From the Ground Up: A Look Into People Powered Monuments

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Dedication

To Memorials around the world, and the people who build them.

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Opening Episode

Walking into the local hardware store, the rusty door clings with the familiar sound of a half-working bell, and the line "How can I help you?" usually follows. Baller Hardware Store is among the last hardware stores in the neighborhood, part of a dying tradition. It is quaint, filled with a thick scent of wood and dust. Walking down the paint aisle, browsing the various colors, a small framed picture of the bald man who once had worked the aisle hangs adjacent (Fig 1). He died just a year ago, and he had passed without a large amount of people knowing. Seeing the picture sends a small but familiar sense of loss through those who remember him. His name was Joe, and he always sat at the end of that aisle with his pleasant smile and small glasses. People in the store shared stories and memories of Joe. Recalling past conversations, his happy presence, and the sets of keys he would make. The photo is small, a quickly shot portrait out front of the store; it hangs with a thick black frame and white border. At the back of the aisle, where the paint gets mixed, lays another poster filled with a couple more images of him with his family and friends. These small memorials require a particular sensitivity and awareness of the space to feel. For those that didn't know him, it would be hardly recognizable. After purchasing some paint for the living room and returning home, a portion of the evening is spent looking up Joe's name, reading the public condolences from his family, coworkers, friends, and local community online. The small photograph once again activated this intimate memorial that his coworkers had set up in the shop.

Moments of collective remembering and reflection can be found in mundane spaces like that. Often, these objects of momentary reflection and remembrance do not require a large amount of materials, space, and publicity. Their unremarkable presence makes them more

personable and evocative. Because they are unexpected marks of collective memory, unassuming in their size and materiality, usually followed by a feeling of surprise, these everyday memorials stick more strongly, creating a sense of community and belonging. The small framed image didn't require public approval or any public funding, unlike much larger memorials where the formal qualities of space, material, and design monumentalize memory. It just asks for its audience to take a minute to remember Joe.

Fig. 1
Memorial to Joe, Nov. 2023
Photographed by Author

This paper will explore the dynamics of memorialization and public memory at sites where grassroots commemorative processes occur. Examining the process of how a memorial comes into being provides a way to understand the collective mourning process, the motivations behind who, what, and how the public and how this can form a shared identity. By recognizing the agency these sites hold and the impact they can have on historical narratives and national identity, local community memorials emerge as more fitting space for meaningful

memorialization. In this context, the paper seeks to explore how the process of public memorialization is a communicative medium. Extending J.L. Austin's theory on the performativity of speech, the paper explores how these sites function as living utterances, actively performing, asserting, or evoking responses from the public.

What is it in a Memorial?

Politically, socially, and in everyday life, memorials can act as physical grounds for constructing, representing, or communicating public grief and identity. The formal conditions under which they are produced, their source of funding, and their placement in location provides an insight on the intentions behind these objects and what they aim to communicate. In smaller community-oriented sites, collective remembering occurs in more mundane situations. Everyday objects often acquire emotional meaning and an ability to communicate by absorbing or representing a moment in time. Monuments and memorials are not mere representations of history; they are active processes.

Memorials themselves have agency. Bruno Latour offers a way to approach memorials and monuments as agents of society-making and potential ordering devices. Actor-Network Theory (ANT) suggests that actors are not limited to humans. Nonhuman objects/actors also possess agency.[1] His theory disrupts the notion of an ontological separation between objects and people, advocating for a more expanded idea of social order. Latour's theory emphasizes the role that material elements and other nonhuman objects play in societal order. [2]Asking for a shift in our focus from the "artificial oppositions we have built between subjects and objects" and to

[1] Latour, Bruno. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007.
[2] Gunnar Thór Jóhannesson and Jørgen Ole Bærenholdt, "Actor–Network Theory," in *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography (Second Edition)*, ed. Audrey Kobayashi (Oxford: Elsevier, 2020), 33–40

recognize that the agency of objects carry power, expanding our understanding of the diverse ways people inhabit many different worlds. As Latour points out, the ANT theory is most effective for revealing how new connections are formed in moments of change. Building on this approach, my research will focus on places where the memorial or monument is in a state of transition: when memorials are created unexpectedly; when they cease to be what they were; when they change meaning; when they are decommissioned from public space.

Those who commission monuments, governments, philanthropists, and big-money corporations, do so with the aspiration to shape public memory. However, whatever their intention may be, neither the monument nor the memorial are stable or fixed. Their existence is transitory; it changes and takes new understandings, meanings, and interpretations over time. A monument, in fact, "does not equal history, despite the return of such rhetoric…on the political right." It can, however, reflect "how history has been publicly constructed." [3] Because monuments are in public or semi-public space, their presence is negotiated with those in power, serving as an exploratory site to examine the role of political figures, those who design the site, and the public's role in the monuments' performance. But if we regard objects as actors with the capacity to actively constitute social relations, collective memories, and subjectivities, how does our understanding of memorials (and other sites of remembering) change? Do we need to emphasize the aspirations and intentions of the memorial-makers less?

Monuments and memorials serve as insightful spaces for exploring the materialization of public memory and historical narratives within society. Public memory, rather than being solely a product of top-down decision-making, also rests in the hands of the people. Recent periods of

[3] Mechtild Widrich, *Monumental Cares: Sites of History and Contemporary Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2023). 10

disruption, notably the removal of racist Confederate statues in the United States, reflect how individuals wield agency in shaping how history is represented. Despite attempts by governments and powerful institutions to utilize monuments as a means of asserting a shared idea, their effectiveness is not guaranteed by its production. It is the everyday citizens who ultimately determine a monument's impact. This influence becomes most apparent during periods of political disruption, where questions regarding public memory and national identity are left in a vulnerable state. Disruption introduces a duality, providing a space to challenge norms and articulate new modes of thought, feeling, and desires for change. Simultaneously, it can foster divisions and othering, fueled by the "fear, insecurity, and desperation it can sow."[4] In times of political upheaval, the link between monumental and memorial sites and national understandings becomes particularly evident. The emergence of anxieties, fears, contestation, and new forms of representation reflects how nations, states, and the general public utilize these spaces for communication, coping, and the assertion of truths, and in turn, how the public responds to these expressions

The process of memorialization determines who and what is deemed worthy of remembrance. Monuments and memorials function as tangible landscapes where national ideals, identity, and memory attempt to take shape. This process “can operate as a form of social cohesion that is needed more during times when other modes of cohesion are failing” but can also be “a site for contestation disruption and intervention.” The ongoing debate surrounding historical monuments, particularly Confederate statues, signifies a shifting public attitude. The competitive conversation around who is chosen to be represented and remembered reveals how

[4] Sturken, Marita. *Terrorism in American Memory: Memorials, Museums, and Architecture in the Post-9/11 ERA*. New York University Press, 2022 6

"national identity is often negotiated, fought over, projected, and asserted through conflicts over who is remembered." Taking the time to examine the politics of remembering, "unearths the guiding ethos of who is worthy of being remembered and who is not." Those placed outside the category of being remembered, are outside what Judith Butler defines to be *the grievable life.* The public feelings activated by processes of remembering are produced and reproduced at memorials, capable of causing alternative reactions, such as apathy, anger, or social activism.[5]

While some monuments can serve as spaces for reflection and remembrance, they may not always facilitate effective emotional experiences. The narrative surrounding a monument influences the emotional impact it has on viewers. Michael Rothberg, an American literature and memory studies scholar offers a way to combat the issue of debating a singular historical narrative, proposing "that we consider memory as multidirectional; as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross referencing, and borrowing as productive and not privative." [6] The concept of multidirectional memory helps "draw attention to the dynamic transfers that take place between diverse times and places during the act of remembrance." [7] This view of remembering creates a more inclusive understanding to prevent the invisibility of histories and people.

Monuments or Memorials?

The interchangeability of the terms *monument and memorial*, and their frequent misuse, speaks to the necessity to make a clear distinction between the two. This distinction presents a difficult task, as much of their defining characteristics are similar. Some art historians, such as Andrew Shanken, find it unnecessary to focus on the differences between the monuments and

[5] Sturken, *Terrorism in American Memory*. 1-12
[6] Sturken, *Terrorism in American Memory*.12
[7] Rothberg, Michael. *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*. Stanford University Press, 2009. 11

memorials. In fact, he finds their muddled existence the vital aspect of how they function, and separating the two words would disrupt their essential essence. While this hesitancy brings a valid perspective on the way these spaces overlap, it overlooks the importance of acknowledging the fundamental difference in how these sites are produced and how the people then engage with them. In separating the two, I do not aim to create a stifled distinction that will prevent seeing how these spaces can operate similarly and come in and out of play, but rather focus on how they are more effective or ineffective.

There is a certain completeness to a monument which differs from a memorial. They are often designed to last forever, creating a sense of permanent remembrance and an attempt "to mold a landscape of collective memory, [conserving] what is worth remembering and discard the rest."[8] The conventional process required to initiate the building of a monument: acquiring permission, obtaining funding, soliciting proposals, implies a specific intent behind its construction. It's further removed from personal experience, often motivated by political aims and based on public ideals and identities. In opposition to the way monuments are constructed from the top down, there is a less formal composition to how a memorial is formed and a more interactive relationship between the visitors and the space. People come together around an object or site and transform it into an active place of remembrance. Often they are bringing flowers, photos, letters, and objects themselves.

The memorial is an imperfect gesture, an object that is socially generative and constitutive.[9] The term gesture, as Adam Kendon describes it, is a "kind of visible action"

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[8] Savage, Kirk. "Chapter One: Introduction ." *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2018, 4

[9] Stamatopoulou-Robbins, Sophia. "Chapter 4 Gifted ." *Waste Siege: The Life of Infrastructure in Palestine*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 2020, 141–171.

derived from the Latin root meaning "to bear or carry, to take on oneself, or take charge of, to perform or to accomplish."[10] Memorials can occur in all shapes and sizes, occupying ordinary forms and locations. They may be self-regulated and unequipped to last for a long time, but their focus centers on the emotional response and uptake from the viewers. In their incompleteness, memorials offer a revealing vantage point; there is a symbiotic relationship taking place, how people come together around an object, place or piece of art, and in turn, how it provides something for the people. Allowing a way to see how objects act as actors and to understand the agency these spaces have.

The monument carries a powerful agency: the decisions behind what it commemorates, who it represents and the stories it tells is embodied in its representation. Around the Civil War Era, the monument was considered a "space where local communities based on geography, interest or both could define themselves and speak to or for the larger collective." The construction of a monument is a powerful statement, and to Savage, a "kind of natural fact." Although impossible, as time passes, the monument is supposed to remain fixed, stabilizing both the physical and cognitive landscape." The construction of monuments in this manner speaks to the desires "of the state to shape the world, or at least to shape consciousness."[11]

Today, the modern relationship with monuments has changed and these sites are now viewed through a more critical lens. No longer considered to be markers of history, but are now often places of contestation, debate, or have fallen out of use. Savage builds upon this idea himself, writing that "today we are acutely aware of public space as a representational battle-ground, where many different social groups fight for access and fight for control of the images

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[10]Stamatopoulou-Robbins, *Waste Siege*. 141–171.
[11] Shanken, Andrew Michael. *The Everyday Life of Memorials*. Zone Books, 2022. 165

that define them."[12] They exist everywhere, taking shape in forms we don't always notice. But they can be ineffective, used incorrectly as a place to form historical narratives and public identity, and overlook effective emotional evocation and personal interaction. While some monuments can serve as spaces for reflection and remembrance, they may not always facilitate effective emotional experiences. The type of narrative surrounding a monument influences the emotional impact it has on the viewers, if it represents a biased story and people awarely acknowledge that, the reaction is affected. The argument that these vices of collecting fragments of history: modern archives, museums, history tests and as Shanken adds to the list, modern memorials, creates something a little more than artificial memory may connect to the unease, or lack of emotional evocation at these sites.

Memorials as Speech Acts

J.L Austin's theory of speech acts, suggests that when we speak, we convey information and perform various actions, such as making promises, giving orders, or issuing invitations. Under Austin's lens, words can have a certain "force ." When you utter something, you are not simply stating but acting. He breaks the performative ability of speech into three categories: the locutionary act, the literal act of uttering certain expressions; the illocutionary act, the actions performed by speakers in matter utterances, including asserting, commanding, requesting, promising, apologizing, and perlocutionary acts, the effects these utterances have on the audience, the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the participants, often when a reaction beyond its intended reaction occurs.

[12] Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves*. 5

Treating a memorial as a speech act enables one to see monuments/memorials' ability to generate social action and is an active part of how history is materialized. Spaces of memorialization are not simply representing something but performing, as they can hold and transform qualities of human emotion, understanding, and reflection. Sometimes, this ability may naturally or accidentally emerge; other times, the spaces and places are designed to produce responses. They can make statements, evoke emotions, and explore consciousnesses. The conventions Austin provides help to show that despite the intention behind the monument or memorial, it is not only its physical standing that causes the performativity but the relationship between the audience's reactions and the site.

The monument's function does not remain stagnant in the context/conditions it was first constructed for, nor does its life end when it is taken down, defaced, or changed. Despite their ideal function, "monuments seldom showcase hard historical truths but rather crystallize myth or political morality tales staged as the past."[13] Even when a site feels stagnant, unrelatable, or irrelevant to everyday passersby, the monument and memorial are still performing. The push and pull relationship between the viewers and the site is how "most monuments abstract or allegorize an event, idea, ideal, or hero…distancing people from the subject as they bring people closer."[14] Individuals engage with the monument and are drawn into a historical narrative where there is tension between the commemorated subject and its relevance or truth. Today, this often results in alternative responses from viewers, evoking emotions outside their intended responses. The monument could be deemed an "unhappy" or "infelicitous" utterance in Austin's terms, as the people's responses deviate from conventional behavior. The alternative reactions of the audience,

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[13] Mechtild Widrich, *Monumental Cares: Sites of History and Contemporary Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2023).10
[14] Shanken, *The Everyday Life of Memorials*.97

which vary from apathy to a desire for social change/activism, show how a monument and memorial, even when it has fallen out of use, continues to perform, carrying new meanings and reactions. This may be an instance where the monument's force changes from illocutionary to perlocutionary, a response extending beyond its original intended reaction.

The first chapter of this paper, titled "The Accidental Memorial," examines how mundane spaces can transform into active sites of catharsis when imbued with personal memories. I use the Elliott Wall, a public mural in Los Angeles, as a primary example to illustrate this process. The chapter also explores memorials dedicated to other artists, such as Kurt Cobain and Amy Winehouse, highlighting how these semi-hidden, non-representational places invite people to express grief through visual expression. By analyzing these dynamics, I discuss the mystical and persistent nature that defines an "Accidental Memorial."

In Chapter 2, titled "Serial Memorial," I explore repeated memorial practices that transcend geographical boundaries. These memorials share characteristics with Jack Santino's "spontaneous shrines," emphasizing the performative functions of temporary memorials. Their repeated appearances, often tied to political movements, serve as a global call for acknowledgment. Like the "Accidental Memorial," these memorials emerge from community initiatives, highlighting grassroots involvement. The widespread adoption of these practices fosters international movements, turning these memorials into "performative objects." Examples include the Ghost Bike Memorial project, which began as an individual's response to a bike accident and has become a global model for memorializing deceased cyclists, and the Comfort Women Memorial, which honors women forced into sexual slavery by the Japanese Government

during World War II. These memorials have become recognizable symbols of activism, prompting significant changes in social attitudes and awareness.

In Chapter 3, titled "The Memorial Against the Monument," I explore the concept of decommissioned monuments through the lens of Chantal Mouffe's "agonism" theory, which emphasizes the role of conflict and dissent in democratic societies. Utilizing the idea of an Agonistic Memorial, I analyze how memorials can transform public spaces and challenge traditional notions of monumentality. This chapter focuses on the public's actions during the dismantling of Confederate statues in 2020, highlighting how acts of defacement—such as graffiti, paint, and light projections—temporarily alter monuments. These interventions reclaim public spaces and offer America a more accurate race narrative. By engaging in these acts, people contest the historical narratives imposed by these monuments, advocating for a more inclusive and truthful representation of history. Through this examination, I aim to show how transforming public monuments into Agonistic Memorials can provide a platform for marginalized voices and promote a more dynamic and reflective public discourse.

CHAPTER 1: The Accidental Memorial

"YOU COWARD" "You knew me, I know" "See you later"

"Free you are: forever you live" "WE MISS YOU"

On the night of October 21, 2003, the news had spread of Elliott Smith's apparent suicide. Handwritten messages expressing various sentiments of love, anger, and sadness filled the wall of a wavy red-black and white mural outside of a local audio store in Silverlake. The mural had become a symbol of Smith's music after being used as the backdrop for his Figure 8 LP, transforming it from a storefront to a local musical landmark—the wall pictures five large lines, four black and one red stripe in the center. The design begins small, at the top right corner near the store's entrance. The five lines stream out, resembling a musical stave with little instruments on top. The stave begins to transform as it slowly increases in size and curves into a twisty shape, creating movement within the mural, similar to a musical experience. The journey of the stave from the store's entrance and onto the wall visualizes the transformation from sheet music theoretical start to a creative and loose flow of sounds.

Fig. 2
Mural as Elliott Mural, Morning after Death Oct. 22 2003
Elliott Smith and Flickr © Autumn DeWilde

The mural's life began as a mundane piece of street art. Its function resided in its capacity to draw customers into the audio store by creating an appealing visual experience. When reading the mural from left to right, the lines draw you to the entrance, bringing people from the outside to the inside. Its value was only attached to the market, existing within a community selling audio equipment.

Fig. 3
Sound Solutions Before Memorial Los Angeles, 2000-2003
Courtesy of Roadtrippers © Photographer Unknown

After the release of the album Figure 8, the wall began its slow transformation as it could be recognized by fans as the album cover in real life, it was not until his death that the mural truly took on new meaning. It became an informal memorial to Smith- a place for people to share memories, messages and reflections. The amount of writing and photographs left not only visualized the effect of this death, but allowed for people to mourn and express grief at this site. When walking or driving by the mural, it was hard to pass without feeling the weight of his presence and his effect on the public.

The chapter examines how sites that do not originate as memorials acquire the capacity to produce catharsis for specific communities, particularly in the context of musicians. The identity of these memorials exists in the encounter between people and the site, functioning as relational devices and becoming arenas for memory exchange. As people inscribe messages and leave gifts, these interactions create and reinstate the memorial.Unplanned memorials accumulate meaning through continuous visits and the projection of memories onto the site. They serve as outlets for grief and platforms for community connection. As people share their innermost feelings and read previously left messages, the site transforms into a documentation of past encounters, acting as a diary, shrine, and memorial simultaneously. These accidental memorials provide an authentic and unmediated memorializing experience. Their capacity to evoke catharsis explains their active nature today. Without these encounters, the site would remain just a mural, lacking the significance attributed by its visitors.

Unlike commissioned memorials built with a predefined narrative, the Elliott Wall emerged within the hands of the community, absent of ulterior motives or imposed agendas. As people naturally gathered to pay respect and offer mementos of sympathy, they formed a community, and slowly the mural transformed into a memorial, today known as The Elliott Wall The continued interaction between the people and these sites illustrates how objects, locations, and spaces can form inalienable connections to the person/event and the memories that surround it. I use the term inalienability to describe how objects and locations become "imbued with the intrinsic and ineffable identities…which are not easy to give away."[15] Annette Weiner uses this theory to understand how land and objects become identified with groups that are difficult to

[15] "Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While Giving - Kindle Edition by Weiner, Annette B.. Politics & Social Sciences." 11

separate meaning from, thus influencing the construct of social hierarchies. Here I will extend this concept to understand how ordinary spaces become imbued with the memory of a person, making them ideal locations communities gather to find catharsis after a sudden tragedy, thus producing “Accidental Memorials”.

Fig. 4
Polaroid of the Memorial the Day After Los Angeles, Oct. 22 2003
Elliott Smith © Autumn DeWilde

Part of the accidental aspect of this memorial, is that the site already participated in the narrative prior to the death.For Smith’s case, the store sat on Sunset Blvd, a popular and highly trafficked street in Los Angeles, the mural's bold colors and graphic design makes it difficult to miss for people living in the neighborhood. Over time, its recognizability made it an effective marker, becoming a form of a directional landmark.

"It's past the intersection with that mural."

“The bar after solutions…” *“If you see the spiral, you went too far….”*

These phrases were often heard in reference to the mural.

Before shooting Smith in front of the mural, Autumn DeWilde, the photographer, went around Silverlake, capturing other shots of colorful murals she found on her Polaroid. These images are similar to the chosen mural; they are simple, unassuming, quirky, and, at times, playful, evoking a sense of Silverlake's community. The album cover could have easily used any of these other sites in Los Angeles, which would have changed the fate of the front of Sound Solutions. Would that site have been activated in the same manner as the Elliott Wall? Or did the speciality of its location on Sunset and recognizability already place it in a more favored position?

For DeWilde, the mural held a special memory, reminding her of her childhood in Los Angeles during the 80's and 90's. "For years," she says, "I would look at that mural and think that was the ugliest mural I had ever seen." She continues, "Growing up, we must have driven past that mural a million times."[16] But as the Silverlake began to change, becoming more gentrified, the mural began to symbolize the unique characters of the neighborhood. Coming to appreciate "the beauty in the randomness of awkwardly painted murals and mispainted, handmade signs before they started getting sterilized."[17] The mural served as a nostalgic reminder of the changing landscape.

The result was an iconic album cover for Figure 8. It pictures Elliott standing in front of a large curve of the stave. His body contrasts the mural as all of him, except for a small portion of his left hand, is in black and white. This choice creates a removal/separation from the mural, as he looks pasted on top. He looks off to the right, with a slight shrug in his posture and one

[16] Wilde, Hansen, and Walla, *Elliott Smith*. 149
[17] Wilde, Hansen, and Walla. 140

hand pocketed. His clothing emphasizes this casual stance, as he wears a black zip-up hoodie with a crew neck beneath, reading LA 84 in graphic lettering. The mural is left in color, emphasizing the thick red line that runs through it. On these lines, his name is written in handcrafted lettering reading, ELLIOTT SMITH ●● FIGURE 8.

Fig. 5
Album Cover
Elliott Smith, 2000 © Autumn DeWilde

These ordinary sites cannot spontaneously emerge as viable memorial locations. Their form and existence as a memorial occur from the accumulation of events that gradually give these sites significance. In his theory of Relational Art, Nicolas Bourriaud writes how form comes into being through an accumulation of random encounters between two elements; it can be defined as a "lasting encounter" between the various elements.[18] But form can only show its proper function and "acquire a real existence when it introduces human interactions."[19] The

[18] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*. 19
[19] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*.19

music industry accidentally places the wall in Smith's mythology. After the release of the Figure 8 album, the mural became associated with his presence. For fans, every time they take out the album or CD or play it from their phone, they see the iconic graphic design; it becomes a visual signifier for the emotional experiences that occur when they listen to music. These feelings are so individual and special that sometimes they are experiences that cannot be put into words. But the association becomes intertwined with the image of the album cover after playing it numerous times. As Bourriaud writes, it is through these interactions that encounters between the space/art/object and viewer exist, "creating "arenas and time spaces whose rhythms contrast with those structuring everyday life, and it encourages inter-human commerce, which differs from the communication zones imposed upon us" [20]. So when Smith passes away, the mural becomes a place to mourn Elliott because it offers a location where the interpersonal experience of mourning is complicated; one can feel his presence, see something in the flesh that is associated with him, feel presence of other fans, and have their moments of reflection. The space, through the interaction with the people, becomes a memorial and a location that offers a new arena of exchange to think about the passing of time, the death of an artist, and a community of similarly affected people.

When Elliott Smith passes away and the wall becomes a site imbued with personal memories related to musical experiences and the memory and presence of Smith. The concept of "thing power" describes the strange ability of “ordinary man-made items to exceed their status as objects and manifest traces of aliveness." [21] This theory helps explain how these ordinary objects/locations acquire such powerful emotive capacity and agency garner cathartic responses.

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[20] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*.17
[21]Sturken, *Terrorism in American Memory* (New York: NYU Press, 2022). 97

Sometimes it is the "things that may have the least exchange value, commodity value…carry agency and an ability to transform, communicate and evoke a sense of reality, past experiences, and remembering."[22]

In a similar memorial to Kurt Cobain, the lead singer songwriter of Nirvana, two benches of his local park have turned into a site where people mourn his death. Located in Viretta Park, Seattle, the benches sit on top of a patchy grassy hill looking out to view the ocean ahead. Cobain struggled similarly to Smith, battling addiction and depression and ultimately committing a suicide in his home in Seattle after escaping from a rehab facility in Los Angeles. These benches have become a pilgrimage for the public to mourn Cobain's death- the spot where he was said to spend time listening to music and writing lyrics. Fans keep the site alive comparably: signing the bench and leaving messages, poems, letters, and flowers. The ordinariness of both the benches and the wall projects an aura of authenticity. These unassuming locations evoke a sense of nostalgia to the time before death. People can imagine how Smith once stood in front of this site, Cobain once sat on the bench, and how they lived in the neighborhood surrounding these locations. Once the artist passes away, they transform into an outlet for emotions and feelings that can't be spoken.

In 2008, the original wood of the benches that he was said to spend time sitting at, were tossed away and replaced with new wood. Somebody then retrieved the wood from the trash and auctioned it off in 2014. Later, his family began to auction other personal items of his with intention to donate a portion of proceeds to Mental Health Organizations. Part of what is making the auctioning work is that these objects, his old instruments, and personal possessions, the

[22] Sturken, *Terrorism in American Memory* (New York: NYU Press, 2022). 97

bench where he was said to sit, still obtain the connection to his presence and music. Without this connection, these objects would be seemingly meaningless. Even when these objects, which were exchanged, passed out of hands, put up for auction, or changed property ownership/business, nevertheless retain an inalienable connection to these artists.

Fig. 6
Kurt Cobain bench in Viretta Park, Seattle 2018
Reddit © Photographer Unknown

There is a certain mystical quality which emerges from these accidental memorials. Their simple existence does not force a reaction, but rather its power comes from how it naturally evokes a reflective experience. These memorials are not commissioned, but are real locations that become imbued with ordinary memories of these artists' lives- where they once sat, stood, and thought about their music. Because the space is turned into a memorial by the hands of the people, they are often in these more ubiquitous locations, requiring the knowledge of the fan to

find the place where this artist once spent time at, thus providing a more personal and private memorial.

The mystique is also tied to the abrupt ending of something people love. In the case of both Smith and Cobain, they both committed suicide. Sudden deaths, especially those related to suicide, lack a sense of closure and unresolved feelings. Part of the strength of these “accidental memorials” comes from the people's unresolved feelings. Longing for a sense of closure, they go to these places that the artists once spent time at. Once finding these spaces, the site becomes an additional place for fans to experience community. Although the people’s connection to the musician may be different, the visitors' can see the messages and gifts left by others who share a deep love and sadness. This provides a sense of comfort, a shared desire to heal and process the complexity of grief. Becoming a site to provide personal catharsis and find community.

What does it mean when individuals can find meaning at a memorial without the need of a visual representation of the person/event they are mourning? In both the case of Elliott Smith and Kurt Cobain, their formal memorials do not generate the same sense of community and interaction as the memorials at locations where they once spent time in. In another memorial to Cobain, a park was dedicated to him in his hometown, Aberdeen, Seattle. It features a cement guitar and a sign with his face, reading lyrics of his song “Something in the Way”. The lyrics mention “Young Street Bridge" the supposed bridge that Cobain would sleep beneath and spend time with his friends. This bridge lies directly across from this park. At this memorial, few markings are left by the public, but underneath the bridge, a plethora of colorful graffiti and messages are left to Cobain. Becoming a hidden home for these personal markings. The statue of the guitar, placed in plenair, does not receive equivalent attention. As people have to trek to the

underpass, its more secretive nature invites people to be creative themselves, becoming an outlet for emotion. This continued interaction of visitors at site, transforms the space into a vibrant memorial.

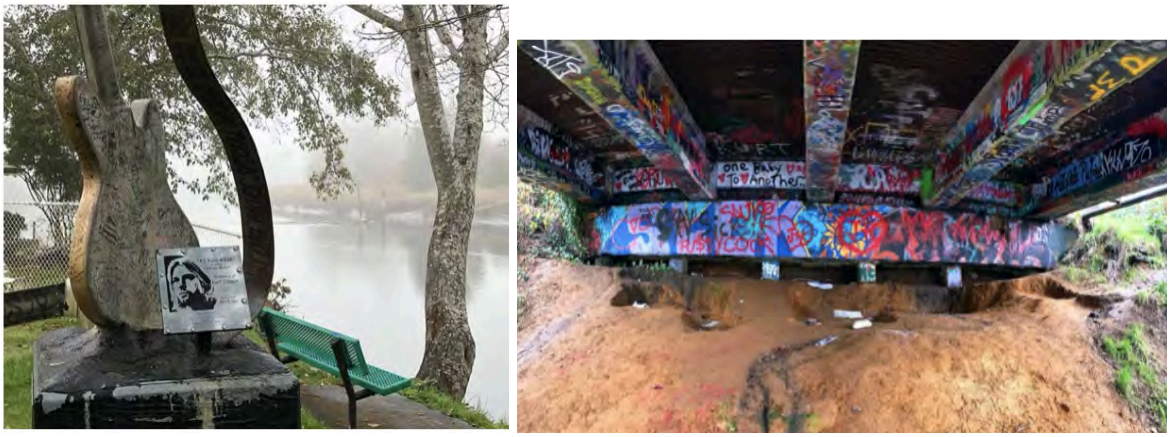

Fig. 7
Kurt Cobain Memorial Statue vs Informal Memorial Beneath the Bridge, Aberdeen, SA 2020
Reddit © Photographer Unknown

Take Amy Winehouse, another gifted musician who died from alcohol abuse at 27. There is a statue dedicated to her in Stables Market in Camden Town, in north London. The statue pictures her standing there with one knee slightly bent, a hand on her hip, and her classic raised hairstyle. This memorial just stands in the center of the outdoor market and does not generate much interaction between visitors and fans. It's a rather fixed memorial, with less capacity to evoke emotion. There is no intimate memory or relationship between Winehouse's memory/presence and the statue, making the site less effective to garner an evocative reaction. Instead, it was outside her apartment, the location in which she was found dead, where people first gathered delivering very similar gifts and messages to what was left for Elliott: flowers, letters, photographs, and empty bottles of alcohol. Although this site did not prove to last very

actively, it touches on the same sentiment of the potency of a site imbued with a living memory providing the most catharsis.

Fig. 8
Amy Winehouse Memorial Statue vs Outside her Home, Seattle 2020
Tripadvisor © Photographer Unknown

But for the sites that do last, their presence is often shaped by how they are portrayed and circulated through media channels. Once the spot becomes established for the inside community, the site becomes more well-known through its circulation on social media. As "social media has become part of how our bodies in physical space interact with others in virtual space complicates and analysis of what we understand "site" to be."[23] Whereas before social media, these sites may only have passed through word of mouth, as a more insider experience, it is now more accessible. Mechtild Widrich asks "Is there a way to figure out how the ever expanding access of a site plays into actual access to the public sphere?" [24] Through the music journals, blogs, reddit threads, travel guides, the memorial sites become public spaces, operating less discreetly than

[23] Widrich, *Monumental Cares*. 15
[24] Widrich, *Monumental Cares*. 15

before. The sites become more intertwined with the narrative of the person as one can now read about the sites in relation to their history, and also as a way to find their memorial. As time passes, and these sites become more well known, the authentic nature that comes from its "accidental qualities" begins to fade for some. Transitioning into more of a tourist destination- and a more official "memorial."

How and why do people become connected? Why do people want to become a part of these sites? People connect to these sites through their connection with the music and musicians. The catharsis that the musical experience provides for individuals adds to the mysticism of the site. The reflective moments of self-discovery and understanding evoked through the lyrics become associated with these locations. The power they hold is not only about this relation to death but also the personal attachment that people have with the music. These are not memories of the artist but of one's self. This experience can be shared among others, but the emotions and memories that are evoked cannot be put into words. The specific message, "YOU KNEW ME, I KNOW," has stood out in many of the photographs on the wall, referring to how Smith's lyrics spoke deeply to others. So much so that it felt as if Elliott understood these people's challenges. *You know my challenges; your challenges are my challenges.* These messages left on the wall are expressions of sympathy, and the rewriting of this sympathy, even after it is erased, reinforces these sites' connection to the artists and the greater community of those impacted by similar struggles.

Part of it is also connected to gatekeeping and ownership of music. There is an appeal of being in the know within niche music communities. (Although both Cobain, Winehouse, evan Smith are popular artists today, they originated from a selective music scene.) Translating into

how these sites operate, tt is not the commissioned and well-known monument that attracts the true fans, but rather the discreet, underground sites. Places where people who care about it know about it, and if you are looking for it, once you search, it's there. This is the same for how the musical community operates; people are hesitant to just share music they like and enjoy because it is attached to something greater than the physical song. There is often a lot of ownership and protectiveness rooting from the fear of others who are not actually connected to the culture the music is grounded in. These noncommissioned memorials function similarly for the fans. They do not have plaques or visual markers, partly because it was never designed to mean anything more, but this also reestablishes their anonymous character. People who are "true" fans are drawn to participate and see this site. The circulation of these sites through social media has made it less easy for these sites to remain hidden, and through time, has changed their relationship to the public; it is a destination for some rather than a place of remembrance.

Graves often turn into memorials which perform similar cathartic responses. For example, the grave of Jim Morrison, the lead singer-songwriter of The Doors, evokes comparable reactions from his Fans. Interestingly, he doesn't have an "accidental" site like Cobain or Elliott. Instead, the messages, flowers, and bottles of alcohol from various fans and tourists are left at his Grave. But the easily accessible, and level of fame which Morrison had, has almost affected the intimacy of the site. It is widely known, open to anyone, and has become a major tourist destination. Why does his grave function in this manner? Why doesn't he have an unofficial memorial? Maybe it is that the fans are making an unofficial memorial out of an official memorial form. How differently does this make people who visit feel? These questions

can also be extended to the apparent lack of similar memorial sites for female artists and others outside the music realm.

The public's continual interaction with the wall and bench maintains the site's function as a site of remembrance. In Weiners understanding of inalienability, the "energy and intensity expended in efforts to transmute or transcend the effects of deterioration and degeneration and/or to foster the conditions of growth and regeneration" There for, attention "to regenerating or recreating the past is neither random nor inconsequential." [25] The public's resistance to the wall changing and their continued interaction of writing is part of what reinforces the wall's connection to Smith. Despite efforts to commercialize and transform the Elliott Wall, the space retains it's inalienable link to Smith due to the peoples connection with him. The building has been continuously repainted, covering up the past messages, used for advertisements, and multiple restaurants have moved in. In 2017, a portion of the building was sold to a new bar, Bar Los Angeles. This caused major reaction and anxiety from fans who did not want to lose this intimate site. The reactions of fans on Reddit reflect these emotions as people wrote

> Fans in the area should contact the owners about how important the wall is and maybe they will keep the art up.[26]

That bar didn't change the face of the mural much, but today a new bar, Drugstore Cowboy, has opened, cutting the wall in half. Although it is much smaller now, and the design looks less clearly like a stave, the wall is still being maintained, and new messages continue to be

[25] "Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While Giving - Kindle Edition by Weiner, Annette B.. Politics & Social Science" 10-11
[26] Camus, Alyson. "Bar Angeles to Open November 1st at Elliott Smith's Memorial Wall." *Rock NYC*, 11 Aug. 2016.

left. If it weren't for the emotional significance that this site holds for fans, the building, like most of Silverlake, would have turned into a new piece of real estate.

Fig. 9
Ninth Anniversary of His Death, Oct. 2012
Under the Radar Mag © The Punk Rock

Fig. 10
The Elliot Wall July 4, Nov. 2022
Flickr © Photographer Unknown

Fig. 11
The Elliot Wall Today, Nov 2023
Photographed by Author

Inalienable objects, particularly those tied to remembrance, are “representations of how social identities are reconstituted through time.” These “Accidental Memorials” act as an

exchange arena where different memories, emotions, and impressions are projected and mediated. As these sites "move [through] time and space, [they] become the carriers of more information, [holding] greater authority than other kinds of things." Analyzing the formation of the site's identity into a memorial, uncovers the layered meanings intertwined with certain memorial sites. The notion of inalienability aids in understanding how naturally emerged memorials become and continue to exist in an authentic and vital manner. [27]Part of the powerful inalienable connection that memory attaches to sites occurs in places that do not directly depict a material representation of a person, where people can instead project their memory onto them. In the case of Winehouse, her memorial statue is not empty enough to project an intimate memory. People need sites that are empty enough to become a relational device. In the observance of the Elliott Wall and Benches of Kurt Cobain, the bodies are a little out of the way, requiring an effort to find. Once people arrive, they encounter a community from observing the previous interactions of visitors at the site. They can then share this on social media, which feeds into other sites.

[27] "Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While Giving - by Weiner, Annette B" 10-11

CHAPTER 2: The Serial Memorial

Driving through Greece, the roadsides are marked with miniature churches that sit upon posts. The more one drives, the more one sees. Known as *kandylakia* in Greek, these shrines mark sites of death or near-death incidents, becoming material expressions of emotions of sorrow, gratuity, and pain that come from incomprehensible events. Spotting a Kandylaki along the road can evoke a momentary flash of spiritual reflection, whether to mourn a life lost, contemplate road safety, or appreciate one's own existence. While primarily associated with dangers related to driving, the practice of erecting these shrines dates back to a time when communities dedicated the impromptu shrines to particular saints. Over time, their messages have changed with the evolution of material culture, intertwining a personal tragedy with broader cultural traditions. Each *kandylaki* is unique, reflecting the personalization of the community that built it. Peering into a shrine, a few candles, surrounded by miniature items and a small image of a saint are usually found. Outside the structure, flowers and gifts often adorn the space. The local community takes care of the sites, typically lighting the candles within them each night.

Similar practices to the Greek tradition of kandylakia can be found in various countries, where roadside memorials emerge at the sites of tragic events. While the origins of these practices may differ across cultures, they all share a common purpose: to serve as responses to sudden tragedies, offering both a means of coping and a symbol of awareness to others who pass them. This repetition of the memorial form hints at something miraculous and beneficial about its widespread adoption and continuation in different cultural contexts.

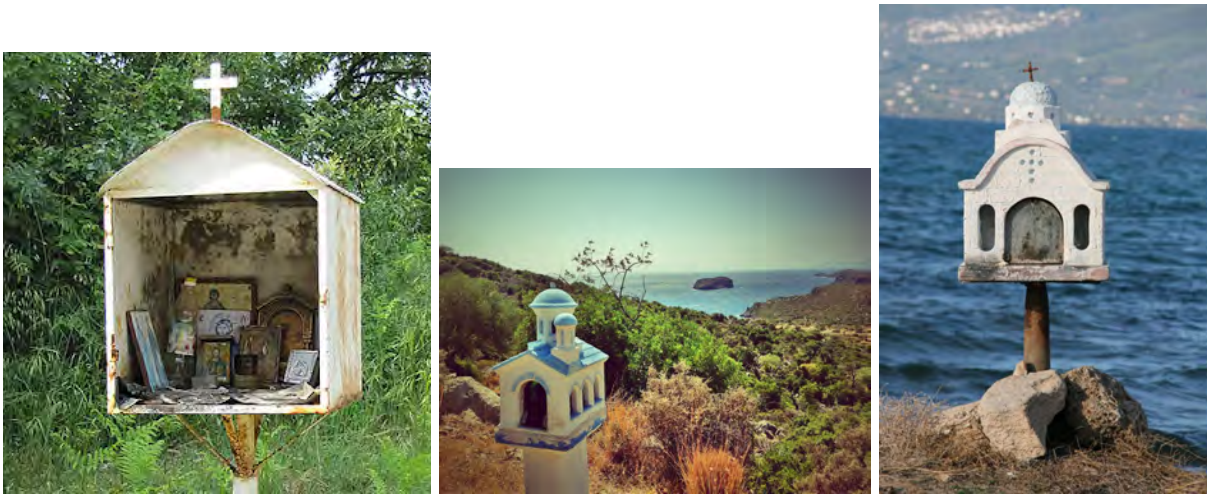

Fig. 12
Greek Roadside Shrines in Olympiada,
Courtesy of My Favorite Planet, © David John.

This chapter examines the idea of "serial memorials", a pattern of memorialization that emerges from grassroots organizing and operates through its repeated appearances. Serial memorials proliferate and transcend geographical boundaries. Similar to Chapter one, a key feature of the memorial is the ground up nature they emerge from, becoming sites that address suffering and death. They commemorate events possessing a certain fragility, a danger of fading from public consciousness. The repetitive appearance of the memorial counteracts that, providing a platform to speak for an unheard community or an unacknowledged event. By claiming public space for these events, the memorials become recognizable symbols of activism.

This chapter will focus on the Ghost Bike and the Comfort Women Memorial, two archetypal examples of serial memorials. The Comfort Women Memorial commemorates women of diverse ethnicities, predominantly Korean, who were forced into sexual slavery by the Japanese Military during World War II, an event frequently denied or minimized by the government. Ghost Bike Memorials are erected in honor of cyclists who've been killed in traffic

accidents. Although they address very different kinds of subject matter, and employ different modes of production, they share a particular urgency which motivates these sites' spontaneous and dispersed emergence, and create a form of a public phenomena. How do certain memorial practices proliferate? How do they become serial memorials? What do they provide for those who build them and those who view them? How do we recognize a serial monument as a serial monument?

The Ghost Bike

An old, used, and freshly painted white bike stands on the corner of a road, chained to a metal pole. Its haunting presence slouches against the post that holds it, as it acts to mark the lost life of a biker. The bike's condition isn't important, its purpose is symbolic and not functional. Around the bike's frame a sign reads, A BIKER WAS STRUCK HERE, followed by a name and date of death. Sometimes, people will add a message to slow down and drive safely. Flowers and candles lay beneath. Innocent and evocative, the memorial provides a place for catharsis and also acts as a testimony to the need for greater safety precautions on the road. The memorial reflects an attempt of a community to grasp the irreconcilability of sudden death and sort out the frustration of the dire need for more walkable and bikeable roads. Its solemn presence is comfortless; one can feel both the weight of the life of the cyclist and the emotions of the mourners.

The first Ghost Bike appeared in St Louis, Missouri, in 2003, after a local bike shop owner, Patrick Van Dur Turin, witnessed a horrific accident. Not knowing what to do with his shock, he built a memorial out of an old bike: smashing it, painting it white, hanging a sign around the neck that read "CYCLIST STRUCK HERE.", and placing it at the site of the

incident. Van Dur Turin originally called this white bike “Broken Bikes, Broken Lives.” with no intention of it becoming a model for grassroots organizing across the globe. It wasn’t until Eric Boer replicated this practice in Pittsburgh and used the term “ghost bike” that the movement launched. After being struck by a car himself, Boer marked the spot he’d been hit with a white bike. In hopes of sending a message to both the city and the driver who hit him, Boer repeated this process, placing multiple versions of the bikes at crash sites throughout the city. Thus sparking public curiosity and generating media attention/awareness. The singular appearance of a bike wouldn’t make a difference, but by turning the bike into a serial event, they couldn’t be ignored. The serial appearance of the bike became a way for the Boer to register the voices of the cyclist community. If the monument is a way for the governments to mark something, serial memorials serve as a way for people to assert visibility and demand recognition from the government.

The initial spread of ghost bikes established a tangible method that the public could adopt to promote road safety and show solidarity with the cyclist community. After the fatal death of Liz Padilla, Visual Resistance, a group of activists in NYC, then employed this same practice. Building both the first ghost bike in NYC and establishing a website, ghostbike.org for these memorials. The creation of an official platform centralized guiding messages and brought a new validity to the Ghost Bikes movement. Then, in 2007, the Street Memorial Project was founded "to honor cyclists and pedestrians that have been killed on New York City's streets.[seeking to make a] compassionate and supportive community for survivors and friends of those lost and to initiate a change in culture that fosters mutual respect among all people who share the streets."[28]

[28] Joanna Todd, “The New York City Street Memorial Project,” n.d.

Passing a white bike on the street instills a sense of emptiness; even before a person understands the symbolism of the bike, the image presents a ghostly picture. If one is familiar with the meaning they act as generative objects, producing emotions of sympathy for the victim and their loved ones. One can imagine the tragedy and heartbreak that occurred at the site. Empathizing with this sudden loss then evokes a sense of unease, an eerie reminder of the fragility of life and the importance of road safety. But the sighting of a bike performs differently depending upon where the bike is placed, a heavily trafficked intersection, or a barren corner (a fast or slow location) and whether you are passing by vehicle or on foot. For drivers, passing a white bike causes an increased awareness of their surroundings. By foot, there is more time and space to take in the location and see the objects and gifts left behind- evidence of the victims' community. For a couple of years, a bike stood in front of the Williamsburg Bridge in NYC. Seeing this marker of death alongside the dense rush of traffic pushing against cyclists changes the way a driver thinks about the road, becoming an unsettling symbol of caution and a reminder of the reality of car-related deaths. Placed in a more desolate location, the lonesome bike becomes a ghostly object that symbolizes the unease of the lost life. Its stark presence alongside a road without traffic produces more uncomfort, the space of the surrounding area makes it more about the life of the biker who passed, generative of sympathy and reflection.

The catharsis of this site comes during the production of it- building a bike is a gathering touchstone for the community- whether that be the intimately related family or fellow groups of biker activists who share similar sentiments. Coming together with like-minded others, collecting parts, gathering mementos, and holding a ceremony produces a place where they can reconcile with the traumatic event and turn this energy into advocacy for change. Once placed on public

property, its function becomes about producing reactions, not about providing comfort, but performing something about the shocking uncomfort of dangerous road conditions.

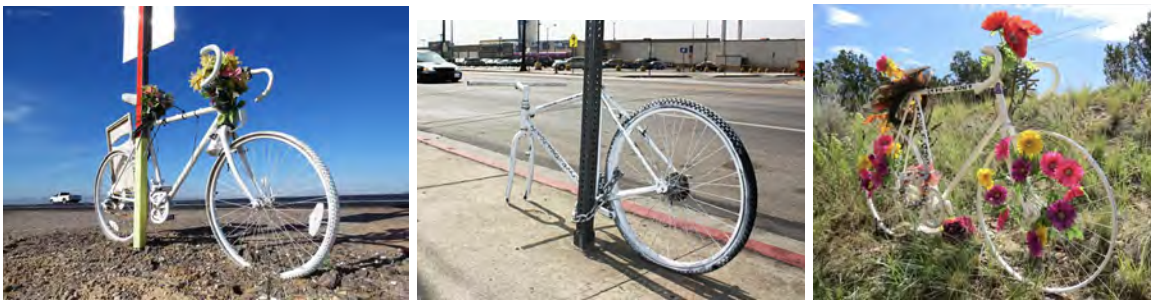

Fig. 13
Ghost Bikes in Arizona, California, and New Mexico
Courtesy of Bizarre-Ghostbikes.org, © Joe Oramn

To build one, it requires no exterior funding; only the collaboration of people, old bike parts, and white paint, the total cost of materials is estimated to be only 20-30 dollars. The use of ordinary material allows for it to be made easily, foundational to a grassroots movement. Even the website Ghostbikes.org provides a comprehensive 'How To' section that offers detailed instructions to construct a memorial oneself. This includes guidance on material acquisition, installation, plaque creation, maintenance, and advocacy to protect the site from removal, which is then documented on the internet to further participate in the global network. The fact that even the website enables/provides instructions for a common person to build a site, reflects the importance of their accessible creation. Part of the specialty of how a bike performs so evocatively comes from this collective nature, formed by the local community, from the bottom up, producing sites reflecting genuine public concerns. Thus the bikes build a sentiment that acts in opposition to a memorial that is commissioned or initiated by a governmental or institutional agency, one can feel the homemade and intimate interactions within the site.

The assemblage of serial memorials are a way by which a community (of bikers, etc) claim a space in public memory and in the city. Digital platforms play an important role in how both knowledge about the ghost bike spreads, but also how these similar communities of activists find and connect with one another. The widespread production of the Ghost Bike has not occurred through a singular entity, but rather the "ghost bike is locally autonomous with various other groups operating more or less independently of one another in major metropolitan areas" [29] The bikes become products of people attempting to register their demands and enforce a change in public policy. Often organized subsequent rituals follow, such as a memorial bike ride, where groups of people ride through the city, stopping at the locations of ghost bikes. Bringing more public awareness to the sites and to the cycling community. Although they commemorate the life of the individual who passed away, their connection to advocacy makes their existence more about the overarching community than the individual mourner.

Fig. 14
Preparing a Ghost Bike in Chicago, IL
Courtesy of Bike Lane Uprising, © Photographer Unknown

[29] Robert Thomas Dobler, "Ghost Bikes: Memorialization and Protest on City Streets," in *Grassroots Memorials*, ed. Peter Jan Margry and Cristina Sánchez-Carretero, 1st ed., The Politics of Memorializing Traumatic Death (Berghahn Books, 2011), 169–87, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qd4xs.11. 177

The bikes often face threats of removal. Heated debates surrounding who to blame, whether it is the biker not wearing a helmet or using proper lights, or the reckless driving of a car. Contemporary day society is very car-centric, often not sympathetic to the bikers' cause. People are quick to blame the cyclist for not adhering to traffic laws and disregard the truth of cyclists' vulnerability. Lack of visibility on this public safety topic, coupled with increasing rates of incidents, motivated the initial proliferation of these memorials in densely populated urban areas. Becoming angering symbols to some who are enraged by the increasing number of cyclists on the street, or resistant to "road diets", referring to the urban planning changes that would impede upon their driving experience. For example, in NYC the city planned to convert parking spots along Central Park West into bicycle lanes, which would eliminate 200 parking spots. This angered the residents of a nearby luxury apartment, eventually leading them to file a lawsuit in an attempt to block these lanes.[30] In Los Angeles, similar pushback occurred, where they "prompted a recall campaign against a City Council member who supported replacing a traffic lane in each direction with protected bike lanes along an unsafe high-speed corridor." [31]Although this recall failed, it reflects the controversial topic of car-bike road relations.

Nearly every time a Ghost Bike was published on a digital site, contentious debates surrounding who to blame would follow. Blog posts like these were common examples of the attitudes of some individuals:

> We should put a "Wear your helmet, or this might be you" by the Ghost Bikes. There are some blameless bike riders, but there are way too many bike riders who ride without lights or a helmet, wearing dark clothing at night, drunk, and who disobey traffic laws. Hopefully, the ghost bikes will disabuse them of the notion that wearing a cap or hoodie will protect their head if they collide with a car or object.

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[30] James Barron, "The People of Central Park West Want Their Parking Spaces (Sorry, Cyclists)," *The New York Times*, August 18, 2019, sec. New York, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/18/nyregion/cars-cyclists-bike-lanes-.html.

[31] Barron, "The People of Central Park West Want Their Parking Spaces (Sorry, Cyclists)." 7

And

> It just drives me crazy to beautify these people who were essentially victims of their own carelessness. They are not really memorials to the dead, like those crosses you see along the interstate, as much as self-serving efforts to portray the deceased cyclist—and by extension any cyclist—as a helpless victim, free of any responsibility.

The constant threat of removal generates more attention to themselves and their cause. Whether about the controversy or the mystic of the memorial, knowledge, and awareness of what they symbolize spreads each time an article, blog post, or picture is published. Social Media has played a key role in how the Ghost Bikes became a social phenomenon. As these bikes operate on the vernacular level, having virtual access speeds the process of others hearing about the memorials. The website itself, ghostbikes.org, maps the locations of appearances of grassroots ghost bikes and archives media coverage that has discussed the movement. Building a bike has become a common reaction to witnessing a bike incident. The memorial's international proliferation visualizes the cycling subculture's growth, reflecting a change in public consciousness and urgency to address safety concerns.

Fig. 15
Road Safety Messages Written on Ghost Bikes
Ghost Bike Memorial, Jan 12, 2007 © Paula Kirman

The ghost bikes are objects which become symbols imbued with memory and meaning. These objects are then strategically placed at sites of death, marking intersections, cross walks, and street corners, with their reminders, concerns, and remembrance. Differently from how the accidental memorial's site, of the last chapter, is imbued with the memory which is inseparable from the location, these memorials can appear in any location. It is their visual cues, the painted white body of a bike, chained to a public post, with a sign hung around its neck, that calls upon the sentiments. They are often in very ordinary locations, sites that would hold no importance, or much recognition if the bike had not been placed upon the corner. Nothing remarkable about the context of physical placement.

But the memorial's relationship to the site of death evokes a sentiment of reality, making it hard to avoid feeling the weight of the incident. Walking, driving, or biking by a bike and knowing that something tragic occurred in the very location, produces an internal moment of reflection, an eerie sense of disbelief and sadness. They appear at the sites of incidents where people feel there needs to be a statement made about urgency and awareness. Using the site of death visualizes the daily vulnerability that cyclists encounter. Regardless of who's at fault, death is death, serving as a powerful message and "converts the memorialization site into a rallying point for the cyclist subculture, transforming the emotional energy of mourning into a force of protest."[32] Their appearance in over 210 locations and 35 different cities is a reflection of the widespread need to address road safety.

Today, the website has become inactive, and sighting a bike along the road is much less common than ten years ago. A product of the awareness/visibility the ghost bikes have brought

[32] Dobler, "Ghost Bikes." 13

to the conversation around road culture, and the widespread changes made to public policy to include more safety precautions on the road. Most major cities have implemented new policies to both monitor road traffic and install more bike lanes. Take Pittsburgh for example, there had been no new bike lanes from 1982-2007; today, it is known to be one of the most bike-friendly cities. Before 2003, NYC had few proper lanes for bikes; now, there are over 650 miles of bike lanes [33], with plans to continue expanding and implementing new ones. As adjustments were made, and the cyclist community was heard, the need for erect ghost bikes has dwindled.

The Comfort Women

In the event of the Comfort Women, a series of installations and public memorials that commemorate the abuse of Korean women during World War II in Japanese internment camps. There is a certain fragility in the event of the Comfort Women, a danger of it falling off of public consciousness. The memorial attempts to prevent this, becoming a serial practice as a response of fervent attempts to silence the actions of the Japanese Military. Here we see a serial memorial that performs slightly differently than the Ghost Bike. The cathartic functions of the site come from its being, rather than its making. It uses a more formal process of creation, leading it to have a more permanent life than the Ghost Bike- calling less upon the suddenness of death, but using its presence to take a hold of space and insist on acknowledgement of a tragic event.

Made of bronze material, an innocent young girl sits upon a chair, with an empty one beside her. She gazes out towards the audience, dressed in a simple outfit, a traditional Korean dress. The statue is unassuming and simple. Her feet lay clenched upon her lap, her bare feet touching the ground by only the balls of the foot, and a bird is perched upon her shoulder. The

[33] "Bikes and Pedestrians," NYC Mayor's Office of Climate and Environmental Justice, October 4, 2022, https://climate.cityofnewyork.us/subtopics/bikes-and-pedestrians/.

gentle presence of the young girl invokes people to think about the lost childhoods of these women. Her sculpted bronze figure calls upon traditional modes of commemoration but rather than stand tall upon a pedestal like a monument, she sits in a chair low to the ground. Her placement across from the Japanese Embassy, stands in opposition to the site, taking a sort of power from it, and silently demanding recognition. Uses a conventional method of memorializing, redefines the function of a statue. Rather than the government marking something with it, here the grassroots community of activists and survivors employ an official mode to memorialize the Comfort Women. It reflects the attitude they want the public/government to respond with. Or perhaps the mode in which they need to use in order for the government to recognize them. The use of bronze material reflects the organized efforts to build the statue.

Fig. 16
Comfort Women Outside of Seoul Embassy
Courtesy of Borders of Memory, 2011 ©David Chapman

Initially planned to be a one time installation, the statue is known as Pyeonghwaui Sonyeosang in Korean and translated as “The Statue of a Girl for Peace”. It was first placed

outside of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul in 2011. Her presence is a symbol of peace in remembrance of the 200,000 women, of various ethnicities, mostly Korean, who were forced into sexwork the Japanese Military in military-run brothels. Only 12 survivors live today. testimonies of this trafficking were not released until l991, and they're not fully acknowledged/reckoned with as the Japanese government still refuses to apologize. The first Comfort Women project was funded by a South Korean Civic Group, to commemorate the 1,000th Wednesday Demonstration, a weekly protest that occurred across from the Japanese embassy in Seoul since 1992.[34]

Although the seemingly tranquil memorial was planned with peaceful intentions, it deeply angered Japan, generating immediate diplomatic tensions between the two countries- leading it to hold a new political significance. Kim Eun-sung, the creator of the first memorial, raises important questions about the reactions of the Japanese Government: "Which part of a statue of a girl is harming Japan? It's a statue with a message of peace and for the rights of women." [35] Why does Japan feel such a need to attack a memorial to women who have suffered? Stephanie Lee writes about this nature of the site stating that "the public memory of 'comfort women' has since become a globalized entity, leaving its original site to produce meanings of its own. The memory of trauma has formed a political organism as it unavoidably invokes post-colonial conflict in and beyond the Korean Peninsula."[36] Unlike recent attempts to remove statues that commemorate confederate, racist leaders, Japan's concerning attempt to remove

[34] Vicki Sung-yeon Kwon, "The Sonyŏsang Phenomenon: Nationalism and Feminism Surrounding the 'Comfort Women' Statue," *Korean Studies* 43 (2019): 6–39.
[35] Griffiths, Sol Han, James. "Why This Statue of a Young Girl Caused a Diplomatic Incident." CNN, February 6, 2017.
[36] THE FUNAMBULIST MAGAZINE. "Sites of Contention: Statue of Peace and Korean Comfort Women Redress Movement," December 16, 2019.

these statues of victims of their past crimes, reflects a lack of interest in engaging with their imperial colonial past.[37]

The memorial deeply angered Japan, its public appearance demands a formal apology to the women who were forcibly taken away and simultaneously exposed the country's attempts to leave this part of their history in silence. Japan initially called the memorial "extremely regrettable," and damaging to bilateral relations"[38], withdrawing the ambassador and canceling economic negotiations with South Korea. In an attempt to find resolution in 2015, Japan agreed to pay ¥1 billion[39] as a form of reparations, in return for the removal of the statue. This is roughly equivalent to 8.3 million US dollars, a very minimal payment for an object imbued with such memory and significance. This agreement "ignored more important responsibilities, such as educating young people or taking measures to prevent secondary harm to victims." [40] The decision was made without the inclusion of any survivors or acknowledgment of their needs. As a response, activists and artists protected the statue, preventing it from removal. Three weeks later, the Prime Minister Abe told the Japanese National Assembly, "There was no document found that the comfort women were forcibly taken away" [41] directly opposing the agreement the countries had made.

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[37] Seth Berkman, "The Fight Over Berlin's Comfort Woman Statue," July 18, 2022, https://www.thenation.com/article/world/comfort-women-japan-korea-germany/.
[38] David Shim, "Memorials' Politics: Exploring the Material Rhetoric of the Statue of Peace," *Memory Studies* 16, no. 4 (August 1, 2023): 663–76, https://doi.org/10.1177/17506980211024328. 664
[39] Kwon, "The Sonyŏsang Phenomenon."
[40]"A Guide to Understanding the History of the 'Comfort Women' Issue," United States Institute of Peace, accessed April 16, 2024, https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/09/guide-understanding-history-comfort-women-issue.
[41] Ibid

Fig. 17
Shanghai, China 2016
Courtesy of Wander Women Project
© WWP Team

Fig. 18
Berlin, Germany N/D
Courtesy of Geschichte der Gegenwart
© Photographer Unknown

Fig. 19
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 2022
Courtesy of Korean American Association
© Photographer Unknown

Fig. 20
Glendale, California 2013
Courtesy of FLICKR Creative Commons
© Melissa Wall

The backlash from this disagreement resulted in the installation of replicas in over 40 other locations worldwide, including the US, Canada, Germany, China, and South Korea. The Comfort Women Memorial became a symbol of solidarity and a means to educate about the trauma of this history.[42] Unlike the ghost bike, whose serial characteristics originated in

[42]"Shanghai Comfort Women Statue - WWP.", "'Comfort Woman' Statue Brings Embarrassment, Strife to Southern American City | JAPAN Forward."

grassroots organizing from the beginning, the Comfort Women memorial only became a serial memorial after an act of erasure. Each subsequent installation prompted Japan to attempt to block production or threaten removal through legal and diplomatic channels. After San Francisco built a memorial depicting a Filpina girl holding hands with Korean and Chinese girls, Osaka threatened to end sister city relationships between the two cities. Ironically, the efforts to interfere with the memorial's life only drew more attention to the cause.

Fig. 21
Comfort Women Memorial in San Francisco
Courtesy Getty Images © Justin Sullivan

Similar to the Ghost Bike Memorial, which gained visibility as media coverage of its controversy grew, the Comfort Women Memorials became both tools of education and symbols of aggression, bringing with them, the conversation and controversy to each location. The digital landscape plays a critical role in how information reaches the public, and the suggestive attitude they take from it. As audiences see and read about the topic on social media and in the news , these platforms became an additional site for which viewers would interact with the memorial. Widrich makes this very same point, discussing how audiences today "often operate at the intersection of material and virtual space, becoming audiences and at the same time producers of encounters with urban environments and history. This in turn, influences projects on the ground." [43] These ulterior, virtual, sites play an essential role in how the phenomena of serial memorials replicate.

The global network of Comfort Women Statue raises international awareness about organized sexual abuse during Korea's colonial occupation.[44] The Comfort Women Memorial does use an official process of production, requiring donations from foundations or private donors to build a statue of bronze. Their placement reflects the desires of the public who initiates a proposal for the statue, but within this desire comes a very intentional relationship between where the site is placed, and what the memorial communicates. Often, they are strategically put outside of Japanese Embassies to call upon Japan to acknowledge their crimes and honor the victims and survivors of this event. In 2017, replicas of the Comfort Women were installed within buses that passed by the Japanese Embassy. Inside the bus, audio recordings of survivors'

[43] Mechtild Widrich, *Monumental Cares: Sites of History and Contemporary Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2023).
[44] David Shim, "Memorials' Politics: Exploring the Material Rhetoric of the Statue of Peace," *Memory Studies* 16, no. 4 (August 1, 2023): 663–76, https://doi.org/10.1177/17506980211024328.

stories would play. The decision to place the statue along the lines that pass by the Japanese Embassy reflects the memorial's function to send a message to Japan. But the audio stories that would play reinstate the validity of these women's experience. Providing public visibility, and to bring these subjects into the conversation at a time when they were still considered "taboo."[45]

Fig. 22
Comfort Women Along the Bus Route In Seoul
Courtesy Getty Images © Jung Yeon-Je

Their emergence in each of these subsequent locations connects with the community that is building them. The memorial thus became a global diasporic object, often appearing in other Korean Communities in the US and abroad. In locations such as Berlin, where there is not a large Korean community, the memorial is placed in a park in the neighborhood of Moabit; Berliners feel strongly about the importance of the memorial as it has become a representation of the larger message about humans rights, wartime crimes, and survivors of sexual violence. Widrich points out that a common mode of "connecting such diverse audiences to historical violence is to emphasize parallels to people's personal experiences of, for example, ostracization or inequality."

[45] Shim, "Memorials' Politics."

[46] The memorial has become a symbol against all "patriarchal violence during wars and other conflicts, a memorial for all nations to stop this behavior—an apology, and therefore a memorial for peace." [47]

The symbolic design invites participation and draws empathy and invites interaction from the viewers. Most replicas feature an open chair aside from the girl, offering people to take a seat. Once sitting, participants become a part of the piece, transforming the statue from a sedentary bronze figure into a device of performativity. They can sit in solidarity, take a moment and reflect, and perhaps take a photograph of or with the piece. Some memorials feature three girls holding hands, with an open space for the viewer to join and close the circle, and an older woman looking over them to the side. By joining hands and closing the circle, they symbolically stand in solidarity with victims of sexual violence. Often, viewers bundle her in a blanket or leave a hat or scarf to keep her warm and protected and place flowers beneath her. Through their establishment in public space, they establish memory, providing a space where this almost forgotten history can be thought and spoken about. Where the ghost bike is a "comfortless memorial," this statue becomes an active location for communities together and for new passerbyers to become educated. It is not an eerie reminder but an innocent and evocative site.

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[46] Widrich, *Monumental Cares*. 66

[47] Seth Berkman, "The Fight Over Berlin's Comfort Woman Statue," July 18, 2022, https://www.thenation.com/article/world/comfort-women-japan-korea-germany/.

Fig. 23
Participation With The Memorial
Courtesy of Reuter © Kim Hong-Ji

The Comfort Women Memorial and Ghost Bikes have become symbols of political resistance and social action through their claim in public space. Although they commemorate and mark very different types of events, they serve as an example of how memorials can function today, becoming devices for grassroots activism in the centers of public space. As they proliferate, they establish a sense of solidarity among individuals and communities worldwide. Mapping the locations of their various sites brings visibility to the larger scale within which these somewhat intimate sites operate. The continuous additions to the map reflect the collective and conscious effort to not forget - to come together and produce a space that can combat neglect, provide catharsis, and promote social action. Their adaptive nature mirrors the changing needs of the public, responding to shifts in public consciousness and giving insight into the changing motivations behind contemporary mourning rituals.

CHAPTER 3: The Memorial Against the Monument

On the night of June 2nd, 2020, a projection of light shaded over the towering statue of Robert E. Lee in Richmond, Virginia, shined a large black and white image of George Floyd's face. He illuminated the statue, bringing to life the colors of the daytime protests. The vibrant graffiti, flowers, and markings glowed like a tapestry draped over a statue, revealing public feelings. Faintly, in the dark, the figure of Lee upon a horse stands upon the projection. The acronym "BLM" beams upon the horse's torso. Lee's haunting presence toppling above Floyd's face is not dissimilar to how the police officer, Dereke Chauvin, murdered Floyd- pinning him to the ground with his knee until he was unable to breath. As his face covered the pedestal, the light projection instantaneously monumentalized Floyd, who had become the central figure to these protests. While also simultaneously acting as a memorial to him and other Black individuals who have died as a result of police violence. The nights after the first projection, other faces of Black civil rights leaders and Black people killed by police publicly recounted "the centuries of pain and resilience of Black lives through the figures who fought and died for justice."[48] Each time a new face appeared, people could feel the pain of injustice. Recontextualizing the monument offered a space that could also provide a sense of empowerment. The projections exhibited a duality of vitality; radiating an array of political messages during the day and glowing with faces at night.

[48] "Projections at Lee Monument Offer Peace in Times of Violence."

Fig. 24
Light Projection Done by Dustin Klein Richmond, Va Jun. 10, 2020
Courtesy of Getty Images © John McDonell

As photographs of the projections spread through the internet, they became iconic and celebrated. They were a central feature of the 2020 photo-ops, found in the Atlantic, National Geographic, and New York Times, marking a pivotal moment in history by capturing the collective outrage and determination of a generation to confront and dismantle systemic racism. The individual photo of the projection upon the monument became the chosen photo to represent the year 2020 in National Geographic's most compelling photos of the 21st century. This visual intervention left an impact beyond what the monument's removal alone could achieve. It was a product of the moment, a fleeting reflection of the political battle, made into a lasting legacy through photographic documentation.

This instance of public takeover jump started a new continuing conversation around monuments and public memory. The public response to the death of George Floyd left the nation with striking visual protests, temporarily altering the historical landscape with condemnations of police violence and white supremacy. These interventions reclaimed spaces once dominated by symbols of white power, offering momentary places of solace and empowerment. In contrast to the memorials in previous chapters, which emerged either unintentionally, becoming cathartic spaces for specific communities, or intentionally as acts of activism, that form an international movement, this chapter discusses memorials that actively reshape public spaces through acts of defacement, decommissioning, and recontextualization. They not only challenge traditional notions of monumentality but also question the accuracy of commemoration embodied by 19th and 20th-century monuments, thereby contributing to a nationwide movement of reevaluation and reinterpretation.

The Stubbornness of Public Space

The public outcry to dismantle Robert E. Lee and other Confederate monuments in 2020 was not the first attempt. The issue of Confederate statues dotting the American landscape has been an ongoing debate for the past 70 years, with heightened attention in the last decade since the emergence of the Black Lives Matter campaign in 2013. These monuments hold a myth of a "public secret." The idea of a public secret, defined by Micheal Taussing, is "something that is generally known but cannot be articulated."[49] The underlying motivations behind the construction of Confederate monuments perpetuate a form of collective denial regarding the legacy of slavery and racism in the United States. Confederate monuments are not "innocent

[49] Taussig, "Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labor of the Negative." 5

vestiges of historic commemoration" but rather representations of a brutally violent and racist past, one that misrepresents the narrative of the Civil War to be a war about states' rights and not fighting to protect slavery.

After the Civil War, the nation came to a critical junction in defining its national identity, and public monuments were at the forefront of the crisis. This presented a difficult case for the South, as acknowledging slavery in public space would "[explode] the myth of a democratically unified people." To create a cohesive memory that portrayed little disruptions, the monuments needed to be disassociated from slavery. This urgency "dictated [a] strategy of depoliticization." Robert E. Lee became the chosen central figure to commemorate the efforts of the South. He seemed to be a "safer" option, as he was implicated in fewer narratives around slavery than the true political leader of the South, Jefferson Davis. Lee could symbolize glorious military strength and nationalism, framing the narrative around the honorary battles fought to protect states' rights and not on the efforts to protect slavery. These monumental efforts create a cohesive and "unproblematic" public memory - one that does not deal or reckon with unresolved issues surrounding the enslavement of Black individuals and their continued disenfranchisement and murder in the Jim Crow era, leaving these events unprocessed in the American public discourse[50]

The development of their "secret" began in the first steps of their production. Central to their rise in popularity was their claim to be a "genuine testimonial for the people's memory." The monument was supposed to be a governmentally commissioned object, but instead began from volunteer organizations; if they emerged from the hands of the people, they must reflect the public's values and needs. The public campaign to raise funds and generate support for the

[50] Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America, New Edition*, 2nd edition (Princeton (N. J.): Princeton University Press, 2018). 4

commissioning of a monument required the support of sponsors and was often connected to governmental agencies. So, in reality, the elite were merely constructing a monument under the guise of public consciousness - projecting a myth of cohesive popular memory.

Despite the public awareness of the fallacies projected by these monuments, their existence remained unaffected, preserving the monument's peculiar power to turn histories they portrayed into "kinds of natural fact" in the eyes of the public landscape. Transforming public space and the memory it bears presents a difficult task. There is a certain stubbornness to how monuments occupy space. They are not transient beings; no part of their existence is temporary. Instead, they were built with the intention to "last, unchanged, forever." Over time, people become attached to these symbols, associating them with their identity, allowing these physical objects to hold influence and presence in the imagination for too long, making them only more challenging to dismantle/detach memory from. These decisions reshaped how America could publicly perceive its past, particularly the Civil War, one where slavery and the experience of black people were excluded from the narrative, instead becoming a reflection of the values America holds closest to them.[51]

For example, the University of North Carolina's Silent Sam statue pictures a young soldier standing on top of a hill with a rifle pointed downwards, a symbol of remembrance for fallen soldiers. Staring ahead with a fixed gaze, dressed in a typical Confederate uniform, he attempts to emulate a sense of duty and honor. The statue was built as a memorial to all soldiers who answered the "call of duty" from 1861 to 1865. The irony is that the statue was built in 1913, 48 years after the end of the Civil War, in a period when Confederate monuments were

[51] Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves*. 4

erected in public space during white supremacy campaigns to disenfranchise African American Voters. While the monument may be presented as honoring Southern heritage or commemorating fallen soldiers, many were erected during the Jim Crow Era to instill ideals of racial hierarchy. He reflects white southerners' attempt to portray revisionist narratives of the war. Attempts to remove this statue began in 1960 during the civil rights movement. The monument was defended by supporters, preventing its removal until August 2018, after the resurgence of the BLM movement in 2017. The people took the issue into their own hands, and protestors toppled the statue, revealing and ending the symbol of white power on the campus.

Now, the monuments' permanency is being questioned, public space is being contested, and the voices once suppressed by these objects are coming forward. Today, the public is highly conscious of understanding the monument as a representational battleground. It is not "just a rhetorical space where people debated image and symbol, but ... .a real physical space where publics [gather] and define themselves at ceremonies and rallies." Unlike memorials described in earlier chapters, whose form and meaning come from their impermanence and movement, the goal of the monument in the late 19th and early 20th century was to "yield resolution and consensus, not to prolong the conflict."[52]

Agonistic Memorials

The death of George Floyd brought forth a movement of energy that the public and the governments could not return from. His death, a brutal result of police violence and racism, erupted a summer of protests, demonstrations, and nationwide outrage surrounding police brutality on racialized individuals. A revelation had come forth. The revisionist approaches

[52] Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves*. 4

which previously dominated public opinion were no longer a sufficient source of mediation. These revisionist attempts to simply add statues that portray Black civil rights leaders near the old monuments did not succeed in problematizing the Confederate monuments, ending up perpetuating harmful messages in public space. Confederate monuments survive off of the power that grows from the careful maintenance of the secret, resulting in the widespread movement of the public to take over, transform, and topple these monuments.[53]

If the government was not going to remove these from the landscape quickly, then acts of defacement could challenge their meanings, unleashing a surplus of energy that had been stored away. The collision of the efforts of white supremacist nationalists to further protect the statues with a newly reignited sense of urgency from the protestors created an inescapable confrontation with America's past. The moment these opinions forcefully entered public discourse, there became a struggle between the new and old spaces of public signification. Every opinion, supporting it or not supporting it, became a public position.

The people took the issue of public space into their own hands. As Taussig argues, public secrets won't lose their power unless they are transformed in a manner that does justice to the scale of the secret. At confederate sites across the country, spray painted messages reading "Black Lives Matter" "BLM" "STOP WHITE SUPREMACY" covered many monuments. But various different grassroots methods of transforming the public sphere also emerged; movements like the Kudzu Crochet project[54], the take over of public street painting, the unofficial renaming

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[53] Taussig, "Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labor of the Negative."

[54] A guerrilla knitting project utilizing over 30 knitters from the mid-Atlantic region to create an installation that covers Confederate monuments with knitted Kuduz, an invasive plant in the south that is known as "the vine that ate the South." "The Kudzu Project | Charlottesville | Guerrilla Knitting," website, accessed April 29, 2024, https://www.thekudzuproject.org.

of public parks[55], performance art, and so on. These interventions become agonistic memorials. According to the theory of agonism "conflict is not necessarily negative or harmful, but rather is a necessary and inevitable part of democratic politics." Chantal Mouffe discusses art's ability to open spaces of agonistic dialogue, where " the struggle to shape the social order becomes apparent: hegemony becomes visible not just as a given, but as the outcome of a struggle between opposed political forces."[56]

[55]After the Black Lives Matter demonstrations in June 2020, modifications were made to the traffic circle where the statue once stood. An unofficial sign now greets visitors with the message "Welcome to Beautiful Marcus-David Peters Circle, Liberated by the People MMXX," commemorating Marcus-David Peters, an African American resident of Richmond who was fatally shot by police in 2018 following an altercation where he threatened the officer. The space around was filled with plaques informing the public on Peters' story and significant events that have occurred since his passing.

[56] "Agonistic Interventions into Public Commemorative Art: An Innovative Form of Counter-Memorial Practice?," DisTerrMem, May 15, 2020, https://www.disterrmem.eu/blog/agonistic-interventions-into-public-commemorative-art.

Fig. 24
Photos of Defacement Upon Robert E. Lee, Richmond, Va Jun. 2020
Courtesy Refacing the Image © Michael Shaw

These memorials, the interventions in public space such as light projections and splattering of paint upon official monuments, challenge norms. While they do this, they provide

space for the public to see alternative futures, and bring new ideas and questions about the public sphere. These acts of defacement, which transform the monument into a people's memorial, become protest tools in times of tension. Becoming ways in which the public can challenge the dominant and hegemonic narratives. To Mouffe, a pluralism of ideas is necessary, different positions and opinions are central to how a society functions and operates, the "right to exist and to defend those ideas should never be called into question"[57]. The ability of the projections, and other tools of intervention to open a conversation led to the decommissioning of many of these confederate monuments.

The projection upon the statue of Robert E Lee provided a temporary veil over the monument, momentarily transforming its message, suspending the public sphere, and providing a moment to imagine alternative memories and futures for these spaces. The public pressure from these agonistic memorials contributed to removing three of the six monuments that lined Monument Ave in Richmond. The Governor issued a removal of the statue of Robert E Lee, but conservative groups challenged the dismantling, stagnating the process. Awaiting the judge's decision, more needed be done to disrupt and further affect the political environment. Richmond, the former capital of the Confederacy, became the central rallying point for the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020. After witnessing the tear gassing of protests on May 30th, Dustin Klein, the owner of Videometry, a light design company, projected an image of George Floyd onto the statue. Using a non-violent approach, a light projection upon the monument could "peacefully

[57] "Agonistic Interventions into Public Commemorative Art: An Innovative Form of Counter-Memorial Practice?," DisTerrMem, May 15, 2020, https://www.disterrmem.eu/blog/agonistic-interventions-into-public-commemorative-art.

amplify the protestor's message" through both "[defacing] and [refacing] the historical landscape."[58]

The agonistic memorial, by its very nature, has no claim to permanency, operating instead through its fleeting nature. Through brief moments of intervention, it momentarily suspends the public sphere, creating room for envisioning different futures and possibilities for the public space. The public outcry against the monuments opened a nationwide conversation about their existence. In response, light projection has emerged as a powerful tool for social activism. The technological advancements of the past decade made equipment more accessible and affordable for the public, becoming a grassroots method to recontextualize spaces. As the light projects upon the surface, it brings protest messages into the midst of the public domain- transforming the space in a refreshingly creative way. The large-scale projection "creates a kind of temporary venue to have these conversations." [59] Its transient nature, and ease of production allows for these messages to be placed anywhere, anytime, and avoid larger scale legal issues of permissibility. Collectives of people, communities, organizations, can then hire these companies to create a temporary visual campaign to disrupt public space.

The Illuminator, a collective that works with projection art, has staged various interventions in public space, altering "the street from a space of passive consumption and transit into a site of engagement, conflict, and dialogue..and [calling] attention to the many urgent crises that confront us, in support of the ongoing struggle for a more just, peaceful and sustainable world." [60] In 2015, After a group of activists, called the Illuminator, went to visit an illegally

[58] Dina Weinstein, "Shining a Light," richmondmagazine.com, June 10, 2020, https://richmondmagazine.com/api/content/2ebc1bbe-ab4e-11ea-9d6c-1244d5f7c7c6/.
[59] "About - Bellvisuals," https://bellvisuals.com/About.
[60] "About – The Illuminator," https://theilluminator.org/about/.

placed statue of Snowden in a Brooklyn Park. When arriving at the site, the statue, which had been placed there only the night before, had been removed. In response, this group quickly collaborated with one another and produced a visual projection of Snowden's face onto the empty pedestal of where he shortly lived. It functioned as a fast and ephemeral memorial, a momentary defacement, but one that does not physically affect the monument. In this case, it provided the way to restate something that had gone missing, and been taken away.

Change.org and the George Floyd Foundation continued to use light activism as a way to "[transform] spaces that were formerly occupied by racist symbols of America's dark Confederate past into a message of hope, solidarity and forward-thinking change." [61] A swarm of fireflies flutters together to create his shimmering gold face- a beautiful and bold image. Around his head, his name is written in with a graffiti style font, mimicking the murals in dedication to him that appeared throughout the country. Designed by Kaleida Hologram Co, it projects a twinkling image of the Face of 42- year old George Floyd. The hologram traveled through five states that the Freedom Riders visited in 1961, placed at statues that had yet to be removed or infront the empty pedestals. Re-Imbuing the space with memories of a population who had been "publicly forgotten." His brother reflected upon this experience "Honestly, it's beautiful. And it resembles him. And the energy that was out there last night from the local people — we all were excited. I'm smiling right now thinking about it."[62]

[61] "See George Floyd Hologram Light up Confederate Monument | CNN,", https://www.cnn.com/videos/us/2020/07/29/george-floyd-hologram-confederate-monuments-eg-orig.cnn.
[62] "See George Floyd Hologram Light up Confederate Monument | CNN."

Fig. 25
Traveling Light Hologram, Richmond, Va Jun. 2020
Courtesy of CNN © Photographer Unknown

The Cemetery of Monuments

These Confederate monuments stubbornly occupy space, becoming more difficult to dismantle/detach memory from as time passes. The Statue, standing 61 feet in the air, required decades of debates and sustained activism from the BLM movement mobilizing in waves from 2013 to its final removal in 2021. However, once removed, the monument's life does not end once it is dismantled; it holds the potential to constantly develop new public understandings and purposes, sustaining itself through these stages, "its erection, removal or modification." The decommissioning and suspension of these monuments' prior functions create an opportunity to think about what we can do so that we don't continue to erase history. This is why careful attention to the next phases of the memorial's life matters; the confederate monuments are relics of America's unprocessed trauma, and the decisions of where they go next carry a symbolic

weight for future generations. So what do we do with them? Should they disappear forever, go to a museum, be placed in a park, or even a cemetery?

The debate of where they go next is highly contested; the various parties, those in support or against the monument, struggle to reach a consensus. In Virgina, the city and state officials felt it was most correct to transfer these monuments into the hands of places that already deal with African American Heritage, donating the Richmond Robert E to the Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia; this organization has also agreed to take possession of all the other confederate memorials removed in Richmond, leaving the fate of the monument up to the organization. Some fragmented monuments were placed in the hands of private collectors, others were donated to museums, but many simply disappeared into storage- resting in old foundries or parking lots, until their future was determined.

Even the Charlottesville Robert E Lee, who was donated to The Jefferson School African American Heritage Center, sat in one of these lots for three years. Moving location twice for public security measures. But on October 21, 2023, the future of the monument had been decided. A plasma torch cut into the head of Lee. The fragmented bronze body that once stood upon a pedestal in Charlottesville, Virginia, dropped into the flames of a furnace. His face burned of green and purple flames, melting into a sludge of red metal beneath. The molten bronze of the monument would be repurposed into a new public artwork[63], symbolizing a new era, a reclamation of power and honor. The project's goal is to "transform it into a piece of art that the community can be proud of, and gather around and not feel excluded or intimidated."[64] To

[63] The current future of the Lees bronze is still undecided. Although it's known it will be turned into a public artwork, who the artist that will build that art work, and what it will be is still being decided. The statue of Robert E Lee weighed over 10,000 pounds, so the process of melting down the body is not a quick task.
[64] Elliott, "The Charlottesville Rally 5 Years Later."

Andrea Douglas, one of the project's two leaders, Swords into Plowshares who initiated the melting of Lee, watching this "[felt] like witnessing a public execution." [65]

Fig. 25
Photos of Robert E. Lee in the Furnace, Oct. 2023
Courtesy of The Washington Post © Eze Amos

[65] Thompson, "Opinion | The Most Controversial Statue in America Surrenders to the Furnace."

For the case of Lee, the leaders of the project felt it was necessary to do justice to the way in which this monument's life came to a close, deciding to melt the body and create a new piece of work with "symbolic resonance." If the "monument disappears without a ceremony to mark why it is coming down, a community has no chance to recognize that it has itself changed."[66] Although the melting of the body had to be completed in secrecy, the knowledge, and the display of the new piece of work will be public, sending a message of hope and redemption to the public. But the story of Charlottesville's Lee is not the case for every decommissioned monument; for many, these foundries have become long term living options for the monuments. Will they be forgotten? Or will new futures continue to be imagined?

These transitional storage spaces are semi-permanent places of rest for the monuments caught in legal limbo, becoming defunct memorials to past public values. An article by The Guardian refers to these lots as "monument graveyards," keeping their location undisclosed for public safety measures. The symbols of the unprocessed and under-discussed events of American history lose their potential restorative function when merely removed and blocked from public viewing. Perhaps the "graveyards" present an opportunity to become a different kind of memorial. If opened publicly, the cemetery of the decommissioned memorial could become an restorative tool for people to process the past. A memorial from which the public can learn, seeing not only the evidence of the violent past but the power the people had to eventually overtake these sites and remove them from public property. This memorial is not about bonding with others, projecting a memory, or employing a speech act but about learning and reflecting.

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[66] Erin Thompson, "Opinion | The Most Controversial Statue in America Surrenders to the Furnace," *The New York Times*, October 27, 2023, sec. Opinion, https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/27/opinion/robert-e-lee-confederate-statues.html.

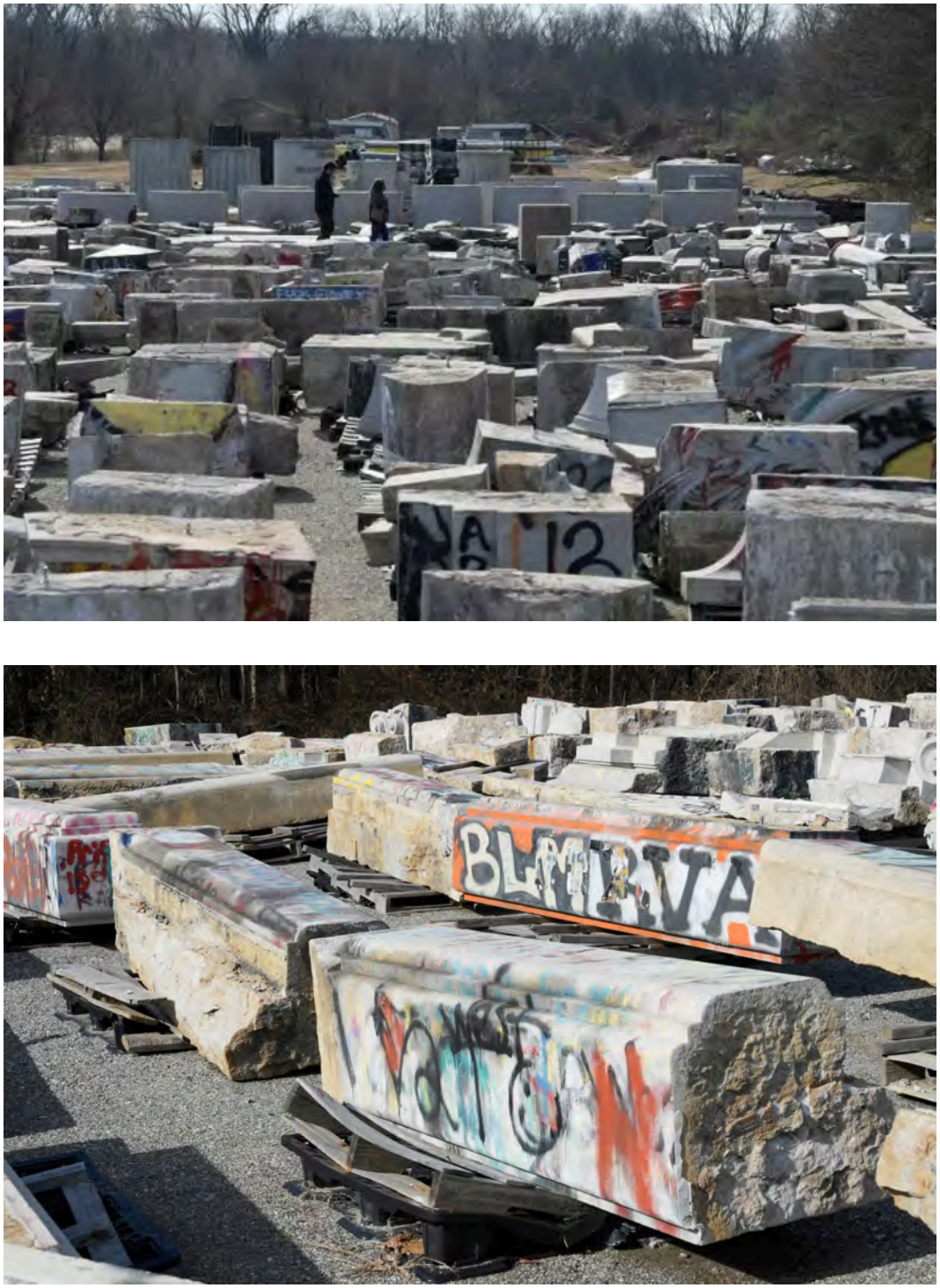

Fig. 26
Monument Graveyard Undisclosed Location,
Courtesy of The Guardian © Lenin Nolly

Fig. 27
Statue Being Removed from Charlottesville, Va July 10, 2021
Courtesy of Reuters © Evelyn Hockstien

Fig. 28
Cheering after Removal in Richmond, Va Sep. 2021
Courtesy of The New York Times © Michael A, McCoy

Closing Episode

In the continued effort to confront the complexities of our shared past and present, it's important to remember who gives meaning to these public spaces, and then influence they can hold in shaping public discourse. Public space tends to struggle with inconvenient memories. The memorialization process often provides a means for people to build solidarity and find some catharsis in their grief. They are people-powered; they can be intimate and hidden, challenge and demand, or deface and disrupt. The collective efforts of people to establish places of memory have become tangible methods to express the public's needs and desires; their gathering, disrupting, and debating at the memorials establish a space in the public sphere for the people's voices.

At the Intersection of George Floyd's death, renamed today as the 'George Floyd Square,' out front of the corner store, Cup Foods, laid a mountain of flowers and many protest signs, art pieces, teddy bears, and other belongings filled the space. These offerings continued to be replenished, a sign of the people's unrelinquishing perseverance to fight for recognition of the history of racial injustice in the city. To keep the fire in the fight for justice, which Floyd's death sparked alive, the George Floyd Memorial Project initiated a movement to collect these offerings and maintain the site. "Memorial Caretakers" are hired to look after the site and clean and preserve the square, assuring Floyd's lasting memory in public space. By recording these objects, the collectors attempt to "challenge injustice and preserve history."[67] As these temporary offerings now live in digital archives and appear in temporary exhibitions, they create a lasting

[67] "George Floyd Global Memorial." Accessed May 1, 2024. https://georgefloydglobalmemorial.org/.

memory of the movement, more permanent archival documentation for future generations to look back upon.

Fig. 29
The George Floyd Memorial Square Minneapolis, MN June 2020
Courtesy of the George Floyd & Anti-Racist Street Art database © Heather Shirey

Today, the focus of memory in publicly funded memorials reflects a "cultural shift toward public feeling as a source of knowledge." The emphasis on felt experiences is thought to create insightful spaces of mourning, challenge ideas of a progressive national narrative, and prompt questions about how to remember shameful histories. Memorials such as Maya Lin's Vietnam Memorial and The National Memorial for Peace and Justice employ minimalist aesthetics that allow for an ambiguity of meaning, becoming "blank slates onto which [the public can] project [their] deepest commonly held feelings." But their imposing presence instills a certain stiffness in their standing. The actual memorialization event occurs when the public interacts at the site. The Vietnam Memorial, in particular, has become a very active site where people take etchings of names, leave gifts, and interact with the architecture. The moment the public leaves flowers,

letters, rings, jewelry, baseball gloves, candles, photographs, and clothing, they create the memorial. The objects brought carry memories, sentiment, and reflections of public feelings. As they are placed, they imbue the site with these attachments, bringing it to life. People can leave their own mementos or see what others have left behind. [68] Like the Floyd Memorial Project, the National Parks services document the items left behind. They created an online database with photographed items accessible to the public and produced exhibitions with these offerings in the museum. The public's responses produce the felt memorial, and preserving their markings reinstates how the people give power and meaning to the memorial.

[68] Sturken, *Tangled Memories*. 50

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