the dangers of warfare while in the presence of Reagan. He never mentioned the disease that was haunting communities across America.

Graham was probably happy to see the newly erected bust of MLK speaking to him from the main nave. Dr. King cited Graham as an ally, and publicly credited him with helping the cause of civil rights. Graham may have reflected on his choice to host integrated revivals in the early 1950’s, but perhaps cringed when he thought about his criticism to enact any changes to law, arguing the movement should focus on “changing hearts, not laws.”<sup>56</sup> What Billy Graham was thinking or feeling bares little importance in considering how these materials are performing, and re-performing. On that day, in 1985, the influence of Jerry Falwell in the conservatism of the era had framed the AIDS epidemic within tropes of sin and reckoning, and with the silence of Reagan and Graham, it was ritualized as a mode of public feeling. The fact that Graham returned time and time again to the pulpit, and his son after him, is the testament to the resiliency of collective affect inscribed in discourses of nationalism. Not to mention that Graham was never gunned down for his appeal to American’s to live in the vision of Christ. Echoes *can* and *do* emerge: a quiet begging to stay awake.

The imbrication of King and Graham within the seemingly infinite archive of history creates a vortex of potential readings. This is true even if the full meaning is deeply obscured

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<sup>55</sup> “Compilation of Billy Graham” accessed on March 13, 2017, <https://billygraham.org/story/billy-graham-trivia-what-reminder-did-he-give-president-reagan/>.

<sup>56</sup> Sutton, Matthew Avery. *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Harvard University Press), 2015.

or misunderstood. A Millennial or a Zoomer<sup>57</sup> that walks into the cathedral may not sense the “silent majority” language that is tucked away in various nooks and crannies, but the fact that there are no stained-glass windows or concrete statues depicting the struggles and triumphs of the LGBTQ+ community potentially serves as a legible absence. An absence ignored for decades, but as more demands of people to see themselves reflected in the myths of America, the absence starts to *boom*. Herbert Blau’s describes this as *thought*, “The knowing that is to be known is already known but not understood until the reenactment.”<sup>58</sup> Theatre goers are prepared for such a suspension of reality, but in the cultivation of civil religion there is a potentially insidious outcome, when myth becomes the basis for contesting facts. Rustom Bharucha explains something similar to this phenomenon in his work on terror: “instead of ‘to see or not to see’, the dilemma of our times is compulsive seeing, repetitive seeing, with a vengeance.”<sup>59</sup> Civil religion as *reaction* needs new forms of analysis, since American Civil religion now presents as American Civil religion(s).

From the bully pulpit, complex critical acts that both reflects and mimics its historical validity are revealed, all the while drawing attention to its activities through its hyperbolic exaggeration. Blau further notes:

When and if we turn back the pages of history, we usually stop at the place that confirms where we are or where we’d like to be, what we have to prove... We are

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<sup>57</sup> I have been incredibly resistant to the use of Zoomer to speak to emerging group of Generation Z. It feels like a capitalists’ delight to see their brand represent an entire generation. However, generation Z is somehow even more of an annoyance to say and write, so I am succumbing to the name Zoomer here. I am sure to regret it.

<sup>58</sup> Herbert Blau, *Take Up the Bodies: Theater at the Vanishing Point*, (Chicago, Illinois University Press, 1982), 3.

<sup>59</sup> Rustom Bharucha, *Terror and Performance* (Routledge, 2014), 16.

always looking for the nuclear event, the remotest particle of memory, *that* happening, a *dromenon*, whether to root a doctrine or to authenticate a Plot.<sup>60</sup> This is abundantly true in the Cathedral, that has since looked back onto its own history, and has attempted to alter its own understanding of itself. It relies on its spatial language which reminds us that performances of history lack credibility; mimesis is illusion, but the power of theater is the truth of illusion.<sup>61</sup> The shortest way between two points, between the acts of violence themselves and the codified spectacles of the cathedral, is the long way around, tracing its edges until a picture emerges. What follows are mis-en-scenes, stories, performances, in which material performs.

### **Land of the Free**

On June 9, 2020, the official twitter account for the Washington National Cathedral tweeted out an image showing the words “Black Lives Matter” projected on the façade of the cathedral. The tweet was intended to show solidarity with the protests taking place all over the country after the murder of George Floyd by police officers in Minnesota. A public display of social and political solidarity is nothing new for the Cathedral that oftentimes makes public reflections and condemnations regarding divisive issues. This statement of solidarity gives insight into the shifting perceptions of the American story, at least from the perspective of the cathedral. Against the backdrop of the stained-glass windows, this gives a moment to reflect on the lack of people of color that serve as clergy and staff of the church,

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<sup>60</sup> Bharucha, *Terror and Performance*, 16.

<sup>61</sup> Bharucha, *Terror and Performance*, 16.



let alone its parishioners. The clergy issued a formal statement of solidarity. Standing at the pulpit, the Very Rev. Hollerith made a formal statement to the congregants:

Ahmaud Arbery. Breonna Taylor. Christian Cooper. George Floyd. We must say the names of our African American brothers and sisters who, because of the color of their skin, are subjected to suspicion, harassment and even death. We must say their names because their names are known to God.<sup>62</sup>

His statement which he titled, “Turn away from Racism,” makes use the same tactics as abolitionists in the 1840’s and 1850’s, in which the call for eradicating systemic racism is the calling of God and uses religious scripture to gird the argument into a commandment for Christians to adhere. By projecting this statement on the cathedral walls, spectators are offered an ephemeral gateway into strides to the cathedral is taking ? to challenge the white-Euro centric narrative that preoccupies the space.

This solidarity that came in 2020 was significant in the grounding the political allegiance of the church. The timing of the statement also highlighted the absence of the past, where statements had yet to be made, a before time, in which the civil religious mechanism of the cathedral reified tropes of American’s character that served systems of oppression. Revise previous sentence for clarity. The materials persevered. The Lee-Jackson windows stand approximately 8 feet high and 4 feet across, had found their home in the cathedral the tableaux of commemoration of those deemed early civil religious heroes of America. Found on the right side of the main nave, the windows are the backdrop for the entombed President Woodrow Wilson and hangs directly across the main nave from the stone bust of MLK. Statues and monuments are often seen as long-standing permanent fixtures and are assumed

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<sup>62</sup> The formal statement of the Very Rev. Holland can be found at the Cathedral’s website, <https://cathedral.org/press-room/dean-randy-hollerith-we-cannot-turn-away-from-the-horror-of-racism/>.

to emerge from the time that they represent, but such memorabilia take effort, planning and politics to get placed. The cathedral requires additional consideration since it requires funding,<sup>63</sup> and must fit in within the broader visual story of the cathedral and its artifacts. Additionally, nothing is simply “put” in the cathedral, a consecration process takes place for each item that is interred. As the cathedral often boasts about its “living history” the materials that make up the space must pass through religious rites to demarcate the item from the profane and casts it into the sacred network of the space. This is true whether the object depicts something from Christian mythology, or from American secular discourses. Again, the cathedral somehow looks back on itself in these particular moments, where nation-making is a process allegorical to a sacrament.

*Cathedral Age*, the church’s magazine, in 1953 wrote about the upcoming dedication of the section containing the windows, saying it was “the culmination of years of devoted effort on the part of hundreds of members of the United Daughters of the Confederacy whose contributions have built this beautiful section of the Cathedral as a memorial to the two great Americans whose names it bears.”<sup>64</sup> Both Lee and Jackson are known for their prominent roles as Generals in the confederate army. The Lee-Jackson windows depicts Robert E. Lee in the left window, showing him engaged in scenes of his as engineer, military man, and educator. The window on the right “portrays Lieutenant General Thomas Jonathon Jackson

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<sup>63</sup>The cathedrals budget operates off private funding as well as tourism. As for the stained-glass windows, statues, and other material additions in the space, the vast majority have been presented as gifts to the cathedral.

<sup>64</sup> “Cathedral Age,” in *Cathedral Age*, accessed June 22, 2018, <https://cathedral.org/about/cathedral-age/>.

as an officer, a teacher, faithful Christian...” both are being honored “for their valor and devotion.”<sup>65</sup> Confederate flags alongside U.S. flags are intertwined in the images.

The arrival of these stained-glass windows in 1953, nearly 100 years after the conclusion of the Civil War came as a part of a boom in the United States of confederate monuments across the country. The Southern Poverty Law Center has charted the rise of confederate monuments in the United States, and saw two major periods of growth: the first during the early 1900’s shortly after the *Plessy v. Ferguson*<sup>66</sup> case, and the establishment of the NAACP; and again, in the 1950’s and 1960’s, with the civil rights movement in the country gaining steam.<sup>67</sup> They remained with little debate since their consecration, when the “Space window” was placed in 1973 to the right of the window, bringing more visitors in their frame of view, no noticeable debates were noted. The windows told their story of the confederate-American, fighting against tyranny for the sake of freedom<sup>3/4</sup>they were silently speaking when MLK spoke from the pulpit in 1968. A spectator looking on from the Lee-Jackson windows onto the bully pulpit and back again to the stone bust of MLK would find time collapsing on itself, each object sanctified in the hegemonic process that determined their legitimacy<sup>3/4</sup>the 1953 Lee-Jackson scenarios, meeting the 1968 sermon of the embodied Dr. King, then finding the 1985 disembodied material representation of MLK. From this

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<sup>65</sup> The index of the stained-glass windows published in *Jewels of Light*, predates the debate over the windows and their placement in the cathedral. See *Jewels of Light: The Stained Glass of the Washington National Cathedral* (Washington National Cathedral, 2004), 89.

<sup>66</sup> *Plessy v. Ferguson* upheld the constitutionality of racial segregations using the “Separate but Equal” doctrine

<sup>67</sup> “Who’s Heritage?” at Southern Poverty Law Center Website, [https://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/com\\_whose\\_heritage\\_timeline\\_print.pdf](https://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/com_whose_heritage_timeline_print.pdf).

vantage point you can start to answer the question Rebecca Schneider poses in *Performing Remains*, “What if time (re)turns? What does it *drag* along with it?”<sup>68</sup> In this instance, a bullet, stripped of its aesthetic charms, and rendered bare. Repositories of Public Feeling emerge, their metaphysical edges shaped by the weight of the systems pressed into their edges. While entropy applies more decidedly to the somatic rather than the material in contemporary re-enactments, no phenomena exists without its potentials of erasure.

The Cathedral began to debate whether the depictions of Lee and Jackson were ‘suitable’ in a house of worship began in June 2015 following the murder of nine Black men and women in the AME Church in Charleston by a white supremacist that joined them for prayer; the shooter killed Clementa Pinckney, Myra Thompson, Sharonda Coleman-Singelton, Depayne Middleton-Doctor, Daniel Simmons, Cynthia Hurd, Ethel Lance, Susie Jackson, Twaynza Sanders on June 17, 2015. Following the shooting, the now rote news cycle and debates around gun laws played out, seeking an answer that did not challenge the neatly crafted narrative of America that had emerged triumphant from its racist past.

In 1985, from the bully pulpit, Billy Graham was looking at outside forces as the cause of potential harm for the American people; his look outward eclipsed the very necessary look inward that had yet to be considered. After the Civil War, Reconstruction saw the passage of the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Amendments, which abolished slavery and granted equal citizenship to Black Americans. In the years after the war, the nation witnessed Black Americans’ integration into Southern political life. Local chapters of the Union League and other organizations mobilized Black voters and fostered Black candidates for local and state

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<sup>68</sup> Schneider, *Performing Remains*, 2.

elections. In 1868 South Carolina had a Black-majority state legislature; in 1870 Hiram Revels of Mississippi became the first Black American to serve in the United States Senate. For a short while, it seemed the promise of liberty and justice for all was an attainable goal, at least in the legal sense.<sup>69</sup>

However, in the late 1860's and early 1870's, white Southerners developed the notion of the confederacy as the Lost Cause in order to combat the radical changes taking root in Dixie. Cultivating its own symbols, beliefs, and rituals, the confederacy, framed in the ideology of the Lost Cause, formed a subheading of American Civil Religion. Proponents of the Lost Cause began to take on new relationships with the symbols and stories of the Civil War, claiming the South was the victim of invasion by "Yankee Vandals," and finding themselves on the moral high ground. They simply "defended their land and life in the face of the undue Northern aggression." The war was not about Slavery, according to this mythos, but rather a response to an attempted power grab by the oversized government to the North. The occurrence of funerals of confederate soldiers, celebrations of confederate holidays, and the mass proliferation of numerous confederate monuments and statues were all a part of the ritualization of the Lost Cause.<sup>70</sup> The Lee-Jackson windows are a material manifestation of this belief system. As a subheading to American Civil Religion, the symbol of the confederacy could move into the public domain being alienated from itself, disguised in claims of history.

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<sup>69</sup> Caroline Janney, *Remembering the Civil War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation. Volume 16 of the Littlefield History of the Civil War Era Series* (University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

<sup>70</sup> Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause* (University of Georgia Press, 2009).

Following the shooting in 2015, the now rote news cycle and debates around gun laws played out. The deep polarization along the second amendment led to its traditional paralysis of action but re-ignited the debate around the pervasive symbols of the confederacy. When placing a “frame” around the cathedral’s public contemplation of the windows can offer a dramaturgical lens to the character of public feeling. In this sense, the familiarity of public feeling around confederate monuments is a reflection of our state of being as “thrown” into the world, as a result of contextual forces that we can never fully control, and in some senses never fully *know*.<sup>71</sup> This can allow spectators to compartmentalize the uneasy feelings that can emerge from investigations into systemic racism and complicity. I argue that this is not the limits of collective affect, these materials that perform offer a point of departure to re-frame our trajectories as being *from* birth, rather than *toward* death. After all, nostalgia reaches far beyond lived experience, a sense of innocence is an intoxicating allure, and finding the obligation of “freedom and justice for all” as a birthright could cultivate new paths forward.

A decision regarding the fate of the windows became more urgent after white supremacists and neo-Nazis staged protests in Charlottesville, VA in August 2017 that turned violent, and left a counter-protester, Heather Heyer, slain. On September 6, 2017, representatives from the Washington National Cathedral announced that it would remove the Lee-Jackson windows:

While the impetus behind the windows’ installation was a good and noble one at the time, the Cathedral has changed, and so has the America it seeks to represent. There is no place for the Confederate battle flag in the iconography of the nation’s most visible faith community. We cannot in good conscience justify the presence of the

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<sup>71</sup> Martin, Heidegger, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, *Being and Time* (Harper and Row, 1962).

Confederate flag in this house of prayer for all people, nor can we honor the systematic oppression of African Americans for which these two men fought.<sup>72</sup> In his statement, the Very Reverend Gerry Hall, perhaps unknowingly, underscores the performative quality of nationhood. An America that has “changed” needs performances of change to make new forms of identity legible. The erasure, or removal, of an icon/image is the ritualized act of recasting history from “good and noble” to “systemic oppression.”

The Jackson-Lee controversy is a rather minor one in considering the long history of the Cathedral, as well as the parallel history of confederate monuments displayed in public spaces. The intersections of these debates, and this space, at this particular point in time, serves as a site of entry into the mechanisms of performance and violence, and how these articulating frameworks orchestrate a conflicted sense of national identity. The term “frameworks” is specifically fitting, since the emergence of an identity of any kind must be allowed within the given structures of society. Not all narratives of “we” or “us” will fit into a given framework, and the consequences of being unable to “fit” becomes debated in the public sphere (often while bodies are subject to blatant oppression). The theatrical function of “framing” can help pull these seemingly endless traces together, and find ways to speak to new stories, with the heroes just off-stage., waiting to emerge.

After the decision, a scaffolding was erected to obscure the windows, and drapery had been pulled down to expose the now taboo pieces for its official de-consecration. These holy objects were in the process of being stripped of their sacred power and would return to the secular world where items of glass and paint can be easily discarded or destroyed. I should note that the cathedral did not opt to destroy the windows but have been stored away in their

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<sup>72</sup> Washington National Cathedral Archives, <https://cathedral.org>.

archives. While they will never be displayed in the cathedral again, perhaps an act of a public destruction of the windows ? offering a symbolic demand that racists imagery be owned up to, and eradicated from the narrative altogether. Or perhaps leaving the area where the windows once stood empty could be the reminder that we have inducted racists narratives in the character of America, and we must continue to struggle in order to eradicate them. After all, the absence of the object continues to perform. Michael Taussig referred to these acts as “the public secret,” in which the spectator fills absence with a knowing of what *not* to know. The debate over the “suitability” of confederate monument in public spaces continues to unfold, so the secret persists.<sup>73</sup>

The removal of the windows came with no condemnation of those that had placed them in the halls of the cathedral, in fact pointing out that it was with “good intentions” that the images were ordered and placed. However, that process is not thoroughly discussed or shares to the broader congregation. The historicity is far less important than the actual de-consecration, the performance itself marking a new history of the space. Relocated within the space of theater, this performance explores the inlay and layering of the socio-symbolic and the conditions of its reproduction. Furthermore, the removal of the windows at the National Cathedral present a model for a future potential of removal of other representations of white supremacy, in this case the confederate monuments.

While the Cathedral sites this as a moment of reframing their priorities in order to focus on giving voice to those that have been for so long rendered voiceless, a look just down the main nave, adjacent to the Bully Pulpit another series of images representative of the

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<sup>73</sup> Michael Taussig, *Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labor of the Negative* (Stanford University Press, 1999), 11.



Civil War cause a troubling contradiction to a mood of solidarity. President Lincoln is depicted next to the words “Emancipation” as he raises his arms out to a Black man, woman and child. It’s not just a trace from one event to the next, it is what is “seen” and experienced along the way for the spectator that informs the narrative. After tracing the scene from the projection of “Black Lives Matter,” climbing the expansive pilgrim steps, and before you can arrive at the Lincoln window, there is large abstract window titled “the Pain of the Civil War,” which shows flames lapping up from the ground toward the heavens, to only find any hope in the small shards of blue in the sky. The abstracted imagery removes the agency of the bodies in pain. At first, I thought that by facing a window without an explicit image of a white savior, visitors may read the layered imagery of flames while connecting with all potentials of pain. A closer look at the design and execution of the window determined that it was a white man that designed and made the window; Black voices are still excluded in the creation of the stories. Ultimately, Lincoln as the great emancipator takes agency away from the narrative that enslaved people worked for their own emancipation.

Since the completion of the final window, the construction of the Social Justice nave has been erected adjacent to the statue of Martin Luther King, Jr., additionally a bust of Rosa Parks and other civil rights leaders have been included to represent these important characters in the American narrative. I was particularly drawn to the bust of Rosa Parks that hovered over the Social Justice nave of the cathedral. I did not immediately place why I was drawn to her image, but then I recalled my last visit to the National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel. I had crawled onto a bus, and a life-size statue of Rosa Parks was sat stoically looking out of the window. She had a similar look here at the Cathedral, quietly determined. She seemed to cast her gaze down at Woodrow Wilson from across the main

nave. Now that I am here with Rosa I am curious what she may have fixed her gaze at while on the bus in the museum in Memphis. The courage of her act made suddenly palpable through these stone structures. I was not transported back to her protest, I could never understand her experience in that position, but I was jugged sideways back to Memphis, where the everyday acts of courage were given center stage to the narrative of social justice.

The congregation that worships in the cathedral are avid proponent of social justice, and often participate in overt statements regarding the continued oppression of people of color and member of the LGBTQ+ community. I am not suggesting that their various efforts are not important, they are, but due to the spatial language established over the long development of the space, the spectacles that offer insight into the American character rely on the engagement with the spectator.

### **Home of the Brave**

On September 14, 2001, days after the attacks, a memorial service was held at the National Cathedral. On this day, its' President George W. Bush at the pulpit. Bush had marked the day as “a National Day of Prayer and Remembrance” for the victims of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. The service was intended to be a call for collective healing. When violence turns inward ton? itself, memorialization is actualized. Oftentimes, these tropes of healing become the predominant lens in how scholars engage with memorials spaces.

Religious Studies scholar, Edward Linenthal, examined numerous memorials across the sacred landscape of America, including the Oklahoma City memorial, and the United

States Holocaust Memorial Museum<sup>74</sup> in Washington, DC. He believes that there is a “therapeutic dimension to memorials, a sort of healing dimension, in which memorials become an immediate language of engagement after an event, rather than just a distant expression of commemoration.”<sup>75</sup> While I have no doubt that healing is an essential function of memorialization, it’s the immediate forms of language being cultivated that is an important part of the mechanisms of civil religion. It was from this bully pulpit that President Bush proclaimed that he would wage war on terror, which catapulted the United States into a series of “States of Exceptions” in which fundamental human rights were compromised, and a permanent shift in the geo-political climate in the Middle East still persists today. This speed to cultivate a language of strength and resistance came from this framework of healing; with healing taken care of the act of living in a post-9/11 world would have to be sorted out in other ways. The speech has since been considered one of the most profound speeches made during Bush’s tenure.<sup>76</sup> Billy Graham had offered the opening remarks to Bush’s speech, ensuring that God would punish those that perpetuated evil in the world. The bust of MLK continued to look on from the right.

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<sup>74</sup> It should be noted that the entirety of the name of this space is its own performance of the politics that come with engaging with sites of memory and violence.

<sup>75</sup> “Interview with Edward Linenthal,” Accessed on March 13, 2019, *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, <https://www.ushmm.org/antisemitism/podcast/voices-on-antisemitism/edward-t-linenthal>

<sup>76</sup> Scholars have approached his speech as an examination of religious rhetoric used specifically by him and his administration, as well as the response of American’s in the aftermath of 9/11 that saw President Bush as a competent leader, when his approval rating was dismally low prior. See Kushner, “Charting the Language of Leadership: A methodological Investigation of President Bush’s Leadership after 9/11”

Sitting atop a modest altar in the corner of the War Memorial Chapel sits a fairly small stone cross. Was this already there during Bush's speech? Just a few steps from the pulpit, the cross stands out in its difference. Surrounded by the grandiose ornaments of decor of the main nave, the cross is modest and simple. The dark stone shaped against a sea of limestone surrounding it. It's difference points to its importance. A small sign near the cross reads:

The cross was presented to the cathedral by the U.S. Army chief of chaplains, "In recognition that we are united in memory, united in freedom, and united in hope, and love for God, our nation, and all of humankind the cross was made by Alvin Neider made the cross from the fragments of from the pentagon attacked on September 11, 2001."<sup>77</sup>

On its own, the cross offers a narrative of the American character as rising out of tragedy. A sense of collective unity and strength. This is one potential negotiation between the actors moving about the space and this humble cross. The cathedral stores so many artifacts and visual stories that an unfocused visitor can feel like they are browsing the aisles of commercial store. But the cross is different, fragments used to make a whole. The violence itself is entirely displaced. In his analysis of forgetting, Norman N. Klein calls this a "distraction: the quiet instant when on image covers over another."<sup>78</sup> The images are layered, but as Klein notes, the place where memory is stored has no boundaries, so no image is entirely lost. When the cross sits in conversation with the rest of the War Memorial Chapel as well as the main nave, more complexities emerge.

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<sup>77</sup> National Cathedral Archives, <https://cathedral.org>.

<sup>78</sup> Norman N. Klein, *The History of Forgetting: Lost Angeles and the Erasure of Memory* (Verso, 1997), 12-13.

The Pentagon Cross brings the spectator back to the events of 9/11, and ghosts begin to lurk underneath the illusions, and new visuals appear. The violence shifts to trauma, the trace of the violence left in its wake. Traumatic events become disruptions of individual as well as national identities.<sup>79</sup> National traumas cause both physical and material effects (injuries and mortalities, and economic crisis), that effect an individual's way of being, but also larger notions of national identity. In fact, trauma reveals prevailing problems of cohesiveness and citizenship while simultaneously reconstructing additional problematic narratives of national identity. The Cathedral's original plans did not include a chapel in this area near the south transept, where the Pentagon cross now sits, but the cathedral decided "a memorial to our nation's heroes seemed necessary and appropriate after World War II."<sup>80</sup> The chapel is centered a sculpture of the suffering Christ. It features a dramatically oversized head of the crucified Redeemer crowned with a halo of brass shapes simulating cannon shells and irregular rays of cast aluminum. Visitors can light a candle and say a prayer for fallen soldiers. But a closer look at the stained-glass windows envelopes the Pentagon cross into the curated story of American heroism. The windows are situated as small vignettes, which attempt a chronology of the American soldier and its development.

It is important to remember that the spectator is also the actor in this retelling, and perceptions and literacy will determine how the stained-glass window is perceived. Consider the reality that a number of visitors to the cathedral would see this as a familiar history, the heroic beginnings to the story of this nation. If there is hope of some kind of moment of even

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<sup>79</sup> Peter Felix Kellermann, *Sociodrama and Collective Trauma* (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2007), 41.

<sup>80</sup> "War Memorial Chapel," accessed on December 14, 2016, <https://cathedral.org/what-to-see/exterior/war-memorial-chapel-2/>.

hinting at the complexities of our fraught and bloody history, it does not come in this window. The last two depict the landing of the U.S. Army at Normandy Beach in France during WWII, and the final image showing WWII soldiers being welcomed by French civilians. Furthermore, inscribed in the window just above these images is Jesus Christ opening his arms to the soldiers to take on their suffering. It is no wonder that so many white Christians in America have taken on such a determined “knowledge” of their history —the narrative is so tied up with their religious convictions it becomes difficult to untangle them.

Of course, there a number of stories to tell within a given space, but there are entire windows dedicated to the artists that designed the cathedral and its various materials, as well as abstract representations of American ingenuity and engineering. Any black or brown faces on display are not the central hero of the story. I have combed through the images of all of the stained-glass, all created between 1907 and 1990 and cannot site a single example of where a white person was not the protagonist of the story. This aspect of the cathedral offers no referent, there is no means to debate the narrative of white supremacy as still being the normative perspective. This is an act of violence, an erasure of their voices and stories of people of color in the Unites States that has persisted to this day.

The Washington National Cathedral has played a pivotal role in the national response to the tragic mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, which occurred on December 14, 2012. This event, one of the deadliest school shootings in U.S. history, resulted in the deaths of 20 children aged six and seven years old, as well as six adult staff members. In the aftermath of such a devastating incident, the Cathedral served as a beacon for mourning, healing, and advocacy on issues related to gun violence. In the days following the Sandy Hook shooting, the Washington National Cathedral held memorial

services and vigils for the victims and their families. These gatherings provided a space for communal grief and solidarity, offering solace to a nation in shock and mourning. The Cathedral's role as a national house of prayer made it a focal point for the expression of collective sorrow and the search for comfort in the wake of such incomprehensible loss. I first visited Newtown, Connecticut in 2013, only a few months after the shooting. I carried the image of the first memorial at the Cathedral with me there, and I am still haunted by my pilgrimage there.

Beyond serving as a site for mourning, the Cathedral has also been a platform for advocacy on gun control and violence prevention. In the years following the Sandy Hook tragedy, the Cathedral's leadership, including clergy and lay leaders, have spoken out against gun violence and called for legislative action to prevent future tragedies. They have hosted forums, discussions, and events aimed at mobilizing public support for measures such as enhanced background checks, restrictions on assault weapons, and other gun safety legislation. While they persistently call for legislation, they do it against a backdrop that has honored the might of America that took up arms to secure its freedom.

From this vantage point, there are key spaces and performances that lay bare the fissures and cohesive narratives and mythologies of the United States' histories. In that sense, the myth of America is always clawing its way to the front of the objects, seeking its truth in its collective participation. If we think about the "lives" of the materials in a theatrical production, the "off stage deaths" engage the spectator in considering the various possibilities in how history and memory move about in the public sentiments and stories, but an American Civil religion without referent can only read *affect* from a reactionary standpoint. This offers explanation of how a group of Trump supporters stormed the nation's

capital on January 6, 2021, motivated by untenable claims of election fraud. Collective memory is not concerned with historical accuracy; its preoccupation of the past is based on a desire to mobilize a vision for the present and create a prospect for the future. Reading the insurrection from the lens of performance studies interested in the debates over civil religion, it is no surprise then, that the men and women that stormed the Capitol waved a mix of Confederate, Christian and Trump flags. Materials *can* and *do* perform.

As a space committed to its role as speaking to the nature of American civil religion, the cathedral did issue a response to the insurrection on January 6. From the bully pulpit Reverend Budde formally denounced the acts of violence at the Capitol and directly addressed then-President Trump directly, “Mr. President there has been no fraudulent election. You called your supporters to our capitol, you fed their wild fantasies and conspiracy theories. You whipped them into frenzy. This is not acceptable.”<sup>81</sup> Reverend Budde’s impassioned speech continued to speak to the mechanisms of public feeling; Budde claimed an “insider” position, to insurrectionist “outsider.”<sup>82</sup> This emotive language did not occur in response to the events of that day, she stood at that pulpit along with the legacy of those that stood before her, the pentagon cross close by, the Lee-Jackson windows still speaking through their absence, and Dr. King and Rosa Parks looking on. This decisive claim is a distinctive move for the cathedral, finding itself again in its own hyperbolic exaggeration of itself as the spiritual home for America. Despite all of these vectors, Budde knew, as did

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<sup>81</sup> “Cathedral transcripts,” <https://cathedral.org/press-room/bishop-budde-and-dean-hollerith-on-election-violence/>

<sup>82</sup> The fact that she is the first woman elected to the diocese is an incredible statement about insider in itself.



all that were looking on, that those men and women were American citizens, and while the symbolic stripping of their American-ness served an important purpose for modeling clear alliances and political support, any real potential to reach into the demography of the Lost Cause, now abbreviated from its story, was likely moot.

### **...and Justice for All**

The cathedral is a poignant starting place for a project looking to the role of violence in the construction of nationhood. The space has built itself across generations all the while building in tropes of the American character into its material form. This gives way to scrutiny of form itself. Rather than thinking about how the condition of *time* in reenactment, the cathedral gives performative language to material objects. Furthermore, the cathedral finds its meaning through religious and secular discourses, and rather than neat taxonomies it stumbles all over itself like the madman in the marketplace announcing that God is dead.<sup>83</sup> Sacredness can be dually given as well as created. When you really begin to look at the cathedral, you see there is a memorial mania of its own that has an almost kitsch-like quality. The vastness of the space reminds the spectator of their limitations in seeing, witnessing, knowing. Perhaps that is something to not take for granted at memorials of violence. Maybe the cathedral taking on endless material is a way to embrace its perpetual limitations in cultivating meaning, but finding a space to gather important relics, like an island of misfit

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<sup>83</sup> In other words, a space of systematic religious ritual, such as an Episcopalian church, is able to cultivate secular languages to adapt its form to the possibility of new creation myths that have accommodated the long gestation of the space.

toys, to be ordered in the future.<sup>84</sup> If we looked at the “hot spots” listed on the website now and compared them with a tour brochure from the past, it would show key differences. The tomb of Woodrow Wilson is not listed as a “hot spot” on the website, but my brochure from 2014 highlights the tomb and the Lee-Jackson windows adjacent. While the cathedral has moved them away from their strategies of seeing, the materials persist.

Memorialization of our national traumas does not only serve healing, but it also has tangible outcomes that manifest in legal and geographical realities. That is to say, when Billy Graham and Ronald Reagan normalized a silence around the AIDS epidemic, this action was part of a genealogy that built up tangible structures in the public sphere. A looking away from the death of thousands, and at that point, primarily gay men, Gay Panic found continued legal purchase. The defense of “gay panic” in a court of law, in which the LGBTQ+ “panic” defense strategy is a legal strategy that asks a jury to find that a victim’s sexual orientation or gender identity/expression is to blame for a defendant’s violent reaction, including murder.

One of the most recognized cases that employed the LGBTQ+ “panic” defense was that of Matthew Shepard. In 1998, Matthew Shepard, a 21-year-old college student, was beaten to death by two men. The men attempted to use the LGBTQ+ “panic” defense to excuse their actions. Eventually both men were convicted of murder and were sentenced to life in prison.

When Matthew Shepard was laid to rest in 1998, his funeral, held in the small town of Laramie, Wyoming, was interrupted by homophobic protesters from Texas and Arkansas preaching hate and vitriol for the 21-year-old brutally murdered. The tragedy of Shepard’s

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<sup>84</sup> Nancy Ring describes religion as a symbolic process, in which the goal is to cultivate order and meaning in order to understand the world, as well as to find one’s place in it.

murder became an important legal benchmark to fight for hate crime laws that were signed into law in 2009 under President Barack Obama, likely due to the tireless advocacy of Matthew's mother, Judy. Along the way, Matthew Shepard transcended the violent act in Laramie. Eventually, Matthew Shepard found his way to the cathedral.

On October 26, 2018, Matthew Shepard was formally interred in the Washington National Cathedral. The sermon at the service was led by the first openly gay clergy member of the diocese, Reverend Gene Robinson. He stood at the bully pulpit and preached a resounding message of love. This time, twenty years after his death, there were no protests, and no vitriol. Ritualization was the task at hand, and while Matthew Shepard had already found himself cast as a civil religious martyr, the cathedral consecrated his name amongst the sacred. (Up until his internment, there was no formal representation of LGBTQ+ in the material spaces of the cathedral.) The following year a plaque was placed in the cathedral for visitors, a site of pilgrimage of sorts. During the dedication ceremony sections of Moises Kauffman's award-winning play, *The Laramie Project*, were performed. It was a play within a play, a meta-theatrical moment, in which Matthew Shepard and the town of Laramie and all that it drags along with it is now amongst those various characters that move about the cathedral, the endless possibilities of new meanings to be made, anachronisms be damned.

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## Chapter Two

### Forensic Dissent: The Crime “Scene” at the National Civil Rights Museum

On April 4, 1968, four days after delivering his first and only sermon at the National Cathedral in Washington D.C., Martin Luther King, Jr. was standing on the second-floor balcony of the Lorraine Motel when he was shot and killed by alleged assassin James Earl Ray. The physical space was immediately scrutinized and examined in order to “set the scene” of the crime.<sup>85</sup> Conceived as a “home-away-from-home” for black entertainers during the segregation era, the Lorraine was intended to cultivate a growing black middle-class community in Memphis and support black-owned businesses on Beale Street, or “Blues Alley,” during the segregation era. As a result, racial tensions continue to play-out in the space, even now, nearly fifty years after Dr. King’s assassination.<sup>86</sup> Concurrently, the Lorraine has undergone a series of transformations and expansions that have been determined by the careful management of the acquired and recreated “evidence” of the murder, the spatial wound that still marks that building. The temporary dwelling soon became a permanent residence for low-income black families, and eventually it was transformed into a vacated façade and was reconceived as the National Civil Rights Museum (NCRM) in 1991--

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<sup>85</sup> see “National Archives Information” [http://mlkkpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/chronology\\_contents](http://mlkkpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/chronology_contents), for the details of the investigation and how they unfolded.

<sup>86</sup> The neighborhood surrounding the motel has seen a steady gentrification of the area leaving very few black-owned businesses today, as well as a steady rise in poverty and homelessness in the black community in Memphis. See John Branston, “Gentrify My Historic Neighborhood, Please,” in *MemphisFlyer* Wednesday, April 24, 2013 <http://www.memphisflyer.com/CityBeatBlog/archives/2013/04/24/gentrify-my-historic-neighborhood-please>

all the while preserving and strategically re-staging the balcony and other material objects related to the crime scene. Indeed, the site is now a space of mourning and sanctified-commemoration, as well as a highly devised theatrical reenactment of U.S. jurisprudence.

My interest in the NCRM has less to do with the specific events on the day of MLK's death than with the fact that physical spaces and material objects determine, in both architectural and legal terms, where and how bodies can move within and across the space. Even while the motel served as tenant housing for residents over a period of nearly twenty-five years before its debut as the NCRM, impromptu measures were being taken to ensure that the balcony where Dr. King was cut down would remain marked as ontologically "different," or "set-apart" from the rest of the dwelling space. The "official" museum space we can visit today is derived from the hermeneutical relics that framed MLK's murder--the balcony, the exterior motif of the Lorraine, and the murder weapon. In order to illuminate the manifold cultural and dramaturgical implications of the structure, I intend to explore the materials that constitute the space as a form of forensic remnants of a past that insist on surviving into the present. By examining the complexities of the multivalent scenarios at play within the borders of the NCRM, my analysis seeks to explain how architectural materials--steel form, glass, bolts, rust, asphalt--can be complicit with performances in which violence and national memory are intersected. I want to consider how the remains of Dr. King's murder, or the crime "scene" are distributed across the space, conditioning the various instances of racial disputations at work on this site and within the symbolic topography of its curatorial mission as a "national" vestige of memory. More broadly, I would like to ask: at what point does the death-site of MLK become what Jonathan Z. Smith calls "structures of temporality," experiences in which the sacred is given through "marks of distinction," and is

transformed into convenient secular devices (i.e., criminal/victim, villain/martyr, justice/sacrifice, citizen/nation)?<sup>87</sup> I will explore how the continual production and re-deployment of certain remains at the NCRM, after nearly fifty years since the initial crime, are still being modified and utilized to manage social identities and ideologies rooted in the memorialization of violence.

One effect of memorializing violence congruent with national identity is that it cultivates processes of belonging based on adherence to certain normative narratives and outcomes; the physical memory-scapes and artifacts frame the absurdity of such insider/outsider categories since the crime “scenes” at sites of violence are endlessly citational. As a result, these scenes cannot be untangled from the cross-historical disparities that are not only manifest in an architectural dénouement, but also the eruptive traces of memory invading the present. In his analysis of theatre structures, Marvin Carlson recognizes semiotic phenomenon and states, “theatrical cultures have recognized, in some form or another, this ghostly quality, this sense of something coming back in the theatre, and so the relationship between theatre and cultural memory are deep and complex.”<sup>88</sup> In this assessment of the “haunted stage,” Carlson sees the enduring past as a result of repetition enacted by spectators coming into conflict with their own specific genealogies. Carlson poignantly addresses the theatre space as an opportunity for spectators to engage with existential modes of experience through memory and confrontation (what he calls “theatre as

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<sup>87</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Towards a Theory of Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 94-95.

<sup>88</sup> Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 2.

memory machine”), but immediately dismisses the power of these encounters by limiting the “specter” to a mere theatrical trick by overemphasizing the spectator as the main occupant of the experience. I offer this criticism not to suggest that these objects are, in fact, subjects, but rather to suggest they function as mobile interlocutors that can potentially condition spectators to critically engage with past events that many have not experienced first-hand. Like Carlson, I believe that sites of violence are “memory machines;” however, I prefer to emphasize the volatility of objects and landscapes in order to suggest that spaces are not only activated by the presence of a spectator; most spaces are already charged by haunted vectors that make uncontested claims to their cartography.

During one of my first visits to the NCRM I was confronted with a temporal and spatial *slip* that both re-articulated and re-inscribed the original conception of the Lorraine as “home-away-from-home” to its present disposition of “home-without-home.” On the corner of Mulberry Street and Butler Avenue I noticed an obtrusive collection of tarps, furniture, and plastic signs. It was early in the morning, in November 2012, and the museum had yet to open to the public. I tacitly wandered up and down Mulberry Street as the rain began to trickle down. Then, from behind the far end of the NCRM, I saw a small-framed woman emerge and head to the dilapidated huddle at the edge of the property. What got my attention first was her peculiar dress. It was about forty degrees outside that day, so warm clothing was necessary as one moved to one shelter to another, yet Smith’s attire suggested a longer commitment to the forces of the weather. I examined her dwelling and noticed a large black sign propped up behind the couch, and a half rolled white sign that was carefully positioned under a heap of trash bags that read in large, orange letters: “POVERTY IS VIOLENCE.” Then, crawling into the plastic tent she had configured, she disappeared out of site. Seeing



this woman had formulated a particular preface to the museum that highlighted the juxtaposition of the sterilized museum setting, and the “typological homeless” settlement, a friction that will be central to the rest of this chapter. The “official” arrangement of memory came here to a jarring halt at the property line. Eventually, the museum opened, and I entered.

### **Motel to Museum**

The architectural structure that stands at 450 Mulberry Street has been re-conceptualized to service the priorities of travelers based on a dynamic history of race, and popular culture in the Blues capital of the south. Originally constructed in 1925, when it was named the Windsor hotel, the modest location served white travelers to the area during a rise in industrial jobs available at the growing waterfront city of Memphis, which resulted in a leisure community of travelers. However, the booming industries available in proximity to the Windsor soon defaulted with the onset of the Great Depression, and eventually, in 1942, Walter Bailey, an African American, purchased the nearly bankrupt hotel and made it one of the few establishments in the area open to black patrons during the segregation era. The neighborhood boasted a high volume of black-owned businesses that built a thriving community.

Dr. King’s purpose for visiting the Memphis in April 1968 was to support the sanitation workers who had gone on strike in February earlier that year. Dr. King had attempted to lead a peaceful demonstration on March 28, but the protest turned violent when some protestors began to break windows, and looted businesses. He returned to Memphis again determined to conduct a peaceful march. On the afternoon of April 4, Dr. King stepped

outside of room 306 at the Lorraine to get a breath of fresh air and was shot dead.<sup>89</sup> The famous photograph which captured the moment immediately after has been reprinted in countless publications: King's lifeless body lying on the balcony in a pool of blood while his aides pointed in the direction of the boarding house window across the street. After the Lorraine's many years of quiet service to the black community in Memphis and to the civil rights movement, the assassination of Dr. King thrust the site into infamy.

Immediately following Dr. King's death there was a need to memorialize his legacy, and to permanently mark the Lorraine. Bailey converted room 306 and the adjacent room 307 into a makeshift memorial to King. There was no entry allowed, nor any opening that offered visual access to the rooms in order to carefully manage the "aura" of the room that Dr. King occupied moments before his death.<sup>90</sup> The perceived "x" of the crime scene, where he was struck with the bullet, was immediately recognized as the sacred point for pilgrimage. According to archival records, room 306 was emptied entirely by Bailey and police during the initial investigation into the assassination. Despite being physically empty, the forbidden characteristic of the rooms functioned as mimetic vessels for visual consumption. They would be imagined with the various somatic residuals of mundane human experience articulating the space: smoked cigarettes, uneaten food, unmade beds, a shaving kit, dirty socks, etc. In this case, the act of closing the doors, and relegating the rooms into

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<sup>89</sup> See Adam Pertofsky, "The Witness: From the Balcony of Room 306," (National Civil Rights Museum, October 30, 2012). The film is the first interactive display offered during the NCRM tour. It is 32 minutes in length.

<sup>90</sup> I use the term "aura" in reference to Walter Benjamin's notion in his article, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," see [http://www.berk-edu.com/VisualStudies/readingList/06b\\_benjamin-work%20of%20art%20in%20the%20age%20of%20mechanical%20reproduction.pdf](http://www.berk-edu.com/VisualStudies/readingList/06b_benjamin-work%20of%20art%20in%20the%20age%20of%20mechanical%20reproduction.pdf)

“untouchable” spaces, marks them as central points intersecting sacred, secular, and civic worship.<sup>91</sup> After all, the residents of the Lorraine, and its subsequent visitors, honored the established boundaries of the space. Furthermore, as if to heighten the dramatic climax of the “witness” and the “sacrificial body” dialectic, Bailey enclosed the portion of the balcony in front of room 306 in plexi-glass and erected a simple sign offering a guarantee that King was killed within the encasement. By setting the space apart from the rest of the motel, Bailey engaged with the ritual processes conjuring transportable notions of the sacred.

Despite the various voyages made to see the balcony, the motel began to wither away once the area began to decline further after the assassination and increasing economic downturn in the downtown Memphis began to keep visitors away. The museum carried on for another fourteen years until Bailey nearly lost ownership for defaulting on mortgage payments. It seemed that all hope was lost, and the Lorraine would be torn down. D’Army Bailey reached out to the local community. Chuck Scruggs, an attorney, collaborated with Bailey to form the *Martin Luther King Memorial Foundation* seeing the need to preserve the death site of Dr. King. Bailey and Scruggs believed that the space should be given national attention, so they commissioned Benjamin Lawless, Smithsonian curator, to help draft a plan for the site. The preservation of the Lorraine was servicing the vernacular aspect since it was “community building” for a particular segment of society but aligning the project within the curatorial traditions of the Smithsonian also invited “official” cultural memory to shape the architectural manifestations of the space. Lawless drafted a vision for the museum that would focus on the civil rights struggle amongst “ordinary people” and not just Dr. King and

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<sup>91</sup> Jonathon Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward a Theory in Ritual*, (Chicago University Press, 1987), 95.

estimated the transformation would cost approximately \$8.8 million.<sup>92</sup> Once again, Bailey and Scruggs turned to the community in order to elicit the necessary funds for the renovation.

Once funds were solicited to transform the motel to a museum, the contemplation over the already demarcated remains concerning Dr. King's death began. The balcony, now run-down despite its attempted preservation by Bailey, needed restoration, and the "aura" of the space needed to be rejuvenated with architectural interventions. The local debates regarding the Lorraine register the interests of community (the desire to improve infrastructure), but also records social anxieties regarding group identity both from within and outside social categories. In this instance, the Lorraine's specific and spatialized transition from Motel to Museum are manifestations of Architectural theorists Anthony Vidler's notion of "warped space," in which subjects are caught in spatial systems beyond their control and use functions of material space and design strategies "to make representational and architectural sense of the predicament."<sup>93</sup> In the case of the Lorraine, the forensic remains of violence are further nuanced as signifiers for the simultaneous loss of localized culture and the gain of social wealth, traditionally denied to members of black communities in the south. The fact that relics of explicit violence against Dr. King became the spatial tools for negotiating, and eventually narrating, the civil rights movement at the NCRM, suggests that the various cues imbedded within the architectural form are also actively disembodying King, and creating a mythological martyr to fill the metaphysical void

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<sup>92</sup> Lawless, Benjamin. *A National Civil Rights Center Proposal* (Memphis, TN: The Lorraine Civil Rights Museum Foundation, 1986).

<sup>93</sup> Anthony Vidler, *Warped Space: Art, Architecture, and Anxiety in Modern Culture*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000), 1.

of the balcony and room 306. The 1988 renovation quickly resulted in eviction of nearly twenty-five residents already living far below the poverty line, dispatching them beyond the legal borders of the space into political invisibility. Certainly, the traces of the past at the NCRM are determined through systems of privilege and hierarchy that continue to arrange racial oppression within the blurred edges of the relentless performative trace--characterized by a hyperbolic function that obscures, and potentially normalizes, the inevitable *decay* of performances of violence that remain.<sup>94</sup>

### **The National Civil Rights Museum, 1991-2012**

The renovation timeline of the NCRM offers an interesting, albeit anachronistic, travel through the museum. The Lorraine was entirely gutted during the initial renovation, leaving only the façade, which creates an almost postmodern detachment when the exterior features are revealed as a visual trick. As I moved through the main entrance just to the left of the death-site of King, I could still make out the careful arrangement of tarps that barely protected the woman from the rain. Her residence, set at an uncomfortable proximity to the museum, challenged the possibility to move passively through the lobby exhibits that dramatizes racial oppression, and the national disgraces of slavery. After purchasing a ticket for \$10, spectators are free to move within the lobby space until the start time of the tour. The museum in the Lorraine tour is divided into three main sections and is on two floors. On the first floor is the lobby and screening room at the front of the museum followed by a series of

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<sup>94</sup> Each chapter functions to explicate the various manifestations of “performative decay,” in order to think through the potentials of and possibilities of performance in relation to violence. In this chapter, we are considering the valuation of “remains” of violence as they are placed in a variety of national narratives.

exhibits on rebellion from slavery through the civil rights movement that take-up the remainder of the first floor, and finally, the assassination of King which are the only exhibits that occupy the second floor.

The first floor displays a chronological re-telling of the heinous acts committed against people of color in the U.S. First, there is a wall that features recreated articles, preserved images of the struggles against slavery, followed by an immersive experience (including interactive displays, such as telephones and videos) of the segregation era in which certain scenes are built in the physical space to represent various forms of resistance.<sup>95</sup> One of the more popular displays is an exact replica of the city bus that served as the performance space for Rosa Parks' peaceful resistance in Montgomery, Alabama. Spectators can climb onto the bus and sit in solidarity with Parks. However, once anyone gets comfortable in the seat, a sound loop dubbing white male driver fills the bus, barking, "Get in the back...you need to get in the back now!" I took a seat next to Rosa in order to take a picture and the seat began loudly clicking underneath me. I jumped up quickly and suddenly felt my own estrangement from the place. The jarring "click" of the seat kinesthetically conditions spectators to recall events outside of their own roster of experiences. The statue of Rosa Parks in Memphis echoes the bust of Rosa that is perched in the Washington National Cathedral. I saw Rosa here before I saw her in the Cathedral. I did not yet know that I would be transported back here from Washington, D.C. This small performance with Rosa in the bus emphasizes lived experiences and subjective perceptions of time during performances.

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<sup>95</sup> Angela Davis aptly notes that "resistance" is often understood within white patriarchy, which excludes the varieties of resistance that were enacted by those that were oppressed. Survival itself serves as a means of resistance, according to Davis. See Angela Davis, "Oppression, Resistance, and Freedom"

Performances are viewed as temporal events unfolding in the present moment, where performers and spectators engage in a shared temporality shaped by bodily experiences, emotions, and consciousness.<sup>96</sup> But, just as quickly as a temporality can be shared, that connection can be severed by performance as well, casting the possibility for a multiplicity of perspectives and experiences.

After moving through the civil rights struggle in the South, generally, and concurrently displaying Dr. King's bibliography, the exhibits move to the efforts in Memphis, specifically. The sanitation strike, which brought Dr. King to Memphis in April 1964, is the final exhibit on the lower level. Several life-size statues of men with signs that read, "I AM a Man" are positioned at the bottom of the staircase. Then, the ascent to the climax is accompanied with an introduction of gospel music. Beginning as a soft whisper, the gentle hymn, "Take My Hand, Precious Lord," becomes recognizable as the steps lead to the final exhibit in the Lorraine building. The top of the stairs offer two iterations of Dr. King's room as they were believed to look the day he was murdered, facing each other from opposite sides. A buffer between the two leads to the window that looks onto the balcony, the wreath, and the boardinghouse across the street, displaying a conundrum of signs that positions the sacred dimension of freedom as a moral axiom of the United States, where freedom is determined through sacrifice. The use of gospel is, of course, a direct reference to Dr. King's affiliation with the Baptist Church, and also the larger attachment of the civil rights movement and Christianity, but it also shapes the processes in which a Christian ethos is

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<sup>96</sup> Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 47.

imprinted within the spatial characteristics of the museum.<sup>97</sup> MLK gave his final sermon in Memphis, delivering his infamous “I’ve Seen the Mountaintop” sermon where eerily pronounced: “But it really doesn’t matter with me now, because I’ve been to the mountaintop ... I’ve seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land.”<sup>98</sup> The uncanny sense of doom is charged in careful displays of King’s final movements.

This is the closest a visitor can get to that claimed "x" of the crime with only a pane of glass between. Both rooms are set-apart from visitors. The curatorial strategy builds from the premise conceptualized by Bailey at the Lorraine in the 1970’s--offering visual satisfaction for spectators to see the rooms staged as it were April 4, 1968, in which the absent body of Dr. King is standing on the balcony just outside moments before his death. Room 307 hosts two neatly made beds, and smart, tidy furniture--the theatrical “foil” to room 306. The numerous props that give it the sense that Dr. King and Reverend Kyles were inside it just moments before: a tray with half eaten breakfast and coffee sits at the edge of one of the unmade beds; the towels in the bathroom are disheveled; papers are spread across the desk with a filled ashtray and a partially smoked cigarette staged on the nightstand. All the while, as you are turning from left to right to view the two rooms more gospel music fills the space. The experience is a sensual vortex of mystical and religious iconography framed within a murder. In addition to seeing these two re-creations of MLK’s room, the visitor is

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<sup>97</sup> In Bernard J. Armada’s analysis of the NCRM he argues that the space “encourages us to see King as a Christ-like figure as we witness, frozen in time, his death and resurrection,” Bernard Armada, "Memorial Agon: An interpretive tour of the national civil rights museum," *Southern Communications Journal* 63, no. 3 (1998): 240.

<sup>98</sup> King, Martin Luther, “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop,” in *MLK Sermons and Speeches*, (Memphis Home Press, 2007), 222-223.



also able to see the boardinghouse across the street where the bullet is believed to have emerged. Furthermore, from this vantage point, the spectator could once again see the woman that had made her home at the property line. Her collection of posters, fliers, and tarps comments on the visual landscape of Dr. King's crafted legacy and expands the cartography of the crime "scene" to include the discursive borders of the NCRM, and throws their legitimacy into question.

### **Expanding the NCRM: The Legacy Building, 2002-2012**

In 1999 the Museum acquired properties facing it, the former Canipe's Amusement store and rooming house, which were an integral part of Dr. King's assassination investigation. In 1968, James Earl Ray stayed in the boarding house. The Museum became the custodian of the police and evidence files associated with the manhunt, indictment and confession of Dr. King. This transfer affords the National Civil Rights Museum the distinction of being the first museum of its kind to receive evidence materials and court documents connected with the criminal case into its collection holdings.<sup>99</sup>

Some of the aforementioned items include: the rifle that was considered the murder weapon used by James Earl Ray, a variety of photographs, police sketches, official court reports, clothing left at the boarding house, and (perhaps the most disturbing) the bullet that was removed from Dr. King's body. The bullet--that entered in his right cheek then passed through his neck and finally lodged into his left shoulder--carried with it a small piece of fabric that is pointed to in the display. The macabre relics are multitudinous in their functionality since they are a negotiation of the facts of history; this dually offers a coherent

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<sup>99</sup> see National Civil Rights Museum website, [www.civilrightsmuseum.org](http://www.civilrightsmuseum.org)

narrative of historical “data” along with a critique of its authenticity.<sup>100</sup>

After receiving these items, the NCRM subsequently raised funds for a nearly \$9 Million dollar renovation. Opened to the public on Sept. 28, 2002, “Exploring the Legacy,” is a 12,800 sq. ft. expansion project aimed at addressing three key questions: 1) Did the Movement die with Dr. King? 2) Was James Earl Ray the assassin? and, 3) what is the legacy of the movement?<sup>101</sup> In the case of the NCRM, the items on display have both judicial and cultural purchase and are doubly exhibited as legal evidence and historical artifact. The NCRM and its objects take on a sacred dimension when inducted into "national" paradigms of belief. There is a real investment in a secular system of worship in which these objects are public performatives of justice.

The juxtaposition of the Lorraine, which focuses on the vast number of people that struggle(d) for basic civil rights, followed by the interventions of the Legacy Building in which spectators are in close quarters with James Earl Ray, the assassin (and his elaborate plot and temporary escape) points to the practically hyperbolic theatrical nature of the crime “scene.” It marks the salient transition from memorializing Dr. King, the victim to remembering the perpetrator, or murderer, Ray. The spectator is then moving through the mirrored positionality of perpetrator, moving from the first floor to the second, and ending at the window, this time facing the Lorraine. Instead of moving through broader narratives of national homogeneity and unity against oppression, this Legacy Building functions to detail

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<sup>100</sup> or as Gaynor Kavanagh explains, “museums embody the stories we tell ourselves, about ourselves. They are a form of negotiated reality, curators say of the object that they collect ‘this is historical evidence,’” Gaynor Kavanagh, *Making histories in museums*, making histories in museums (London ; New York: Leicester University Press, 1996), 6.

<sup>101</sup> See <http://www.civilrightsmuseum.org/Mission-Facts>

the endless archival records regarding the assassination of Dr. King--including materials from various investigation on both the state and national levels that spanned over fifteen-years.<sup>102</sup>

Finally, the chronology of the Lorraine and the Legacy Building are synched. In the Legacy Building two rooms are also staged as poised on the balcony, and from Ray's rooms in the boardinghouse there is a staged boarding room, dictated by the carefully strewn clothing across the room and the duffel bag that poorly conceals a rifle inside. Off to the left is the recreation of the bathroom where the shot was fired. Since the bathroom does not allow visitors, there is a glass room crafted to the right that grants spectators passage to step into the same vantage point as the shooter. The bizarre interplay between the rooms deciphers Ray as a live presence in the space: the narrative depicts how the shot was fired, and Ray is quickly moving throughout the space to gather his personals before his escape. Diana Taylor names this type of moment "post-dissapearance," a situation in which, "the sumptuousness of the ceremony performs the sacralization of the *remains*...[providing] the authenticating materiality that sustains the performance of resuscitation."<sup>103</sup> Sanctifying the ceremony of the perpetual symbolic assassination is the proximity of the "real" rifle, bullet, shell casings, clothing and other relics and main display case of the boardinghouse. Accompanied by an interactive display, the "tracing" of the investigation offers a multi-dimensional explication of how these found objects serviced "justice," when they facilitated not the capture of Ray,

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<sup>102</sup> The National Archives, see [http://mlkkpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/chronology\\_contents](http://mlkkpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/chronology_contents)

<sup>103</sup> Diana Taylor *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Indiana: Duke University Press, 2003), 142.

but the conviction.

The interactive display creates a map that links the various artifacts to one another in order to craft the narrative of the crime "scene." This mapping is yet another reminder of the construction of a semiotic and rhetorical blueprint of the space. The objects are the key witnesses in this case. In the case of the NCRM, the wound is imprinted on the objects that act as points of confrontation and/or reconciliation for spectators to determine their role within the dramatized scenario. The narrative nuances Taylor's notion of "postdisappearance" since it begins with a material object, and then invokes legitimacy for systems of secular devotion that construct or perpetuate democracy. Marking the legal process as an open scenario (the display also presents materials relating to the numerous doubts that have been made regarding the guilt of Ray as the killer, or as being the sole perpetrator) U.S. jurisprudence frames sacralized objects (the bullet, etc.) as public performatives of the negotiations of justice.

Consider that the rooms of Ray are treated with the same strategies as King's rooms and balcony<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>set-apart<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>giving equal priority the memorialization of murder in the mission of the museum. The emphasis is not only on King and Ray, but also on the uncanny relation that begins with Ray firing the rifle, the bullet lodging into King, the investigation that compasses the space, the slow dilapidation of the Lorraine, and the salvation of the space, the expulsion of Smith, and the building of a "national" memory. Furthermore, the rooms are created to look as they did *before*, bordering the exact moment the murder took place, not as a preservation of the exact moment. The material place as *beginning* allows for the circular, diagonal, and horizontal confrontations of performance that Schneider describes to be scattered and arranged across symbolic topographies.

The last portion of the exhibit is on the lower level which expands the conversation regarding civil rights beyond the racial conflict in the U.S to other examples of struggles both domestic and abroad (women's rights, gay rights, etc.) "Reflection" is the final exhibit in which pictures of hundreds of renowned civil rights leaders across the globe are hanging from floor to ceiling with benches in the center crafted into a circle intended for thoughtful reflection. Perhaps the final duty of the spectator offers the most puzzling experience of the Legacy Building—leaving. The exit of the Legacy Building, which faces Main Street<sup>104</sup> maneuvers spectators within the identical escape route as James Earl Ray. 424 Main St, the former location of Canipe's Amusement store, where Ray was seen fleeing the scene, and where he left behind the rifle in the doorway, is the identical architectural framework now as it was in 1968. The location of his escape, (and later his confession, which he would eventually recant from prison) is now the gift shop for the Legacy Building. The fact that each visitor must walk in the footsteps of Ray has great potential for the museum to critique our complicity in structural racism that is perpetuated today, but fails to do so.

### **The Lorraine and Jacky: the Blueprint of the Crime “Scene”**

After exiting the Legacy Building, occupying the physical spaces of perpetrator, and emerging onto the carefully dilapidated streets of the “Historic Downtown District” (boasting the remains of streetcars, and neon signs from the 1950's), I took a left onto Butler Avenue, and was again confronted with the huddled mass, and its female occupant. A closer look at her space reveals even more posters, signs, and pamphlet that she offered to passers-by. I

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<sup>104</sup>The Lorraine sits on Mulberry Street, and faces the back side of Main Street the two parallel roads are connected by Butler Ave. Therefore, the NCRM as it is largely conceived borders Main St, to Butler Ave, across Mulberry St where it again meets Main St.

headed for her table. On a wet and windy November day, I snapped the carefully staged image of Jacqueline “Jacky” Smith, the self-proclaimed, “last tenant of the Lorraine Motel.” Smith has been sitting in protest since the moment she was evicted from the Lorraine, over twenty-six years ago. There seems to be a compulsion to overlook Smith. In fact, the NCRM has been slowly making land purchases over the years that have pushed her further to the periphery, and farther away from visitors of the museum. Despite these efforts, Smith is in no way an invisible squatter. Her movement across Mulberry Street over the past quarter-century<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>from within the museum to the adjacent corner—renders visible a plane of connections and controversies ensnared in “national” claims where violence is emphasized. After all, while Smith is moved, the wreath, or the “x” that marks the spot of Dr. King’s death, remains fixed as the central attraction<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>the civil rights exhibits are secondary.

In this particular crime "scene" Jacky Smith is sitting with arms crossed staring directly into the camera, and just right of center hangs a poster of Dr. King and text that reads, “I did try to be right, I did try to feed the hungry, I did try to clothe the naked, I tried to love and serve humanity.” The loosely transcribed quote was taken from Dr. King’s “The Drum Major Instinct,” a sermon given on February 4, 1968, at the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia. The photographs offer a constellation of traces that cue semiotic, rhetorical, and somatic possibilities of consumption. At bottom-center of the photograph a large, weathered sign is held on the folding table using large strips of duct tape that are carefully disguised. The partially obscured poster on the table reads: “Welcome to \$10 Million James Earl Ray Exhibition: You are about to desecrate the memory of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.” Additional fliers and protest material litter the table above. A waterproof sign that reads “Stop Worshipping the Past, START Living the Now,” can be seen amongst

other preserved images and news articles that Jacky has saved in plastic page protectors. Centered on the table are two black and yellow fliers that in this instance served to cover the duct tape, displaying black and white images of Dr. King sitting thoughtfully at a desk with a variety of famous quotes printed beneath the representations. To the far right of the photo hangs yet another banner: “Where were the roadblocks in 1968?” which seem to be Smith’s attempt at reminding visitors the massive amount of change that has occurred to the space despite its claim to preserve the original landscape in the 1960’s. The layering of the image creates a vortex of nostalgia and simulacra that are condensed into an anamorphic vision of a homeless woman, a reproduction of Dr. King, the iconic sign of the motel, and the preserved 1960’s automobiles given to a flattened visual dimension.

Not unlike a murder mystery novel, the museum uses a criminological canon to ritualize and authenticate the “x” of Dr. King’s demise. Within modern western practices once an act of violence has occurred<sup>3/4</sup>in this case the assassination<sup>3/4</sup>the body is removed, the blood tidied, and evidence confiscated for the sake of investigation. The reconfiguration of the space is then imagined through a careful display of objects in connection to a crafted narrative that is projected to a jury in a court of law. As Anthony Vidler suggests: “objects can be presented in the courtroom, but spaces have always to be imagined, and represented; and representation has, from the early nineteenth century at least, been an art, controlled by psychological projections and careful artifice, more than a science.”<sup>105</sup> There is a critical intersection between material remains and dramatic narratives in the creation of a crime “scene” <sup>3/4</sup>the jury is adjourned and the crafted space, as Vidler mentions, is then layered atop

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<sup>105</sup> Anthony Vidler, *Warped Space: Art, Architecture, and Anxiety in Modern Culture* (MIT Press, 2000), 122.

of the material place. If the “x” marks the most significant spot of the crime, then, in the interplay of space and place, the “x” is on the move. The cartography of this crime<sup>3/4</sup>moving from the Lorraine, to courtroom, and back to a crime “scene” on display<sup>3/4</sup>is troubled by the (dis)placement of Jacky Smith in and across that space. Smith challenges the claim that the asserted “x” (Dr. King’s assassination) is the only location of violence within the spectacle.

Where Jacky Smith resides now is a process twenty-five years in the making. It was in the early 1970’s that Jacqueline Smith became a resident. After graduating from North Memphis’ Douglass High School, Smith pursued a short-lived career as an opera singer. She reportedly turned down a voice scholarship to the University of Southern Memphis, as her interest in singing professionally began to wane. She eventually ended up landing a job as a maid and a desk clerk at the Lorraine—the position included free boarding.<sup>106</sup> Her current protest cannot be understood through the poor quality of my snapshot as given, but has to be thought through in the ever-colliding scene that is inherit within a theater of violence, as the image suggests. In the live(d) performance, Smith’s representation of her protest is endlessly citational<sup>3/4</sup>a collection of photographs and memorabilia that move across the decades, but remain in their own footprint. Smith’s obedience to NCRM borders creates a chance photographic flipbook of her expulsion. Her movement, the movement of the images, and continued expansion of the museum are all at play in a still-image scenario. Jacky and Lorraine generously demonstrate the kaleidoscopic nature of any given performance and re-performance of a crime "scene." I call the collision of traces the "blueprint:" like an

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<sup>106</sup> Mark Jordan, "April 4th 1968: Memphians remember Martin Luther King's final crusade," *The Memphis Flyer*, April 2, 1998. Found via: [www.memphisflyer.com/backissues/issue476/nfea2476.html](http://www.memphisflyer.com/backissues/issue476/nfea2476.html)



architectural schematic, there is a certain arrangement of materials and objects to be considered in addition to the temporal and spatial "placedness" of the NCRM. Erika Doss calls museums and memorials archives of public affect, "repositories of feelings and emotions, that are embodied in their material form and narrative content."<sup>107</sup> The "blueprint" of Jacky and Lorraine deploys dialectic of affect in which objects become the manifestations of feeling. For example, the bullet fired from the boardinghouse leaves an imprinted trace as it moved across the street marking the "x" at the Lorraine as it ripped through Dr. King. Sketches, schematics, and dramatization of that trace have been (and continue to be) drawn, re-considered, layered atop, over and through in the consideration of public feeling as it is re-framed in symbolic, mythic, judicial, historical and political frameworks.

The traumas at the NCRM are multiple. The moveable "x" becomes an important advantage for the curatorial intentions of the museum. The wreath and the balcony are the inescapable starting point; once inside, the exterior of the Lorraine is revealed to be a façade, as the interior spans outward to display struggles for civil rights in the United States. The museum benefits from the transferable claims of violence that begins with the assassination and then compasses the racial hatred particular to the United States, via the civil rights exhibits. The wreath becomes the sign for Dr. King's assassination; the assassination becomes the metaphorical "tell" of the racial atrocities committed and endured since the foundation of the country and beyond. The crafting and/or disfiguring of "nation" is a duplicitous act¾the sign acts as a door rather than a window, where revelation is inevitably obscuration.

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<sup>107</sup> Doss, *Memorial Mania*, 13.

Alas, violence is a cheeky devil—the exhibits on the violence committed against blacks in the United States are profuse, yet as I have pointed out before, the emphasis really lies on the judicial relevance of the assassination. Paradoxically, the bullet, along with the medley of “legal” objects displayed, obscures the systemic violence enacted that made the display even possible. Again, that “x” is beguiling. Violence is used to reveal violence. Forensic dissent is then directly engaged with the re-interpretations of legitimate violence that has legal purchase. Ivan Karp argues museum spaces are “places for defining who people are and how they should act and...places challenging those definitions.”<sup>108</sup> I would further argue that the re-actualization of violence at national sites of memory is invested in determining the proclivities of nation and “legitimate” citizenship. After all, by granting the “x” passage across the “official” landscape of the NCRM, Jacky Smith has been subsumed within a nexus of violence that reveals struggles over memory and its representation, while also determining her legal expulsion from her bygone dwelling.

### **Forensic Dissent**

On January 1, 1988, eviction notices were disseminated to the approximately twenty-five residents/employees of the Lorraine. Smith claims that the tenants were all low-income or no-income, and the eviction was devastating to the inhabitants. Smith refused to leave after being served an eviction notice. Finally, Memphis Police forcibly removed Smith from the motel on March 2, 1988.<sup>109</sup> This was the first act of legal expulsion enacted on Smith moving

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<sup>108</sup> Karp et al., *Museums and Communities : the Politics of Public Culture* (Smithsonian Book, 1992), 4.

<sup>109</sup> See AP “Evictions Empties Motel Where King Died,” *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/1988/03/03/us/eviction-empties-motel-where-dr-king-died.html>

her from her second-floor room down to the street below. Smith retells the story of her resistance on her Web Site alongside the included image<sup>110</sup>:

Month after month, she resisted the moves to have her ejected. She spurned financial and career inducements from authorities, whilst her quality of life rapidly deteriorated. Utilities were cut off and food had to be brought in by supporters and well wishers. Eventually, on January 14<sup>th</sup> 1988 she was given notice to quit. After the notice period, sheriff deputies forcibly threw out Jacqueline onto the street. Local neighbors supported her cause and brought her food and clothing. Ms. Crenshaw, a stalwart civil rights campaigner from the 1950's, supported her until her death in 1994. Crenshaw recognized in Jacqueline, some of the qualities she saw in Dr. King when she rallied his support for the Sanitation workers in Memphis in 1968.<sup>111</sup> Smith's dramatic third-person depiction of the eviction aligned her own efforts and conduct with those of Dr. King. In fact, Smith successfully re-performs her eviction by visually remaining just outside in her harsh encampment and continues to be a peaceful protestor.

In 1989, adjacent to the renovation, Smith set-up a crude protest site consisting of a small couch which she covered with a tarp to create a tent, a collapsible table, and hand-made signs that she hung from the chain-link fence surrounding the perimeter. One sign read: "Please Help Make This, The Future Site of the DR. MARTIN L KING JR Housing Center, Job Training & Clinic for Poor People, God Willing." Above the larger sign was another that read: "Keep the Dream Alive." While the posters at each of her protest sites are enticing, there is something about the utility the space(s), serving as both protest and "home" that creates a strange attraction. Architecture theorist and urban planner, Léon Krier, discusses the importance of 'home' as it manifests in architecture. "And yet 'home,'" Krier writes,

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<sup>110</sup> Images are available of Jacky Smith being evicted from her the Lorraine after refusing to leave. Image courtesy of Jacky Smith via her website [fulfillthedream.net](http://fulfillthedream.net).

<sup>111</sup> "Biography," accessed on December 5 2023, <http://www.fulfillthedream.net/pages/mlk.protest1.html>

“survives in all of us as the inter-most refuge. The notion of home still has fundamental meaning for each of us because we all come from somewhere, and we all feel the need to belong. If that desire is not fulfilled it turns to pain.”<sup>112</sup> The relationship between Smith and the Lorraine is confounded by a paradox<sup>3/4</sup>enduring the loss *of* home while remaining *at* home<sup>3/4</sup>that becomes further compounded by her repeated eviction.

These complex intersections of *home* and *homelessness* are further nuanced by Smith’s own persistence of *performing* homelessness as a strategic form of protest. In fact, Smith’s *unhomely* “dwelling” is only understood due to a certain dependence on a human investment in security and affirmation. Jacky and Lorraine are engaged in a repeated dance in which body and architecture are metaphorical manifestations of a mutual lack. In this scenario, Smith is occupying a controlling image while simultaneously dismantling its validity. According to Rebecca Schneider, “the very explicit *twiceness* of reenactment trips the otherwise daily condition of repetition into reflexive hyper-overdrive, expanding the experience into the uncanny.”<sup>113</sup> Considering the blueprint of repetition, “twiceness,” or the uncanny—how theatricality imprints itself on material place as seen at sites of violence—serves as a means to historicize the intimations of nation building. For example, as the borders of the NCRM take new shape they are inducted with a legal legitimacy, both as a righted property, but also as crime “scene.” The space is a part of the crafted narrative of crime asserted by the museum (that looming “x”), but is also extends to current debates over “crime” and criminal. After all, Jacky gets a public police escort out of each “home.”

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<sup>112</sup> Léon Krier, Dhiru A. Thadani, and Peter J. Hetzel, *The architecture of community* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2009), 439.

<sup>113</sup> Schneider, *Performing Remains*, p. 14.

After the official dedication of the museum in 1991, Memphis Police again escorted Smith off NCRM property. The second protest site was spread across the concrete and stucco wall that lined the lawns of the boardinghouse where James Earl Ray resided on April 4, 1968. From 1991 to 2002, Smith intentionally placed herself directly across from the wreath, or the “x.” This made it impossible for visitors to miss her protest. Anyone entering the museum would see Smith camped out in front, but more jolting was that she was seen from the vantage point of standing from behind the wreath within the museum. Although Smith cannot be within the NCRM, she illustrates what Michel de Certeau describes as a “maneuver within the enemy’s field of vision.”<sup>114</sup> He writes:

The space of tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power...it does not therefore, have the option of planning general strategy and viewing the adversary as a whole within a district, visible, and objectifiable space. It operates in isolated action, blow by blow.<sup>115</sup>

During this time, the wreath and the balcony were considered the emotional climax of the museum—the point where visitors are as close as they can be to the actual death-site. While entry onto the balcony is prohibited, the final display inside the Lorraine stands behind a window that looks out onto the wreath and across to the boardinghouse. The forced distance to the “x” only adds to its allure. Then, there was Jacky, and her sign “BOYCOTT CIVIL RIGHTS MUSEUM DISGRACE TO REV. KING” staring back at the museum. If “museums [are] attempting to act responsibly in complex, multicultural environments are bound to find themselves enmeshed in controversy.”<sup>116</sup> A marginalized group that has been

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<sup>114</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 37.

<sup>115</sup> de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 37.

gentrified from the neighborhood is just one example of the various controversies presented in Smith's live(d) protest.

In 1999, after the NCRM purchased the boardinghouse along with the legal artifacts from the murder, investigation and trial, Jacky immediately, and visually criticized the development as a "glorification of violence." The photograph above was taken in July 1999 while the "Legacy Building" was being renovated. When the building was dedicated in 2002, she at her current protest site, positioned under the tarp, and above "POVERTY IS VIOLENCE," Smith also displayed a large sign visible to the entrance of the museum that reads: "STOP Tourists STOP, BEFORE YOU GET TRAPPED OVER THERE, Come over here and get the real story about the National Civil Rights WRONG Museum." Although various conditioning forces could make the signs challenging to see clearly, the red letters spelling "WRONG" at the bottom center of the black poster and the large yellow "STOP" signs are apparent. While her current space is no longer adjacent to the memorial, or in direct view from the second-floor window, there is still a draw to Jacky and her site. It is the very endurance of her space, its repetition, and recreation that has carved itself into the blueprint of the crime "scene."

Smith's protest space has evolved over the years, adapting itself to the evolution of Lorraine and the NCRM. Her signs are no longer hand-written on thin paper but are professionally re-produced in full color on water-resistant material. Despite being in opposition to the museum, she has become encompassed in its strategies. The posters are a more sanitized reproduction of her resistance to the NCRM. In his work *Camouflage* Noah Leach argues that architectural design can determine societies relationship to others and our

negotiations of belonging.<sup>117</sup> If we consider the primacy of material objects, particularly material remains, at sites of violence, then we can begin to determine the politics of the epistemic remains of violence. More specifically, we can understand the volatility of objects as they are cast within complex narratives of memory. In the case of the NCRM, Jacky Smith resists the normative narratives of national strength and reconciliation that would have rendered her invisible, and instead found a means to exploit the traces of past violence to grant her hyper-visibility. The evolution of her space is, paradoxically, a collaboration with the performance of memory and violence, as well as an overt attack on the museum, as seen on her fliers and posters. Perhaps citing Smith's occupation of the NCRM<sup>3/4</sup>as a visual consequence, and enduring agent<sup>3/4</sup>within the confines of the law, can help performance studies scholars think more deeply and effectively about staging complex strategies of activism that are developed along fluid ideological categories.

Furthermore, I begin to see how performance that "remains" can bode potential social decays and deformities, but it can also endure in unexpected forms, and reformulate traditionally divested social typologies (i.e. homelessness) into redefined points of resilience. The theatricality of the crime "scene" at the NCRM is not a result of bodies at play, but the larger network of bodies *and* materials, as demonstrated through the interplay of Smith, her protest, the Lorraine, the wreath, and the various curatorial crafts set in time and place that have wielded this eruptive cartography. The "x" that marks the site of violence is both obscured and reified in this spectacle, as is the axiom of justice within reflexive "American" mythology when made legible as both empirical and flexible. On the most practical level, this

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<sup>117</sup> Leach, Noah. *Camouflage*, (MIT Press, 2006), 3.

structural shift in perception offers a new paradigm for considering lobbying strategies and finding rooms of resistance within the predominant legal texts, while persisting within the functions and privileges of U.S. jurisprudence. Jacky continues to sit in protest. March 2, 2024 marks 36 years that she has made her dwelling outside of her former home. Despite her persistence, the space continues to expand and change. Another major renovation is now underway with a planned reopening in 2025. They purchased additional properties that surround the motel, the few of the original buildings still survive around the Lorraine. The renovation will include a comprehensive "top to bottom" overhaul of the Legacy Building, which is situated across Mulberry Street from the Lorraine Motel. This building is notable as the location from which James Earl Ray fired the shot that killed Dr. King on April 4, 1968. The project will preserve the room where the fatal shot was fired while redesigning the rest of the building's exhibit spaces. Additionally, the expansion will extend the building east to Mulberry Street and south to the borders of the adjacent Founders Park, increasing the exhibit space by an additional 7,500 square feet to the existing 17,000 square feet.

Founders Park itself will undergo a complete redesign, transforming into the "BlueCross Healthy Place at Founders Park." This renovation, fueled by a \$9.6 million donation from the BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee Foundation, will make the park more visitor-friendly with seating areas, performance spaces, water features, and artwork installations, while remaining open to the public. Jacky has likely been (re)moved from her home again, the blueprint of her dissent carved in the metaphysical landscape of the space. I would not simplify Smith's protest as a form of continued resistance, or an example of collateral damage of memorialization. Instead, I would point to the powerful dialectic at play between Smith and the material remains<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>steel frame, nuts, bolts, asphalt<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>in which her dwelling is



determined by the space she then deliberately occupies. Alas, the material dimension of performance cultivates the remains of event through the uncanny negotiations of that "x" as it bounces and zigzags across the crime "scene," the ghostly, and volatile figure that is always, already present.

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### Chapter Three

## Chapter Three

### Spatial Wounds and Spectacles: The Architectures of Violence at Sandy Hook

#### Elementary School

On December 14, 2012, a 20-year-old male killed his mother in the home they shared and then drove over to his former school, Sandy Hook Elementary. He took four of his mother's guns with him including a Bushmaster AR-15 rifle and a Glock 10mm handgun. He killed 20 first-graders and 6 educators with the rifle, before finally turning the handgun on himself. Autopsy reports show that each of his victims were shot between 3 and 11 times.

“Why on earth would do you want to study this?” That was the question I was confronted with on my first visit to Newtown, Connecticut in August 2013, only eight months following the tragic shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School. I can tell you now that this chapter does not offer any satisfying insight into the current reality of shootings at schools, or gun violence in general. It only peels back the curtain to reveal the impossibility of any academic analysis to completely “walk through” these violent spaces. You will see in the pages that follow, I attempt pathways through and across the metaphysical wound, and oftentimes found and endless and arduous path. It was the lurking discomfort that made it clear I must attempt an analysis on the ritual process of memorialization at this space, despite the inevitable failure that lay ahead.

On a Saturday, in the midday, and took a drive through the area. Newtown is bucolic with an unassuming charm, tucked into the New England countryside. It is something that a novelist would call “sleepy” alluding to its easy pace and Rockwellian comfort. I came upon a youth ballpark. Families were crowded around the fields watching on as the kids went about their business of being kids, and I decided to make a brief stop. I was quickly spotted

as an outsider, after months of the outside world barging into their small town, so it was no surprise that there was a guarded response to me, a stranger, taking a pit-stop at their local ballfield. Despite the unease I sensed, people were friendly, smiling and nodding and carrying on about their business. Eventually, a grey-haired gentleman in his late 50's, casually dressed in denim pants and a dark plaid shirt, despite the heat of the summer day, approached me and politely, but directly, cut to the chase, "Where you from?" We talked a minute. I explained I was visiting from California doing research on sites of violence and memorialization in the United States. He asked a few questions and I answered, and after a brief pause, he said, "Why on earth would you want to study this?"

His question was tinged with disgust, although I don't think his intention was to be unkind. In that moment, I could only tell him I hoped that it would create an understanding of the past that would prevent tragedy in the future. My answer only appeased him. In honesty, it did not satisfy me either.<sup>118</sup> My presence there came within a month of a steady wave of visitors, each with their own desires and intentions. "Trauma tourism" or the practice of visiting sites of violence, is a fairly common practice within the United States. In his question of "why?" he raised the larger ethical question of what the consequences of my voyeurism were; my viewing of their pain, for whatever reason, is ultimately bound up with human desire. In my analysis, I hope I could understand that complexity more, and offer a better answer to his question. He turned and walked away, and I promptly left the park. I then

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<sup>118</sup> Susan Sontag argued in her masterpiece *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), that viewing atrocity emerged from political acts of pacifists to lay bare the realities of war. She comes to question how we have normalized such images, and the impacts this has had on our societies. See Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (Picador, 2003).

navigated through the residential hamlet of the Sandy Hook neighborhood and headed toward the school.

I borrow from Rothberg's notion of the "implicated subject" in which he introduces a new theory of political responsibility that expands beyond the traditional categories of victim, perpetrator, and bystander.<sup>119</sup> My analysis aims to uphold a sense of ethical responsibility that comes with analyzing collective sites of violence. Where Rothberg's notion falls short is in the dangers of bystanders or perpetrators being conflated with victims. As an outsider to this space, I most certainly cannot understand the traumatic impact that the tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School has had on this community, and the many generations to come. Therefore, I resist any attempt to make any comparison from the various tragedies and traumas that have been featured in the chapters of the book. Instead, I am moved to embrace Diana Taylor's methodological approach in which she also moves through spaces of "absence." "¡Presente!" is a term often used in Latin American political protests and memorials to evoke the presence of those who are absent, particularly victims of state violence or disappeared persons. Taylor's argument revolves around how this invocation serves as a powerful performative act that brings the absent into the present moment, challenging official narratives and the erasure of memory.

Taylor situates "¡Presente!" within her broader scholarship on the "archive" and the "repertoire" as modes of transmitting knowledge and memory. While the archive refers to tangible, material records (such as documents, images, and texts), the repertoire encompasses embodied practices, performances, gestures, orality, and movements—forms of knowledge

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<sup>119</sup> Rothberg, Michael, *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators*. Stanford University Press), 18.

passed on through physical presence and performance. In this context, “¡Presente!” is a part of the repertoire, acting to assert the presence of those who have been forcibly removed from the historical record. “¡Presente!” Taylor explores how performance and performativity can be tools for political resistance and memory work. She argues that these embodied acts challenge the limitations of the archive in representing past atrocities and injustices. By invoking the absent and making them "present," activists and performers create a space for mourning, remembrance, and even resistance, emphasizing the social and political significance of memory and forgetting.

Taylor's theoretical framing of “¡Presente!” thus highlights the intersections between memory, performance, and politics. It underscores the importance of embodied practices in contesting official histories and in the ongoing struggle for justice and human rights. While this framework provides a critical lens through which to view acts of remembrance and resistance, revealing the power of performance as a tool for social and political change.<sup>120</sup> But, unlike Taylor's cartography of sites, which are charged with social advocacy and a history of resistance and protest, Newtown, Connecticut does not cast itself as the front lines of advocacy and political reform. They mourn the loss of their babies, their neighbors, and their innocence. The endless repetition of gun violence has placed commemoration on an endless loop that funds its way from our communities, into the media cycles, talking pundits, and back again.

My conflicted walking through these locations of violence and memory defined the spiral-like movements of this chapter, a narrative structure that intends to reproduce my own

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<sup>120</sup> Taylor, Diana, *¡Presente!: The Politics of Presence*, (Duke University Press, 2020), 20-21.

perplexities. As I tried to analyze the complex emotional and political entanglements converging around this traumatic site, it was impossible for me not to get involved affectively with them. In this case, I don't want to set aside those personal complexities for the sake of creating an "objective" view of my research. As a mother and as a citizen, I was visiting a history that demanded from me a deeply situated and intersectional response. My daughter was in the first grade at the time of the shooting, as were the majority of the victims, and I could not deny my emotional connection to the space. I was further conflicted as a scholar attempting to engage with a tragedy so soon after it had occurred. Walking through the Lorraine Motel allowed the critical and hardening distance of time. The performative decay already taken hold and offering steady ground to walk atop. But, arriving at Newtown felt like coming to the base of an oozing volcano. I have continued to struggle with how to ethically serve the community of Newtown in this analysis, but pain and violence are irreversible, and so the best I could do was to try to understand, fail, and try again. That is the framework for this chapter, an attempts to find a way through the violent landscape, but never coming out on the other side.

### **Sandy Hook School**

Sandy Hook Elementary School sits in a residential community, and is the only building located at the end of Dickinson Dr. At the entrance to the street, on the corner of Riverside Rd. and Dickinson Dr., is the Sandy Hook Volunteer Fire & Rescue Station. A short drive to the end of the road is the Sandy Hook Campus. Following the shooting, the school was shut down, Dickinson Dr. was blocked off with a chain linked fence butting up against the dense trees and foliage that marked the majority of the property's perimeter, like a

fortress wall. The place was both new and familiar to me. In the aftermath of the event, live footage of the school and the community began on an endless loop as part of the now rote post 9/11 practice of a 24-news cycle. “OUR HEARTS ARE BROKEN” was the headline featured the morning after the massacre in *the Hartford Courant*. Below, a group of parents hold each other tightly, a father holds onto the embrace as he looks to the sky, his face a picture of pain. *The Chicago Tribune* used the same headline, but instead chose an image of small children clasping their hands over their mouths in fear and disbelief. *The New York Times* featured a picture of young students standing in a line in utter fear holding onto the person in front of them, being led by a teacher out of the school. These initial reports and images began to the cycle of production that quickly built a massive digital and physical archive that curated the various potentials of the material wound.

The reports of the tragedy in Newtown found themselves within the framework of past shootings at schools in the United States. On December 17, 2012, a prayer vigil was hosted at the Washington National Cathedral and was televised and broadcast across the nation. The cathedral also chose to honor the victims with white roses, and small portraits of each child and educator etched onto a petal. Again, the shooter and his mother were rendered absent. From the pulpit the Very Rev. Gary Hall announced, with President Obama and other political leaders in the audience, that “the gun lobby is no match for the cross lobby.” Hall’s proclamation was deeply emotional, the horrific nature of this crime on top of so many other school shootings that have come before it seemed to be too much for Hall to bear in that moment. The cathedral has not shied away from taking a stance on political topics if its believes their faith demands it, so it was not surprising to see the Reverend speak directly to the gun lobby from the pulpit, but also, he was enacting a cycle of rhetoric that the news



cycle that was familiar to its spectators. Questions around gun violence and gun control legislation are ubiquitous and are amplified in the wake of a shooting. But for the day, the point being, a movement for gun control picked up steam amongst a cross-section of groups in the United States. President Barack Obama was present at that prayer vigil, the camera often moving to him as he openly shed tears and would occasionally wipe them away from his face.

President Obama introduced a gun bill shortly after which was intended to heighten background check measures and wait times for guns. He reached out the parents of the victims at Sandy Hook, and many expressed their deep support for cause, while some opted to avoid the political squabble altogether. Gun violence at schools is not a phenomenon of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: they have been documented as early as 1840 in this country. I had arrived in Newtown with the image of resiliency and sorrow that was demonstrated at the Cathedral. I arrived with a sense of urgency that “something must be done” and found myself attempting to barge my way into the grief of that community. Since then, hundreds of other shootings have taken place on school grounds. Reports of these incidences rarely found their way outside of the local community, and the painstaking steps of recovery and healing remained a local affair. Then, in 1999, two teenage gunmen took the lives of 12 of their peers and 1 educator, injured 21 others, and finally took their own lives after a brief standoff with police. This tragedy at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado marked a shift in how violent acts on school grounds were perceived, in some part because of the scope of the carnage, but also because of how they were mediated.<sup>121</sup> While some would argue against setting the

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<sup>121</sup> Dave Cullen's book "Columbine" is a comprehensive and deeply researched account of the tragic school shooting that occurred at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, on April 20, 1999. The book meticulously examines the events leading up to, during, and

events at Columbine as the crucible of school shootings, it is impossible to deny the impact Columbine High School's tragedy had on how school shootings have been memorialized, and also serve as the standard to compare when another shooting is cast from a local tragedy to a national vestige of memory. Of course, it is impossible not to recognize the extreme nature of the crime specific to Newtown and the families at Sandy Hook. To date, the killing at Sandy Hook Elementary school is the largest mass murder to take place on school grounds in the United States. Amplifying the tragedy is the age of the victims, most being only six years old. With such tender innocence being rendered silent, the nation reeled in its aftermath. Between Columbine (1999) and Sandy Hook (2012) there were nearly 100 other school shootings that were reported in the national media news-cycle.

In its responses, the community of Newtown demonstrated, whether wittingly or not, an understanding of the importance of the space. While the nation was looking on, the school was shut down, the road was blocked off, and an investigation ensued. This new paradigm of seeing and being seen was not lost on the community of Newtown. Patricia E. Llorda, the First Selectman of Newtown, served as the public figure to speak to the issue of the massacre, the crime scene, and the aftermath of the spatial wound. In a press conference

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following the attack, where two students, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, killed 12 students and one teacher, and wounded more than 20 others before taking their own lives. Cullen delves into the lives of Harris and Klebold, offering insights into their backgrounds, personalities, and the factors that might have contributed to their decision to carry out the massacre. He challenges many of the initial misconceptions and myths that emerged in the immediate aftermath of the shooting, such as the portrayal of the killers as outcasts who were bullied, and the idea that they specifically targeted jocks or minorities. The book also explores the response from the community, law enforcement, and the media, scrutinizing how the tragedy was handled and the impact it had on American culture and school safety policies. Cullen spent ten years researching and writing "Columbine," drawing on extensive interviews, journal entries, law enforcement records, and videos made by the killers themselves.

following the deaths she said, “We want to be absolutely certain to do everything we can to protect the privacy of the families and the Sandy Hook community... We’re going to every possible length to eliminate any possibility that any artifacts from the building would be taken from the campus and ... end up on eBay.”<sup>122</sup> This careful consideration of the space and the management of the material emerged as the community found themselves forcibly thrust into the cultural lexicon of mass shootings. With the ever-growing pilgrimages made to the site, impromptu measures were taken to ensure that the space would remain marked as ontologically different or set-apart from the rest of the surrounding space. The Newtown Selectmen Committee Explain the origin of this committee on a footnote. took on the interests of its community and how it should manage the site. In their consideration, they looked to past school shootings and how the community responded and considered how they would appropriately memorialize their tragedy that was being shared across the nation.

If theaters of violence are situated within a performative materiality, as I argue they are, then these acts of proliferation through the news media and the internet become forms of mimesis, enveloping new spectators and actors into the narrative of the trauma. Kathryn Lofton’s research in religion and pop culture offers insight into how these dramas are central structures in our binge behaviors. She writes:

Much of what fills the annals of fundamentalist diagnosis is the figuration of an enemy. If someone points to a fundamentalist, or offers an archive of something called fundamentalism, invariably a feature of that figure or text is a description of an encroaching enemy...Regardless of the indicating symptom, a necessary component of a discourse we have come to call fundamentalism is the perception of societal

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<sup>122</sup> “Newtown to keep school razing under wraps,” accessed on November 8, 2023, <https://www.lubbockonline.com/story/news/nation-world/2013/10/16/newtown-conn-keep-school-razing-under-wraps/15070784007/>

transition from bad to worse...The prerequisite for fundamentalism is thus not a certain level of modernity but a certain psychology of chaos.<sup>123</sup> As a performance studies scholar with an interest in the sacred dimension of theater and performance, I see Lofton's understanding of "binge culture" as an important nuance in engaging with sites of trauma, like Sandy Hook, that may otherwise be overlooked. She reminds us that "Being is consuming,"<sup>124</sup> in the sense that we rely on mediated forms of information to determine our position in the world, but also seek out these models of consumption to satisfy our desires. Furthermore, in considering as performances the infinitude of material archive that emerges after an event like Sandy Hook, then the phenomena of "trauma tourism" or "trauma souvenirs" can be examined as acts of the imagination performed by the consumer. Although they may seem acts of leisure, or kitsch popular culture commodities, there is a sacrality undergirded in the drive for palpable experiences through mimesis.

In the case of memorialization of violence, ritual processes are mechanisms that are mobilized in conjunction to violence. Memorialization is not a response to a violent act, but rather a contribution to its role in culture, and its archives. Although official narratives are produced, they can be undermined by the acts of mimesis that are granted authority through their affiliation with the tragedy, a sacred space. In Maurya Wickstrom's examination of corporate culture, she considers these mass produced and mediated materials from a theatrical lens. She refers to "...theatre's stubborn way of slipping out from under the thumb of the real into identifications, or the abandonment of the experience of the original, real self

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<sup>123</sup> Lofton, Kathryn, *Consuming Religion* (University of Chicago Press, 2017), 24.

<sup>124</sup> Lofton, *Consuming Religion*, 1

into an experience of sameness with another.”<sup>125</sup> Her analysis of the intersection of performance and capitalism elucidates the role of imagination within consumer practices, and in my application, helps to explore how theatres of violence are systems of labor and desire with deep theological purchase. Wickstrom continues:

It’s through the imagination that people both act and are acted upon. The imagination, perhaps especially as it takes embodied, mimetic forms, can no longer be thought of as merely the idiosyncratic property of individuals of individuals but must rather be regarded as one of the places where power is organized, structured and distributed.<sup>126</sup> Imagination is not an escape from societal structures but is a means to practice and maintain them. Mass media coverage of these tragedies generate peak ratings but are unable to offer more than a limited understanding of the social and cultural implications of making hyper visible these public deaths.

The fence at the school entrance was intended for the practical function of creating strict limitations on access to the space, both physical access but also visual access as well. Soon the fence served as the primary pilgrimage site for visitors in the immediate wake after the tragedy. A makeshift memorial emerged within hours. 26 angel tree-toppers were placed along the fence to represent each of the victims. Underneath each angel grew piles of flowers, teddy bears, prayer candles, dolls and other children’s toys. Soon, the entire fence was covered in inexpensive, mass produced, kitsch materials and objects. Scholar Erika Doss described these makeshift memorials in her vast research of similar memory sites across the United States. “Memorial mania,” she wrote, is “an obsession with issues of memory and

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<sup>125</sup> Wickstrom, Maurya, *Performing Consumers: Global capital and its theatrical seductions*. Routledge, 2008, 45.

<sup>126</sup> Wickstrom, *Performing Consumers*, 48.

history and an urgent desire to express and claim those issues in visibly public contexts.”<sup>127</sup>

In addition to creating connection through visible markers, these are acts of the imagination in which spectators, whether in person or in a mediated form, can find their own position within public discourses. The desire to participate in these rituals is only one possible performance, and the consumption of these spaces is another form of embodied enactment. The familiarity of these impromptu memorials is a form of visual literacy that can serve as social capital. How do you consume these visual markers? Where do images of these roadside memorials with store-bought mementos take us? Memorialization does not escape the internalized structures that foreground group formation and offer a lens to see and feel the world with others, even if they are imagined.<sup>128</sup> The power that these material objects imbue once they are inducted into the space are determined by the intersection of the site of violence as well as the spectator.

### **Negotiating the Memorial Site**

The growing memorial fence at Sandy Hook was well preserved by the community, but also was monitored by police that were protecting the space. These inexpensive objects were being increasingly challenged by the bitter weather characteristics of a New England winter, yet these items were not simply tossed aside. Cultural theorist Marita Sturken

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<sup>127</sup> Doss, *Memorial Mania*, 2.

<sup>128</sup> I rely on Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of “habitus” in regard to this particular social formation, he writes, habitus is “a subjective but not individual system of internalised structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class.” See Bourdieu *Outline of Theory and Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 1977), 89.

research on the role of kitsch in memorialization challenges the limitation of thinking of kitsch objects through the lens of high or low culture. She writes, “Most kitsch conveys a kind of deliberate and highly constructed innocence, one that dictates particular sentimental responses and emotional registers.”<sup>129</sup> She sees the mass production of these objects to be peripheral in their meaning when they are used in relation to the memory of loss. She argues that these objects carefully cultivate ethos and sympathy, “not hate and rage,” and produces an ethos is universally shared.<sup>130</sup> Sturken’s astute analysis demonstrates that these objects found at volatile sites of violence reduce the political complexities of the given tragedy into a simplified notion of a general, national tragedy. I agree with Sturken that debates over “the highbrow or low brow” aesthetics of kitsch culture elide the impact they have in memorial spaces. I would also add that, when spectators perceive these spaces as expressions of a universal, human experience, these are performances of the imagination. When considered this way, these actions are forms of immaterial labor, intended to produce social relations and networks.

From the standpoint of those in direct proximity to the tragedy, or the living victims, kitsch objects serve a different function. Selectman Llorda explained that the townspeople were deeply moved by the outpouring of generosity they saw from the larger community but continued to keep a careful practice around the management of the space, this included the fence memorial, which had been inducted as a piece of the site. She wrote:

These wonderful outpourings of love and support began right after the tragedy of Dec. 14 and

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<sup>129</sup> Marita Sturken, *Tourists of History: Memory, Kitsch and Consumerism from Oklahoma City and ground Zero*, Duke University Press, pp. 21

<sup>130</sup> Sturken, *Tourists of History*, 22-23.

continued for many days afterward... We faced the problem of what to do with the memorials. How could we demonstrate the greatest respect for the kindness and compassion of the donors? Our answer was to remove the items from the outdoor memorials and prepare them for use as sacred soil in whatever permanent memorial is later created. To us, sacred soil honors the kindness of donors.<sup>131</sup>

It is in the management of the sacred soil that the community were inevitably connected; and the kitsch material served as a signifier that the processes of memory production were playing out. No endless proliferation of kitsch fully destabilizes the geographic realities of centers and periphery. The day I went to the ballpark in Sandy Hook, I was an outsider, and my proximity to the space only amplified the metaphysical barrier of our social networks in relations to these traumas. The fact that the community of Newtown chose secure materials from the site, whether produced before or after the tragedy also points to the role that physical proximity continues to play in the cultivation of the sites of violence, despite the barrage of technological mediators made available each day.

Llorda remains steadfast regarding the decisions the committee made regarding the space, and how they considered steps forward. They looked to the examples of Columbine High School, the school only razed the library section of the building where most students were killed, and built a memorial space in its footprint, which was surrounded by the original, unchanged structure. After Virginia Tech suffered its own tragedy in 2007, they opted to keep the building that served as a primary site of violence but transformed its'

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<sup>131</sup> E. Patricia Llorda, "Newtown honored the generous response to Sandy Hook," *NewsTimes*, 19 December 2014, <https://www.newstimes.com/opinion/article/E-Patricia-Llorda-Newtown-honored-the-generous-5969280.php>



function from a lecture hall to a student resource center to access mental health services and support. In the days that followed it became clear the need for a permanent, public memorial. People packed their various offerings, letters and toys, in plastic cases in attempts to preserve the physical integrity of their offering they left behind. After the shooting at Columbine High School, a similar impromptu memorial was produced at the school property, covered in flowers, candles, and letters to the victims. Within a few days another memorial appeared on the grassy hill that served as a perch to look onto the school grounds from above. A local man built 15 large crosses and hoped they could serve as a space for people to reflect on the tragedy and seek healing. Zanis, a carpenter, built crosses for the victims as well as the gunmen. The names of each of the dead were written on each cross. The hillside memorial attracted droves of people from the area and beyond. Students would write messages to their friends on the cross, an attempt to express their grief. Others would find the crosses of the gunmen and write messages of forgiveness. Including the shooters in the process of memorialization allowed for critical space to consider the contexts in which the tragedy was situation. The crosses for the gunmen were defaced several times, and Zanis had to rebuild and re-erect them repeatedly while the memorial stood. Scholar Michael Taussig describes the role of defacement as a ritualized act. It's through this act of repulsion that something sacred is created.<sup>132</sup> In the case of the crosses at Columbine their presence served as a tool of memorialization in which ideologies could be negotiated and played out through the act of destruction and creation. Eventually, with the help of Zanis, a permanent memorial of crosses was made to honor the tragedy. Only 13 crosses are included in the official memorial that

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<sup>132</sup> Michael Taussig, *Defacement* (Stanford University Press, 2009), 33.

stands today. With the gunmen rendered invisible there is no room for repulsion of disgust in the way that Taussig suggests, perhaps leaving room for the reality of their presence to fester in the absence of their material reproduction.

In 2012 at Sandy Hook, the fence memorial was a space to remember the victims, but within the practice of memory, forgetfulness abounds. 26 angels stood on the fence, but 28 died on December 14, 2012. In order to consume trauma, the enemy had to be clearly signified. The fact that the shooter also shot and killed his own mother in her home before heading to the school makes identifying the causal symptom of the killer's turn to extreme actions of violence, or his "fundamentalism," to use Lofton's terminology, problematic. In the hierarchy of villain and victim, her place was negotiated as somewhere in-between. Ultimately, closer to villain than victim; the guns were hers, and she was responsible for her child, and her erasure from the public discourse fit easily within the cycles of consumption. These acts are ritualized through a palpable desire for visceral experience in where remembering is carved out through deliberate acts of forgetting. But, the absence of the shooter also serves leaves its own metaphysical trace that persists.

### **Meme/Memorial**

The Sandy Hook community were connecting inwardly in order to heal from this overwhelming trauma, which left a vacuum for others that wishes to mourn collectively. These acts of mourning are not produced within a vacuum, and there are various factors in how one "sees" a trauma. Technologies of seeing are certainly an important point in how we understand our own positioning within any ideological framework. As Suk-Young Kim astutely states in her reading of the DMZ exhibition at the Korean War Memorial, "the

position from which we see determines our ideological differences and allegiances...the visitors' passive experience of viewing museum displays eventually turns into an ideological act of seeing and feeling the pain...from a particular political stance..."<sup>133</sup> In addition to the basic kinesthetic conditioning of having to look on from outside the barrier, or through other mediated forms, the means of seeing the space was shaped by growing ideologies around the tragedy. The mass production of materials in response to the trauma of Sandy Hook was driven by consumer habits. By 2013, when Obama pitched his gun bill, and the people of Newtown were debating the next steps of the space, we were firmly situated in the age of the internet and social media, and the meme was having its key cultural moment. Richard Dawkins coined the term "meme" and argued that cultural development occurs through the transmission of and imitation of memes, such as music, catchphrases and fashion.<sup>134</sup> Memes can be defined as pieces of digital kitsch. Religious Studies scholar Beverly McGuire examines memes within certain cultural settings and argues, "while they seem trivial or superficial, Internet memes reflect and change social mindsets...Comparable to offline jokes in their speed of transmission, Internet memes differ in the fact that their networked transmission transcends physical space and their online accessibility overcomes restraints of time."<sup>135</sup> The meme is transferrable, but also malleable, because parts can easily be lifted and manipulated. Also products of mass consumption, these digital artifacts, unlike the trauma

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<sup>133</sup>Suk-Young Kim, "Staging the "Cartography of Paradox: The Dmz Special Exhibition at the Korean War Memorial, Seoul," *Theatre Journal*, 63, no. 3 (2011).

<sup>134</sup> Richard Dawkins *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford University Press, 1976).

<sup>135</sup> "Instant Karma and Internet Karma: Karmic Memes and Morality on Social Media," in *Believing in Bits: Digital Media and the Supernatural* (Oxford University Press, 2019), 108-109

kitsch of teddy bears that embody an ethos of sympathy, memes are direct, and are produced for the sake of reproduction.

A Google search of “Sandy Hook memes” shows a collection of images that range from the utterly grotesque to the deeply somber. Even though I expected to find a great deal of shocking material, it was still gut-wrenching to see it there. But, the imagery is limited, the access to visual characters which is essential to the meme’s transferability, and therefore most were made then forgotten. Once the conversation moved to the gun control debate, the memes produced were endless, and as a form of cultural production, they served to remove the issue of gun control from the crimes at Sandy Hook Elementary. Obama pushed the bill to the Senate for a vote, and it was quickly shot down in a low vote by a majority Republican Senate in April 2013. The president said the failure of the background check bill “came down to politics,” and was due to the lies of the “gun lobby.” Ultimately, the bill was a flop, and while he was marketing his gun bill, gun sales in the United States soared.<sup>136</sup> In fact, the Bushmaster AR-15 that was the primary weapon used by the gunman in Newtown, had its highest year of sales in 2013, according to Remington. In order to fully understand the complexities of these spaces, these various forms of enactments have to be considered within the broader context. Even a meme has cultural clout if it satisfies consumer desires. Additionally, the management of the wound is being informed by these swirling political movements.

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<sup>136</sup> “What happens after gun restrictions? gun sales go up?” *The New York Times*, accessed on April 20, 2021, [https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/12/10/us/gun-sales-terrorism-obama-restrictions.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/12/10/us/gun-sales-terrorism-obama-restrictions.html?_r=0) .

In 2013 it was decided that Sandy Hook Elementary school would be torn down, and a new school would be built in its footprint. Photography was banned at the site, and all workers were made to sign non-disclosure agreements. Every piece of rubble from the demolition was sent to an undisclosed location to be grounded down into dust and recycled into the concrete for the new building. The steel has been melted down and restructured. Workers were required to guard the perimeter to prevent onlookers from taking photographs or videos. On my first visit there I snapped a photo, and a young man suddenly appeared from behind the gate, seemingly out of nowhere, and kindly asked me to erase the photograph, and I obliged, and off he went. Llorda and the Selectmen committee were diligent in keeping the space deeply restricted. With the growing memorial mania being proliferated Llorda saw the potential for someone trying to seek notoriety through their access to artifacts. At Columbine doorknobs were taken off classrooms as keepsakes, as well as bricks and stone that came from the demolished library. There is something haunting about these souvenirs of murder finding their way into the world. But, as Llorda points out, “Certainly we know that there is a real market for such ‘horribilia.’ And, I think we can probably agree, that some workers involved in the demolition could be tempted to engage in such commerce.”<sup>137</sup> Llorda’s tone suggests a dark underbelly of the digital marketplace where formidable boogey men flaunt their taboo trade. While there is certainly an element of such ‘horribilia’ as she describes there are also plenty of codified social forms of showcasing trauma souvenirs. In 2004, the entire collection of evidence collected from Columbine High

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<sup>137</sup> E. Patricia Llorda, “Newtown honored the generous response to Sandy Hook,” *NewsTimes*, 19 December 2014, <https://www.newstimes.com/opinion/article/E-Patricia-Llorda-Newtown-honored-the-generous-5969280.php>.

School collected by the police in the extensive investigation was released to the families of victims and the general public for viewing. The hundreds of pieces of evidence filled up two large room, and spectators could navigate their way through the items on display: victim's clothing, shell casings, bullets, maps of where the victims were found, the gunman's report on Charles Manson, bloody carpet fragments, and on and on.<sup>138</sup> The act of witnessing these objects was welcome by most of the families, and the event proceeded with limited criticism or hesitation. In the previous chapter I showed that the crime scene evidence of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. was put on display in the addition of the National Civil Rights Museum. The boarding house where James Earl Ray took his shot at King is preserved, and now visitors can stand where the shooter stood, in the presence of the bullet that tore through him. And there are endless other example of crime scene evidence being used in curated displays of violence. When an investigation is concluded, the materials from the evidence file are often donated to memorial spaces or museums, particularly in national traumas. In some senses "proof," serves as key markers for understanding violence. But, these are ultimately mis-en-scenes, pieced together by investigators in the aftermath. It is what we imagined happened.

Despite some of these former practices, the Newtown Selectmen committee took the unwavering stance from the beginning that these materials would either be re-interred into the sacred ground of the site, or would be hidden away and preserved. These decisions came with some internal criticism. Many town members have asked for keepsakes from the school they had sent their kids to (classroom signs, fixtures, etc.) but the city council deemed the

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<sup>138</sup> Catalog, accessed on March 27, 2023, <https://www.acolumbinesite.com/evidence.php>

action of handing out memorabilia to be “inappropriate,” but did agree to the suggestion to leave the cast of dinosaur footprints that adorn the front yard, and to keep the original flagpole. From outside the community, the lack of access created a sense of ire from some, suggesting it was a violation of their personal freedom to not have access to at least the legal evidence. Llorda remained aloof to the frustration of outsiders:

Imagine, if you will, the hurt that comes with knowing that photos and artifacts from the place where your child or spouse was killed are present in the digital marketplace. I think not having unfettered access to these items and photos was a small price for the "land of the free" to pay.<sup>139</sup>

Despite criticism, they moved forward with the demolition, but nothing at the Sandy Hook is being discarded, or cast off. The memorabilia that people delivered to the site were collected. Some of the more deteriorated objects were photographed, the originals are incinerated. The ash was used to create the new materials that would be the foundational concrete of the new school. For First Selectman Llorda, this is a kind of “continuity” for the community, despite the fact that it is “an invisible one.”<sup>140</sup> The re-inscription of the material remains into the new space served to limit the potential manipulation of the trace left behind by this tragedy. It is a direct critique of the notion that these events are in danger of being forgotten if certain strategies of memory are not enacted. The community of Newtown has resisted national myths from overtaking their intimate knowledge of the violence that occurred that day and is careful to offer it up for public consumption. Llorda stated that before the demolition of the

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<sup>139</sup> E. Patricia Llorda, “Newtown honored the generous response to Sandy Hook,” *NewsTimes*, 19 December 2014, <https://www.newstimes.com/opinion/article/E-Patricia-Llorda-Newtown-honored-the-generous-5969280.php>

<sup>140</sup> E. Patricia Llorda, “Newtown honored the generous response to Sandy Hook,” *NewsTimes*, 19 December 2014, <https://www.newstimes.com/opinion/article/E-Patricia-Llorda-Newtown-honored-the-generous-5969280.php>

old building she “would have loved to have a ceremony thanking the Sandy Hook School for all of the years of service it’s given the town, but that would have been a national event, reminding people all over again of what happened on December 14.” So, she opted not to hold such an event.

The surviving students of Sandy Hook Elementary were in the meantime attending classes at the nearby Monroe school. The community wanted to rebuild a space for them they could return to without fear. The design for the new school emphasized “safety and security while out in the open”<sup>141</sup> The whimsical design features curved line and shapes in its architecture and boasts tall window features that offer natural sunlight. The new school was completed in fall of 2016. It is a lovely space, but it’s the security features that set it apart. Built into the lovely foliage and along the buildings are cameras invisible to the eye that cover the entirety of the campus as well as the entrance from the beginning of Dickinson Dr. The tall windows provide generous warmth and color to the space, but these windows are bullet-proof and also feature shades that could cover them in an emergency. Additionally, the school features a top level that overlooks the atrium (the center of the school), so staff can keep an eye on the students below, as well as have sight of all of the exits and entrances. The design also took into consideration the daily function of the space, and security was a top priority. The firm noted:

When parents and buses begin to drop kids off, they pass through multiple security checkpoints on the way to the entrance. They also pass by several bioswales, which are angled landscapes that direct storm run-off and keep outside people at a distance.

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<sup>141</sup> Sivgal+Partners Architects was the design firm selected for the Sandy Hook Elementary school build. <https://www.businessinsider.com/new-sandy-hook-elementary-design-2016-8>



At the entrance, there are designated drop-off locations and colorful metal blinds by the windows.<sup>142</sup>

I consulted with an architect on the design who specializes in building utility spaces with an investment aesthetic senses. His reaction was simple, “this place is bomb proof.”<sup>143</sup> After such a horrific crime, it’s not surprising that the families at Sandy Hook would want the measures of safety the new building offers. In this case, the environment, and the physical remains, re-encode the absence of dead bodies as a living object that re-energizes the invisible with the visible. And the implications of these physical artifacts continue to inform the space. The re-integration of the materials from the original building, everything that was not taken by police for evidence, serves as a remain, and in this sense the utility of that honors the idealism of what a school should be in the first place. The power of the material remains serve to re-inscribe meaning, less in the sake of the national story, but in service to the local one. Even now access to the space is limited for the community members, the students and staff. The sacrality of the space is manifest in its resistance to be compared. The local community continues to resist the national appropriation of the tragedy and is careful to offer it up for public consumption. Llorda also stated that she “would have loved to have a ceremony thanking the Sandy Hook School for all of the years of service it’s given the town, but that would have been a national event, reminding people all over again of what happened on December 14.” The community said their goodbyes quietly and personally.

### **Spatial Wounds and Spectacles**

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<sup>142</sup> *Business Insider*, <https://www.businessinsider.com/new-sandy-hook-elementary-design-2016-8>

So much of what had been produced and mediated in the wake of Sandy Hook had been steeped in partisan rancor over the gun laws and mental health concerns. Parents of the victims had been put through endless trials over the failure of the gun control bill and were even entangled in a legal marathon with Conspiracy theorist Alex Jones, who claimed that the shooting at Sandy Hook was a hoax produced by government officials serving Obama's agenda. He had been in a wrangle with Newtown law enforcement over access to images of the victims at the crime scene. Police were conducting a thorough examination of the crimes committed by the gunmen, but also were internally reviewing their efforts in their initial responses for that day, which left the case "open" for over 6 years, and access restricted. Additionally, they had already signaled that they would be considering the wishes of the families in what they would be willing to release to the general public. The police chief simply stated, "these are gruesome images, and the parents don't want them out there."<sup>144</sup> With his access limited, Jones built an army of conspiracy theorists that would harass the parents of the victims. Lenny Pozner, the father of one of the twenty first graders that was killed was deeply affected by the hoax conspiracy, " "Conspiracy theorists erase the human aspect of history," Pozner said this summer. "My child — who lived, who was a real person — is basically going to be erased."<sup>145</sup> The resonance of "absence" which was felt in the weeks and months that would follow was palpable. Lives taken, leaving a tangible and metaphysical abyss. In the recognition of what is absent, or away, some trace or remnant is necessary. It is a spectators' game, and is therefore, *not* absolute. Absence is an inter-textual

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<sup>144</sup> Reeves Weldman, "The Sandy Hook Hoak," *New York Magazine*, September 5, 2016.

<sup>145</sup> Weldman, "The Sandy Hook Hoak."

phenomenon, and works as an inverse definition of the temporal, material and spatial vestiges. But, the absence of the victim followed by a strategic erasure, as Pozner painfully explains, seems to be a severe consequence of the performative trace of violence. In this sense, the remains at sites of violence do not exactly exist as what Rebecca Schneider calls a “performative trace” that moves between disappearance and reappearance,<sup>146</sup> but is akin to something more like performative *decay*<sup>3/4</sup>the violence being so constantly present it has the potential to become dangerously banal.

After years of legal wrangling with Jones, Pozner and the other parents prevailed. Their efforts left Jones bankrupt, delegitimized, and depleted of his social capital. In some senses, the living victims of Newtown agency of their experience has given them power in interrupting the for-profit consumption cycles around the tragedies at Sandy Hook. In 2015, parents of the victims at Sandy Hook filed a lawsuit against Remington, the producer of the Bushmaster AR-15. The case was closely watched by gun lobbyist, since it could establish a legal precedent for future victims of gun crimes. Although the gun bill was quickly cast aside in the rancor of political partisanship, this civil suit could begin a wave of financial repercussion that may eventually have more of an impact closing the doors to massive gun corporations and its sellers.<sup>147</sup>

Despite the interest in keeping the access to the site of the massacre restricted, the community did want to honor the those that lost their lives, as well as their families in a larger memorial that would be open to the public. After over 100 submissions from

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<sup>146</sup> Schneider, *Performing Remains*, 97.

<sup>147</sup> A ruling came in on this today and they settled for \$73 million, I am leaving this note here as a reminder to include this in the final revision.

Architects and designers, approvals for the Sandy Hook memorial were approved in September 2021, nearly 9 years after the shooting. The key area of the memorial will be a water feature with a sycamore tree in the middle and the victims' names engraved on the top of the surrounding supporting wall. The water flow has been designed so floatable candles, flowers and other objects will move toward the tree and circle around it. Pathways will take visitors through a variety of plantings, including flower gardens. "We wanted to create sort of a place that was quiet, a place of reflection, a place where people can come to connect to nature," said Daniel Affleck, an associate principal of San Francisco-based SWA Group who designed the memorial. "A place where people can come and they can see the seasonality, the changes, a kind of peacefulness and the way that the plantings are going to change as a reflection of the passage of time."<sup>148</sup> Within Newtown there were mixed feelings regarding the memorial, specifically in relation to its cost, and how it would be funded. The memorial is expected to be completed by December 14, 2022, the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the shooting. It seems the need to have the space may be a part of codified systems and expectations rather than personal desires. After so many outsiders intruded in their space, I wonder if they wish to experience that invasion again? Architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable is troubled by the disappearance of what she and others calls "the real," derived from Walter Benjamin's notion of "aura." In considering the reproduced-base ethos of capitalist culture she argues "We are what we build, stone and steel do not lie. But there has been a radical change in the way we perceive and understand physical reality. Surrogate experience and synthetic settings have

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<sup>148</sup> "Memorial approved for Sandy Hook," usnews.com  
<https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/connecticut/articles/2021-07-22/memorial-for-sandy-hook-massacre-victims-nears-construction>

become the preferred American way of life.”<sup>149</sup> Perhaps Huxtable would see the careful consideration of the space in Sandy Hook as a ray of hope that the “real” is still a local priority for its communities. Certainly for those living in Sandy Hook, whether they were in favor of the memorial or opposed, they understand that the crimes that day would remain and find their expressions in some material form.

“Why on earth would you study this?” That man’s question has stayed with me, but I will be honest, it was more of a nuisance in the beginning. Something that made me feel awkward and uncomfortable and I would turn away from it. It was in May of 2014, when another young man murdered six, before taking his own life, that I returned to his question with a new understanding. The following evening, the UCSB community, nearly paralyzed in grief, came together at a candlelight vigil to support one-another. A colleague of mine approached me as I was taking a quick snapshot of what I found to be such a moving moment, and asked me, “Hey! Are you going to write about this?” (Pause) I was absolutely insulted by the question; how dare he assume something like that. I was suddenly transported back to my first visit to Sandy Hook Elementary School, and I was standing in front of that man again, the sounds of ballparks swirling around us. Flash back forward to UCSB, in which the student body was hosting a “Paddle Out Memorial” for the victims. News vans and cameras flood the area, allowing no sense of privacy or peace. I suddenly understood that man’s disgust, I felt like I was a voyeur peeking into a tragedy I could never understand. It was uncanny, the 24-hour news cycle was lurking in every corner, snapping photos of the broken glass left on the street from a bullet, the remnants of blood on the sidewalk. I felt a

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<sup>149</sup> Ada Louise Huxtable, “Living with the fake and liking it,” *The New York Times*, 30 March 1997.

desire to protect the survivors, the friends of the victims, the victims themselves from being commodified, but the inevitable happened. The story of the killer was the central narrative, a snap of him staring blandly in the camera. The familiarity of this story, it was so much like Sandy Hook, Virginia Tech and Columbine. The need to memorialize fueled individual pilgrimages in search of a collective unity. I believe the study of sites of trauma, my visit to Sandy Hook and the many other sites of violence deemed national vestiges of memory serves to offer a framework to deconstruct social networks and ideological frameworks that when revealed could encourage us to consider ethical standards in our productions of culture, as well as our consumption.

Perhaps this is where the role of theatre and theatre making becomes the most critical. *26 Pebbles*, a play by Eric Ulloa, is a docudrama that uses the verbatim technique, where the script is constructed from interviews with the residents of Newtown in the aftermath of the tragedy. Inspired by Moises Kaufman's *The Laramie Project*, Ulloa spent years collecting narratives and data for the piece. It aims to capture the community's efforts to heal and come together in the aftermath of the tragedy. Rather than focusing on the shooting itself, *26 Pebbles* delves into the lives of the people of Newtown as they cope with the aftermath of the loss and find ways to move forward. The title refers to the 26 lives lost during the shooting, with each pebble representing an individual victim. The narrative weaves together various personal stories and perspectives from the community, including parents, teachers, first responders, and others affected by the incident. Through these stories, the play explores themes of grief, community, resilience, and hope.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> *26 Pebbles* premiered in 2016 at the Human Race Theatre Company in Dayton, Ohio. It was well-received, with critics and audiences noting its emotional impact and the respectful handling of a sensitive subject. The play has since been performed in various theaters across

Additionally, *Columbinus*, written by Stephen Karam and PJ Paparelli, with contributions from various others, the play is a blend of fact and fiction, drawing from discussions with parents, survivors, and community leaders, as well as diaries and home video footage to explore the dark aspects of American adolescence. The narrative is structured into three acts. The first act sets the scene in a typical American high school, focusing on the lives of eight teenage archetypes, each represented by labels rather than names. Central to this act are two outcast friends, "Freak" and "Loner," who face bullying and isolation, leading them towards a tragic path. The second act transitions these characters into Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, incorporating elements from the actual massacre, including the shooters' videos and journals, to depict the events leading up to and including the tragic day. A newly added third act shifts perspective to the survivors and the community, reflecting on the incident and its aftermath, including the societal push to repress grief and the ongoing issue of school shootings.<sup>151</sup> Again, pulling inspiration from *The Laramie Project*, this docudrama also focuses the narrative on healing and reconciliation. Scholars have often interpreted memorialization as a means to mend individual or national traumas. This perspective implies that violence interrupts a specific narrative and that interacting with sites or remnants of violence serves as a way to expunge or resolve this symbolic division.

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the United States. Its approach to storytelling—focusing on the community's response rather than the event itself—has been praised for offering a unique perspective on tragedy and healing.

<sup>151</sup> *columbinus* began its journey in 2003 with a reading at the Arena Stage, Washington, DC, and has since seen various productions, including a notable off-Broadway premiere at the New York Theatre Workshop in 2006. The play has received critical acclaim for its sensitive and insightful portrayal of a difficult subject, earning nominations for several awards, including the Helen Hayes Award and the Lucille Lortel Award for Outstanding Sound Design.

But, violence is not universally experienced by humanity, and in this sense we can never fully come to a moment *after* violence.

I do not have all the answers regarding the ethics of the scholar, but I see violence becomes a useful, albeit twisted, starting point to tease out the complexities of this sacred dimension. After all, violence is a disruption or desecration of a normative narrative regarding everyday life, or everyday performances. The wound including its physical remains, somehow must be negotiated and determined within the context of a cohesive national identity. The United States is certainly attached to its violence experiences, and I see potential in the examination of the physical remains of sites of violence in order to create (or at the very least imagine) secular typologies that can realign political debates within new ideological frameworks. Artist have begun the work, plays, sculptures, etc. are being produced; an emphasis on material remains at sites of violence offers the possibility to alter political affiliations, and perhaps rejuvenate activism.

As I write about Sandy Hook Elementary school now and the memorial-space being built nearby, I can still feel that pounding feeling of dread and sorrow that came to me at the beginning of all of this. It returned like a heavy drum after the shooting at Robb Elementary school in Uvalde, TX in 2022. I feel the thud again and again, and more pain and violence occurs. What will this chapter accomplish? These shootings are intrinsically caught up within each other, a new echo bounced into the world that becomes another performative trace to follow, another endless and impossible path. Scholarship can go so far, and offer nuance and some light to a scenario, but it can never go far enough when violence and its aftermath are involved. I pray for the victims of Sandy Hook, I pray for us all.



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## Conclusion

This coming May (2024) marks the 10-year anniversary of the tragedy in Isla Vista. Time has passed, but tragedies like this have not abated. In reflecting upon the intricate web of violence and its aftermath, our analysis has traversed the somber landscapes of tragedy, from the palpable grief of Isla Vista to the broader canvas of gun violence across the United States. We've grappled with the inherent uniqueness of each violent act, despite their disturbing commonalities, and peered into the depths of violence against women through the lens of the Isla Vista tragedy. This exploration has underscored the futility of comparing acts of violence, revealing the paradox of their interconnectedness amidst their distinctiveness.

Our journey through the "theatres of violence" concept has illuminated the complex nature of places marred by violence, highlighting the multifaceted dimensions—somatic, temporal, material, and sacred—that these sites embody. This exploration has not only expanded our understanding of violence's impact beyond the physical to the metaphysical but also enriched our comprehension of spaces of collective trauma as sacred, charged with emotional and cultural significance. Violence, by definition, encompasses behaviors manifested through physical actions or volatile emotions. Its measurement lies not in its occurrence but in the extent of its destruction, whether physical or psychological. Consequently, violence defies objective quantification and is instead gauged by its aftermath, transcending material and physical boundaries to encompass the metaphysical realm. Each instance of violence, such as the Isla Vista tragedy, is inherently unique, despite sharing commonalities with historical and global events. The prevalence of gun violence across the United States, exemplified by over one hundred reported school shootings in 2015 alone, underscores this grim reality.

The term "theatres of violence" is employed to encapsulate the multifaceted nature of sites where violence unfolds, encompassing somatic, temporal, material, and sacred dimensions. The concept of a sacred dimension emerges within the interstices of the somatic, temporal, and material, transforming sites of violence, especially those of collective trauma, into sacred spaces. This sacrality influences bodily movements, the perception of time as both compressed and prolonged, and the significance attributed to material elements. In this context, "theatre" refers to the dramaturgical framing of spaces where violence occurs. Moreover, "Theatres of Violence" underscores theatre's function as a communal gathering space and highlights its metaphysical role in cultural discourse through ritualistic practices. Memorialization, far from being a mere response to violence, actively contributes to its cultural significance and archival representation. These theatres of violence serve as arenas for the negotiation of diverse contributions and interpretations, despite the production of official narratives. During my observation of the memorialization process in Isla Vista, I witnessed the materialization of memory and the sacralization of physical remnants. The community swiftly engaged in commemorative performances, imbuing physical spaces with volatile and multifaceted meanings. Objects such as bullet holes, blood stains, and shattered glass assumed significance beyond their physical attributes, evading easy comprehension. The management of physical traces and the construction of meaning in unstable, situated spaces underscore the complexity of memorialization processes. Memorialization does not erase violence but rather perpetuates it through public discourses and codified rituals. These practices serve as markers of resistance, endurance, and hope, yet they also reflect the prevailing structures that dictate how communities engage with violence. Certain narratives are deemed appropriate and enshrined in collective memory archives, while others are

marginalized or excluded. For instance, the controversy surrounding the statue depicting a woman falling in commemoration of the September 11th attacks highlights the tension between raw expressions of vulnerability and narratives of national strength and unity. In conclusion, "theatres of violence" serve as dynamic spaces where competing memories and interpretations intersect, shaping public discourse and collective memory. Understanding the complexities of these spaces sheds light on the processes of meaning-making and memorialization in the aftermath of violence.

This discourse has navigated the nuanced dynamics of performance in the aftermath of violence, from the ritualistic to the material, shedding light on how commemorative acts shape and are shaped by the rhythms of tragedy. This examination has revealed the intricate relationship between nostalgia, anachronism, and performance, challenging us to consider how these elements interact to mediate our understanding of the past within cultural practices. In the broader context of national trauma, our analysis has delved into the repercussions on national identity, exploring how sacred spaces at sites of violence serve as crucibles for examining the interplay between space, place, and collective memory. This reflection has cautioned against conflating performance with ritual, emphasizing the dynamic struggle over memory and collective perceptions in shaping a cohesive national narrative. Ultimately, this analysis of theatres of violence as dialogical spaces where competing memories and interpretations intersect has underscored the importance of engaging with these sites not just as consumers of memory but as active participants in the construction of meaning. This engagement challenges us to confront the ethical responsibility of acknowledging our implication in systems of power and violence, urging us to envision alternative futures through the lens of multidirectional memory.

The concept of "performance that remains" necessitates careful consideration in spaces where violence is simultaneously exposed and obscured. The temporal aspect of performance is dynamic, encompassing various theories and perspectives within performance studies research. Performances serve as conduits for memory and history, where past events and narratives are revisited, reenacted, and contested. Ritual performances, in particular, follow repetitive sequences and structured temporal frameworks, shaping collective experiences of time. Furthermore, the interplay between nostalgia, anachronism, and performance invites critical inquiry into how the past is mediated, performed, and contested within cultural practices. Furthermore, the entanglement of sacrality and civil religion in performance holds significant implications for theater scholars, practitioners, and audiences as they navigate the remains of trauma and engage with collective memory.

Reflecting on the complexities and profound narratives intertwined with sites of violence, our analysis culminates in a contemplative synthesis of the intricate dance between memory, violence, and memorialization. The National Civil Rights Museum (NCRM) and Sandy Hook Elementary School serve as poignant case studies through which we have explored the dynamic interplay of performance, trauma, and the politics of memory within the American landscape.

At the NCRM, the deliberate inclusion of both the location where Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated and the supposed vantage point of his assassin underscores a broader narrative of confronting violence head-on. This expansion not only encapsulates the act of murder within the museum's scope but also introduces a nuanced complexity to the memorialization process. Through the observation of a seemingly disjointed yet profoundly symbolic scene outside the NCRM's confines, we are reminded of the ongoing struggles that

persist beyond the sanitized museum experience. The juxtaposition of a memorialized site with the raw, unvarnished reality of societal issues like poverty offers a stark reminder of the work that remains in the pursuit of justice and equity.

The case of Sandy Hook Elementary further complicates our understanding of how spaces marked by violence are managed and memorialized. The transformation of the school into a site that is both sacred and contested illustrates the delicate balance between remembering the victims and navigating the politicization of such tragedies. The notion of "spatial wounds" becomes a powerful lens through which we can examine the ways in which architecture and material remnants of violence contribute to the shaping of national memory and identity. The management of these spaces, as seen through the careful curation of Sandy Hook's landscape, reveals the intricate relationship between violence, memory, and the mechanisms of national belonging.

Our journey through these "technologies of memory" at sites of violence has illuminated the multifaceted roles that performance and trauma play in the construction of public memory and identity. By moving beyond a simplistic understanding of memorials as mere sites of healing, we delve into the complexities of ritual performances that serve to legitimize the myths of the state and the struggles for representation within the collective memory. The examination of contemporary political discourse, exemplified by events like Glenn Beck's "Restoring Honor Rally," highlights the profound impact of these performances on the shaping of political allegiances and the broader American political landscape.

As we conclude this exploration, it's evident that the study of violence and its memorialization is not merely an academic endeavor but a vital exercise in understanding and confronting the enduring presence of violence within society. It's through this collective

negotiation and mediation of experiences that we find pathways to healing, underscoring the critical role of memory, performance, and space in shaping our collective identity and resilience in the face of tragedy. It is evident that the study of memorialization and the performance of violence at sites such as the NCRM and Sandy Hook Elementary School offers crucial insights into the broader dynamics of American politics and society. These spaces of memory serve as stages upon which the national narrative is contested, negotiated, and ultimately, constructed. In acknowledging the limitations of traditional forms of activism and the necessity for engagement at ideological borders, we are reminded of the ongoing challenge to navigate the complexities of memory, violence, and identity in a deeply divided nation. This reflection not only reaffirms the significance of our inquiry but also underscores the urgency of continuing to explore these intersections as we seek to understand and shape the future of American society.

It seems the logical next step for this research is to explore the role of theatre as means to grapple with these tragedies, and perhaps challenge the systems in place that determine the functions of memory and memorialization. In some ways this journey through these various spaces have shed light on performance of violence in profound ways, but there also still seems to be something impossible to ever understand. In an attempt reconsider this wound, my colleague and friend, Professor Annika Speer, and I are putting on a staged reading of Branden Jacobs-Jenkins's play *Gloria*. The play is set in the offices of a prestigious magazine in New York City, following the lives of a group of editorial assistants who are aspiring to establish their careers in the competitive world of publishing. The story kicks off on an ordinary day filled with the mundane yet cutthroat office dynamics among the assistants, who are all vying for success and recognition. However, the plot takes a dramatic



and dark turn when an unexpected act of violence shocks everyone and changes their lives forever. This pivotal event forces the characters to confront their ambitions, moral boundaries, and the lengths they are willing to go to achieve success.

By primarily focusing on the impact of the event on the survivors and the broader implications on society's obsession with trauma and the media's role in it. Set in the offices of a New York magazine, the play explores themes of ambition, memory, and the commodification of tragedy through its characters, who are employees of the magazine and witnesses to the violence. The play challenges the audience to consider how individuals cope with trauma, the ethical implications of turning personal tragedies into public spectacles, and the ways in which such events are sensationalized and exploited for professional gain. Jacobs-Jenkins uses sharp, dark humor and shifts in narrative perspective to examine the survivors' attempts to move on with their lives, which include exploiting the tragedy for book deals and media attention. This reflects a critique of a culture that is quick to capitalize on disaster and suffering. We hope to open-up dialogue amongst the community to see if any clarity can be gleaned, 10-years later, and find a path not only toward that potential of healing, but ultimately come together again after being torn apart.