

Digital Memorialization: Collective Memory, Tragedy, and Participatory Spaces

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Abstract

Throughout American history, memorials have played a key role in shaping collective memory and propagating particular beliefs and conceptions of public tragedy. With the rise of an online participatory culture, collective memory can be shaped by a plurality of voices, rather than by those with powerful positions in government and other large organizations, which typically control the process of memorialization. Social media connects communities through technology and has allowed the public to create spaces for mourning and memorialization without the input of official culture. The digital memorials that arise out of media environments contribute to and change the collective memory of American public tragedy. This study centers around three forms of digital memorials: video memorials, mourning on social networking sites, and memorials in virtual worlds. Through analysis of specific digital memorial sites, commentary from digital memorial media producers and a historical analysis of traditional memorial sites and spontaneous shrine sites this thesis examines how these memorials function as activist media not only in relation to issues surrounding public tragedy, but also by shaping collective memory.

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Preface

In front of the courthouse in Shreveport, LA sits a tall stone monument with a metal fence around the base. Atop a pillar is a soldier holding a rifle, and around the base of this pillar are the bust of four icons of the American Civil War:

Confederate Generals Robert E. Lee, Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson, Pierre G.T.

Beauregard and Henry Watkins Allen. The

monument serves as a memorial to “the soldiers and sailors of Caddo Parish who

served...in the service of the South.” (Brock, 2005, p. 37) The inscription on the pillar states “Lest We Forget” speaks to the strong sentiment many Southerners felt toward the Confederacy, particularly in Shreveport, which was briefly the Confederate capital.

Erected in 1905, the memorial reflects an old way of thinking about the Civil War, and its placement in front of the courthouse is an unusual juxtaposition for a city where over half the population identifies as Black or African American (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006).

The Confederate Memorial represents the power of memorialization in representing old ways of thinking over long spans of time. While at one time having a



constant reminder of the Confederacy was useful for citizens of Shreveport, many feel that the memorial represents an out-dated, racist way of thinking and that its placement in front of the courthouse —where justice is served— is particularly unfortunate. The memorial does not reflect the changing views and beliefs inscribed in collective memory through other methods by successive generations. Local community activists Dan Garner and Ron Hardy note that the memorial is to “that era [which] represented no freedom and democracy for a certain group of people”. (RonHardy, 2006)

Other recent memorials to key events in American history do allow the public to contribute to the collective memory of public tragedy. Maya Lin's design for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was hotly contested by veterans, government officials and citizens and its opponents viewed its abstract qualities as a “black scar” of shame. (Bodnar, 1992) The original design features a two low, black, reflective granite walls built into a hill. Inscribed on the wall are the names soldiers who died or went missing in the war and many visitors make rubbings of soldiers names home to take home. They also leave objects at the Wall ranging from dog tags to American flags and more unique, personal items such as letters to soldiers and aftershave. This response was so great that the items are archived by the National Parks Service. It is perhaps because of its simple, expressive design that the public felt the need to bring items to the Wall and inscribe their own meanings onto the Wall. The memorial was also shaped after its erection by three additions: an American flag, a plaque to those who died after the war, a representational sculpture entitled *The Three Serviceman*, and another sculpture dedicated to the women who served in the Vietnam War. The Wall changed over the years and was reflexive to

the needs of a changing society. Visitors inscribed a democratic meaning to the memorial by bringing objects to the Wall, which has since become a popular practice at memorial sites.

An example of the influence the Vietnam Veterans Memorial has had on memorialization is the Oklahoma City Bombing memorial. The similarly abstract design features a reflective pool flanked by two large gates, symbolizing the time within which the bomb went off at the Alfred P. Murrah building. There are also rows of empty chairs representing the victims lost that day, a wall listing the names of survivors and many other symbolic components. Key to the memorial is the Memory Fence, which originated as a chain link fence that mourners flocked to and pinned many items to its façade. This memorial incorporates the most powerful component to the power of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial: the ability for the public to continually shape the meaning of public tragedy by bringing objects to the Wall. By doing so, the public is allowed to shape the memorial over time by adding objects that reflect their current perception of the bombing, democratizing the collective memory of the event.

Leaving objects at memorial sites is not a new practice, as it has long been observed in cemeteries and at sites of tragedy. Even so, how the desire from the public to shape the memory of public tragedy through these objects translates to digital spaces is, as of yet, unexplored. The use of participatory spaces on the Internet has revealed the ability for digital spaces to dramatically democratize the memorialization process and also may shed light on new emerging rituals surrounding death. This thesis explores emerging practices for mourning public tragedy within social media that capitalizes on

the participatory spaces of the Internet. This analysis, for the sake of scope, looks at response to American public tragedy and how this public is utilizing the Internet to rally around these events.

Conceptual Foundation

Memorialization and the act of mourning have taken on new dimensions as society looks toward digital spaces to collectively mourn and commemorate events centered around death. Public tragedy, or rather events causing great suffering, destruction and distress, signifying great loss and misfortune for a specific community, is often difficult to memorialize within America because of citizens' complicated relationships with government, media, religion and other powerful institutions. As many scholars have noted, memorialization plays a vital role in shaping collective memory (Doss, 2002; Gillis, 1994; Foote, 2003; Ulmer, 2005). Memorials serve as spaces which allow certain ideas, beliefs and mourning standards to be passed on and constructed throughout time. Often, what gets memorialized determines the tragedies that will enter collective memory, how they will be perceived by future generations, and expose the power dynamics of who controls these views.

Digital environments bring into question institutional and private control of collective memory and open new avenues for society to participate in tragedy memorialization. With many of these digital spaces becoming incubators for the emerging “participatory culture” (where former consumers become part of the production of culture) the ability to question who contributes to collective memory through memorialization and what gets memorialized enters into a new potentially democratizing

space. While digital spaces such as blogs, social networking software (e.g., Facebook, Friendster, MySpace), and media sharing services (e.g., Flickr, YouTube) - where public participation is vital - have thrived and become successful at bringing attention to issues not covered by the mainstream media, it is unclear if digital memorialization can have the same power to bring attention to tragedy and challenge mainstream assumptions and beliefs surrounding that tragedy. Often, memorials can act as reminders of abuse or mismanagement of power, neglecting particular groups of people and call society to rectify or prevent tragedies in the future. Memorials that openly criticize or establish dialogue about these powers, however, are hard to find except when generated by the public and not large organizations. Can digital memorialization democratize the memorialization process? Will it shift the power of memorialization to a wider range of people?

One of the main reasons memorials have such a strong influence on collective memory is because of the way they physically transform our landscape and act as long lasting reminders of tragedy. While physical memorials often are made of sturdy materials and maintained by governments or well established social groups, digital memorials exist in ephemerality, easily lost by corrupt data or lack of interest over time. For example, a Hurricane Katrina memorial in Second Life erected as the site of a fundraiser was soon replaced by a library's virtual presence. While the site had been heavily documented as being the site of a fundraiser on various blogs and media outlets, the site disappeared after serving its purpose as a rallying point for action by the Second Life community. Milosun Czervik, who maintains a memorial to the victims of the 2007

Virginia Tech shootings has expressed concern in his blog about the permanence of the memorial. It appears that for many creators of digital memorials, this is an important issue.

As Erika Doss noted in her essay “Death, Art, and Memory in the Public Sphere: The Visual and Material Culture of Grief in Contemporary America,” “feelings of guilt and gratitude ... are ritualized, becoming collective and socially acceptable through offerings and participation: through gift-giving and grieving at the shrine sites” (2002, p. 70) Spontaneous shrine sites have played an important role in the way society mourns, serving as a space for people to bring objects, writings, and images to a tragedy site to begin the mourning process. Often these shrines will maintain their presence for as long as the memorial space exists and those who maintain these sites meticulously archive these objects in warehouses. Many times, as Maida Owens notes these shrines are left to decay if they are not connected to someone who can maintain them. Many digital memorials have a space for participation similar to these shrines; however, it is unclear how long they will be maintained or who is allowed to interact with these spaces. Can digital memorials be long lasting or do their temporary nature aid the mourning process?

Often memorial spaces are mediated by those who maintain that space or these spaces are closed off to these types of responses. Authoritative control is also ripe for investigation, as censorship is a major issue in non-virtual spaces, such as who should be memorialized at the Littleton, CO school shooting shrine. Often questions of religion, role in tragedy (victims vs. transgressors) and political agendas play an important role in who and what the public decides to memorialize in these spontaneous shrines. How can

mourning, a very private, solemn and personal experience be shared, created and carried out in spaces that are for the most part out of the control of users? How does participatory culture change/maintain issues of power, freedom of speech, and alternative views of tragedy?

Literature Review

I will approach digital memorialization through the lens of activist media and commons-based peer production and place this phenomena within a historical and social perspective of spontaneous shrines.

Memory and Identity

Collective memory¹ as defined by sociologist Maurice Halbwachs is a shared living memory, “a current of thought whose continuity is not at all artificial, for it retains from the past only what still lives or is capable of living in the consciousness of groups keeping the memory alive.” (quoted in Bodnar, 1992, p. 10) Collective memory and identity, which have been controlled in the past by powerful institutions through mechanism of law, religion, government, class and other societal phenomena, are issues central to memorialization. John R. Gillis (1994) points to a long tradition of aristocracy, the church and and monarchical states controlling insitutional and permanent sites of memory and observes that living memory was how ordinary people developed a history. The long lasting creation of history by powerful institutions often did not paint an unbiased point of view and many groups of people were disenfranchised (women, racial minorities, etc.). Here we see a fractured collective memory that could become more

1 I use the terms collective memory and public memory interchangeably throughout this thesis.

personal, democratic and representative with the input from a plurality of voices. Gillis (1994) concludes by stating that the “democratic society's” memories need to be publicized rather than privatized in order to understand the pasts of various groups of people in order to address what divides these groups and use this a method for unification. The implementation of the digital memorial has the potential to democratize the process of making alternative pasts known because of the networked environment within which it is deployed. The recent development of social media, or technologies that bring many people together to build shared meaning, provides fertile ground for developing a more democratic collective memory.

Émile Durkheim emphasizes the importance of large organizations on the production of a collective imagined past. He specifically looks to the formation of religion and rituals as creating a method of transmitting social memory and for bounding groups together. More importantly, a secular morality has emerged in modern times from a lack control by religious law and as a result has challenged traditional powers of memory construction. Barbara A. Misztal notes:

For the past to become a source of solidarity, the search for the truth about the past should be carried out under conditions of diversity and discourse, by relying not on ‘a single narrator, but rather on a plurality of contending voices speaking to one another’ (2003, 133-134)

Memorials in themselves are works of art dedicated to the memory of someone or an event and digital memorials are mechanically reproduced works in the sense that they are mediated by technologies. Walter Benjamin in his article “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” states that mechanically reproduced works are freed of

the aura, or an element of “distance, however close it may be” (1969, p. 243) in a sense, a type of holiness or sacredness. As a result, these artworks could be free of ritual and become more concerned with politics, empowering art-making to be concerned with social control. Whenever mechanically reproduced art is made with the intent of memorialization it is still closely associated with ritual. In this way, digital memorials are in a unique position to change ritual through manipulating social orders within rituals.

American national identity, as John Bodnar (1992) explains in *Remaking America* is deeply informed by a public memory shaped by official and vernacular culture.

Official culture is created by cultural leaders or authorities at all levels (e.g., government and religious leaders) and those in status quo (e.g., celebrities, those with high amounts of wealth). It also performs as the hegemonic standard of power. Most often, official culture promotes nationalistic, patriotic ideologies, portraying American in a positive light.

Vernacular culture are groups that share some sort of social bond (e.g. veterans, racial minorities, housewives etc.) and often their views of reality are derived from first-hand experience. This culture often conveys “what social reality feels like rather than what it should be like.” (1992, p. 14). Its existence threatens official culture's sanctity. The two cultures are always negotiating public memory; however, both usually promote some form of patriotism. Despite this continual negotiation, Bodnar questions the effectiveness of vernacular culture to combat official culture in order to create a more democratic public memory. In this examination, we will look closely at how vernacular expressions emerge and develop a collective memory that is informed by a plurality of views and

opinions and we will observe how this is negotiated among digital memorial producers and those who interact with these memorials.

Spontaneous Shrines and the Memorial Arts

What is commemorated or memorialized shapes how current society views history and thus informs collective memory. (Doss, 2002; Foote, 1994; Kammen, 1993) While public commemoration by powerful institutions of government, religion, etc. largely control collective memory "people can construct their own counter- memories from below, and that it is not always possible, particularly in democratic countries, to impose on people totally invented or fabricated traditions." (Misztal, 2003, p. 135) Both spontaneous shrines and digital memorials have the ability to form these counter-memories and publicize them to larger audiences. In this sense, collective memory of mass tragedy can be reshaped through these responses.

American historian Michael G. Kammen (1993) notes that the past is often reinterpreted by present societies, taking into account current needs and perceptions, which creates a constantly renegotiated collective memory. Key to this negotiation is the production of memorials that inscribe onto the landscape particular beliefs and views about public tragedy and their victims. Much like how Marshall McLuhan noted that "[w]e look at the present through a rear-view mirror. We march backwards into the future," (1967, p. 72) society constructs memorials not through a lens, which considers future views of public tragedy, but only through how the present society views the past.

Kenneth E. Foote (1994) places memorials into four categories of sanctification, designation, rectification and obliteration all of which take in to account the public's

reception of what happened at a site of public tragedy and how that site should be treated. The physical landscape is an important communicational resource for shaping collective memory. When objects and spaces modify the landscape, they embody what communities wish to sustain in history and memory. Also, as Foote notes, memorial spaces become rallying points for groups to congregate and address issues surrounding tragedy. For example, as Erika Doss (2002) outlines in her essay “Death, Art and Memory in the Public Sphere,” the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City not only became a rallying point for citizens to mourn and express frustration, but later a site for a government sanctioned memorial, a museum about the bombing and home to the Oklahoma City Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism. It is evident that memorials are successful when they motivate action to prevent tragedy from occurring again.

I utilize Foote's four categories of memorials to analyze and compare digital spaces, considering issues of physicality, persistence, administrative power and public/private space definitions. These dimensions, specifically when applied to memorials in virtual worlds, place the digital memorial in the tradition of spontaneous shrines, while bringing up new issues of control and power, which may limit the democratizing influence these spaces can have upon memory and identity.

Haney, Leimer and Lowery (1997) in their article “Spontaneous Memorialization: Violent Death and Emerging Mourning Ritual” view spontaneous shrines as a political act because of their effectiveness in calling for respect and attention after violent death. Many times, these shrines are expressions from the public searching for closure and

support, which allow visitors to reconcile the threat upon their assumed values and understanding of the world. Haney, et al. note that spontaneous shrines allow the public to reaffirm and negotiate values shared within a community.

Spontaneous shrines have also been sites of complicated authoritarian control. Erika Doss (2002) outlines the reactions of the public to fifteen crosses that were erected in Littleton, Colorado in response to the Columbine High School Shootings. There was intense debate about the two crosses meant to memorialize Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, the two students who committed the murders, resulting in a victim's father ripping both crosses out of the ground (Doss, 2002). While spontaneous shrines are built with the intention to memorialize the dead often what is to be memorialized is fiercely contested or complicated by politics. Harriet Senie notes that spontaneous shrines are often sites of protest, a “grass-roots public response to a private need, personal messages meant to be shared although not necessarily heard by the powers that be.” (2006, p. 51) This confusion of public and private space is an issue at the heart of online experiences, where one can have a private life and have an open, public experience simultaneously. Digital memorialization complicates personal expressions of mourning because expressions will reach a wide audience and may influence the perception of the tragedy or the organizational structures around it. Also, control of this space is much more instantaneous and more hidden than in spontaneous shrines. An administrator of a space could quietly delete a personal message or blatantly disallow particular kinds of interaction. These are issues that trouble the democratizing power of these spaces, but also may enable a “healthy” healing for mourners.

One of the first sanctioned spontaneous shrine accepted and maintained by a larger organization is the items left at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. The memorial, designed by Maya Lin who at the time was a young architecture student, has been called a counter-memorial for its simplistic expression of grief and emphasis on the absence created by the death of the soldiers. Almost immediately, people began bringing items to the wall that had a overt political expression, personal connection to a soldier, that spoke of patriotism or community, shared experiences of the war, or that created connections between the living and the dead (Hass, 1998, p. 95-102). These items are gathered by National Parks rangers then archived by the Museum of Archaeological Regional Storage Facility (MARS). This is one of the few spontaneous shrines that exists in an archived format, as most are left to decay and eventually disappear or are replaced with permanent memorials. (Senie, 2006; Owens, 2006) Issues of permanence are also prominent in digital memorials as limited storage space and the ephemeral nature of digital media work against long term existence.

Experiences of Mourning

Mourning and death in the western world for much of the past century has been largely a private experience, regulated to hospitals, homes and funeral parlors. (Doss, 2002) Recently public tragedy has moved this experience into the public sphere, often complicating the process of mourning and causing new rituals to emerge.

Nissan Rubin (1990) in his examination of the American funeral and the mourning practices of the kibbutz (a collective community in Israel) notes that social networks experience mourning rituals as processes of segregation and aggregation.

While mourners may seek out private ways to mourn, they also reach out to their immediate social network to mourn collectively and move forward. One key question about digital memorials is how to they facilitate this process since many of the examples I use exist within social media created to bring communities together.

Often the immediate response from members of society after a public tragedy is experienced is the need to make some sort of effort to move forward or rectify the tragedy – or rather to simply “do something.” (Doka, 2003a) Most often this experience of survivor guilt is because public tragedies “shatter our assumptions, that is, our underlying model of a safe, meaningful, and benevolent world.” (Doka, 2003b, p.4) We can see this particularly in the response to tragedies like Hurricane Katrina and September 11th, which made many Americans question the abilities of the government, their safety, and the assumptions they may have had about American subcultures. The outpouring of spontaneous shrines after both of these events points to a ritual that Americans have adopted in order to address their concerns and mourning. How are these concerns addressed within digital environments and do they correlate to other, more traditional memorial practices? Are these practices successful in satisfying the need to “do something” and remove survivor guilt?

Participatory Culture and Commons-Based Peer Production

In *Convergence Culture*, Henry Jenkins (2006) outlines the transformational power of fan culture to re-negotiate participation within larger structures. When groups of people re-interpret, remix, or remake media objects, not only are they forming a political statement about the ownership of culture; they are also “envison[ing] a world

where all of us can participate in the creation and circulation of central cultural myths.” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 256) This participatory culture is starting to have influence on how those institutions approach the distribution of their products; but more interestingly, it has power to shape the beliefs and ideas around cultural phenomena.

Spontaneous shrines, much like fan and commons-based peer produced media, are mechanisms to resist a collective memory controlled by powerful institutions and to return the formation of memory to the collective. The shrines' critique may be the space they occupy, a larger organization who could be considered at fault for a tragedy, or how the event should be memorialized. The networked responses outlined in *Convergence Culture* have the potential to reshape the entertainment industry and allow equal participation in culture to all entities. Memorialization enacted by the government or large organizations has the power to take away participation of the people in creating a memory of tragedy. Spontaneous shrines and the archiving of objects contained within have reshaped the construction of memory through a plurality of voices. When similar practices are put into place within a democratizing space such as a virtual world or social networking sites, the ability for the people to shape the memory of mass tragedy increases.

Commons-based peer production is a term coined by Yochai Benkler (2006) to describe collaborative projects, which emphasize the sharing of information and products in a decentralized system. His lengthy look at the economics and cultural development as a result of this mode of production predicts a more empowered citizenry. Benkler notes that there are two parameters that define a commons: whether they are open to everyone

or only to a specific group and whether they are regulated or unregulated. He argues that commons-based peer production is successful because it is open to everyone and is completely deregulated. Applying this to the construction of collective memory, we can see how particular view points or groups of people have been favored over others due to methods of regulation by authoritative powers (Durkheim would draw upon law and religion). When authoritative powers control collective memory, identity becomes limited and uninformed by a multitude of perspectives. Ideally, spontaneous shrines and digital memorials in should operate as commons-based peer production as they enable the most open dialogue about tragedy.

Particularly useful for examining the motivations behind digital memorialization is his explanation of extrinsic and intrinsic motivations for participating in structures. Extrinsic motivations are placed upon individuals from the outside, such as monetary compensation or other rewards from an authority. Intrinsic motivations arise from within an individual such as pleasure, pride or satisfaction. Both motivations correspond to the public and private spheres of digital memorialization, where the extrinsic motivation of this motivation would be to contribute to a public collective memory, and the intrinsic value would be the act of mourning.

We interact with objects, digital and non-digital, based on meanings established through social structures. (Couch, 1996) These meanings are also continually being developed as we interact with them and each person interprets the process of interaction with that object. This approach developed by symbolic interactionists such as Carl Couch and Herbert Blumer is particularly useful for analyzing digital memorials with in

virtual worlds like Second Life. Within these spaces, there are two social structures competing within the meaning making process: one developed by users of Second Life, and another by the well-established process of memorialization. How this shapes the visual language of virtual memorials and behaviors of visitors is explored in the chapter “Your World, Your Imagination?: Representation and Social Expectations in Virtual Memorials.”

Digital spaces are not necessarily completely democratizing or necessarily productive in creating meaningful responses. In addition to issues of access due to the digital divide, a de-personalization of these spaces could occur from current trends to aggregate and develop highly aggregated “meta” sites. Jaron Lanier (2006) notes that the power of the Web lies with people and "that ultimately value always came from connecting with real humans" not from the building of resources or media. Often, a guiding force or order prevents an over-excitement or hyper-fragmentation of the collective (ex. project managers on open-source projects, moderators on discussion boards). Lanier argues that collective production is not "all wise" and rather benefits from the guidance of "clever individuals." In the case of digital memorials, the "clever individuals" often hold the power in spaces to decide who has a voice, what will get publicly memorialized, and what view of the event will be prominent. Whether or not Lanier's argument that “clever individuals” can produce productive spaces with personality that enable effective mourning to occur is at the heart of issues of control of digital memorial spaces.

Activist Media

The way that digital memorials subvert traditionally powerful structures allows them to operate as activist media. As observed by many scholars (Bodnar, 1992; Kammen, 1993; Gillis, 1994) certain groups have the power to define how collective memory is formed, and often that formation is through the production of memorials. While there is some negotiation between these groups and the general public, most often these memorials attempt to infuse public tragedy with patriotism and national pride. Often public tragedy brings a surge of pride and in general, makes the public bond together (e.g., the use of the American flag after September 11th) the process of making an official memorial is often bound to the desires and needs of committees, funders, and large organizations like the government, mainstream media, and religious organizations, who in turn negotiate how to represent this national pride.

John Downing defines radical media as “an alternative vision to hegemonic policies, priorities, and perspectives.” (2001, p. v) Activist media, as I utilize and define it in this analysis, performs the same way, but specifically challenges hegemonic structures of power. It also actively advances an alternative ideology to official culture. Many of the memorials in this analysis subvert the typical power structure present in the process of memorialization by utilizing social media that enable many people to join together and develop their own meanings and memories. In addition, many of these contributors used the process of memorialization to advance a particular belief, political agenda or increase the access to alternative visions of public tragedies. These users challenge the very ideologies behind creating memorials, those that inform collective

memory and negotiate new memorial practices. The process of digital memorialization within social media proves to be a powerful tool for overriding the official culture that Bodnar defines as “sacred and timeless.” (1992, p. 14)

Areas of Inquiry

The following chapters analyze memorial practices within virtual worlds, video sharing sites, and social networking sites.

You Watching This Here And Now: Video Tributes as Activist Media

Video memorials arising from the devastation in the Gulf area from Hurricane Katrina exhibit the same qualities of "textual poachers" that Henry Jenkins describes in *Convergence Culture*. Many contain photographs taken by news agencies or organizations other than the video creators. These borrowed images are then set to a soundtrack generally not composed by the video creator. A call to action is included, asking the viewer to donate to the Red Cross, volunteer time, or to not forget the governmental response and societal effects of Hurricane Katrina. Another site, Iraqmemorial.org also uses the medium of online video to memorialize fallen soldiers from the Iraq War. Friends, families and colleagues of the soldiers can submit short testimonial style videos about the soldiers. These videos serve as rapidly deployed activist media and perform not only as aids to mourning but also as media, which invoke an ideology of change and reconciliation. In this chapter, I examine how these videos exist as activist media by drawing attention to social issues and subverting the typical

power structure of memorialization. I also examine discussion among YouTube members and categorize their common responses.

Your World, Your Imagination?: Representation and Social Expectations in Virtual Memorials

Virtual worlds such as Second Life enable users to create and shape their world according to their imaginations. Virtual memorials to American public tragedy challenge and uphold social orders present in traditional physical memorials as well as negotiate the social order developed by the residents of virtual worlds. However, these memorials also change collective memory by being more responsive to the on going social relations to public tragedy. By examining closely the creation, visual language and methods of interaction with two memorials, the Virginia Tech Memorial and the September 11th memorial, this chapter explores the meaning created by the visual language of virtual and non-virtual memorials, how it modifies social relationships to memorial in Second Life, and how these acts of memorialization create a more reflexive collective memory.

Forward, Together, Forward: Mourning on Social Network Sites

Social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace enable users to quickly develop a space for interaction and communication. After the Northern Illinois University shootings in February 2008, social networking site users used these spaces to mourn collectively. A visual language emerged around the NIU memorial ribbon, users discussed proper memorial practices, debated social and political issues surrounding the shooting, and utilized these platforms to establish initiatives, which addressed those

issues. This chapter follows two groups on Facebook and MySpace from their inception to April 2008. These memorial represent a shift in power in regards to memory production and turn the practice of memorialization into a participatory function.

Chapter 1:

You Watching This Here And Now: Video Tributes as Activist Media

By 2005, media sharing sites that enabled users to quickly upload and share video online garnered attention not only from Internet users, but also news outlets and corporations. Around this time, access to video equipment, editing and server software, and the Internet had become nearly ubiquitous among computer users. Most consumer grade digital cameras came with an option to shoot video and web cams were becoming cheaper and often built into new computers. Also at this time, user-friendly video editing software such as iMovie and Windows Movie Maker had been bundled into new computers and operating systems for about five years. It was likely in 2005, most people who owned a personal computer had access to some sort of video editing software, regardless of whether or not they knew it. This access in addition to a rise in the use of broadband, high speed Internet connections and a re-emergence of an open sharing online culture set the ground for popular video sharing sites such as YouTube, which focused on providing a space for users to upload, share, and propagate their video creations. As people began to populate these sites with content, two types of video styles have become

widespread: the vlog and remix videos. Vlogs, or video logs, feature a person speaking to the camera about themselves, their lives or an idea, similar to a testimonial or the video equivalent of a blog. Remix videos take existing footage and place them into a new context, similar to the methods of détournement, utilized by the Situationist movement.

Video tributes have emerged within social media sites and other memorial sites as a way of reshaping ownership and the collective memory of public tragedy. Most of these appear in the same aesthetics as vlogs and remix videos and while commenting on situations, organizations, and assumptions surrounding public tragedy. For example, after Hurricane Katrina passed through the southern United States in 2005, video tributes appeared on YouTube, utilizing images and video from news outlets, other media producers and popular music and often documenting suffering and governmental failures. These remixes are still being made at the time of this writing, with less frequency but with the same style. Another application of these video sharing sites is Iraqmemorial.org, which is a memorial to the fallen members of the United States Armed Forces. The memorial site utilizes video sharing site Veoh to host and stream video testimonials from families, friends and associates of servicemembers. These videos often feature someone close to the servicemember speaking about who they were, why they were in the armed forces and memories they have about that person. The short sixty second testimonials serve as a living memorial; but often take an activist position, noting that many of these servicemembers committed suicide after returning from their service.

While both of these take advantage of social media, the two examples are extremely different in the ways that users have organized around these objects. YouTube, known

for its community organizing around the public's video production does not have a distinct community producing memorial media; rather, it has members who produce memorial media outside of a public discourse about how these videos should look, function, and be interpreted. While there is a commonality in most video tributes on YouTube aesthetically, there are not expectations or standards set up for producers.

Many of the YouTube video tributes take images from the news media and other image outlets online. One of the earliest video tributes, "Hurricane Katrina Images" by YouTube user Jewls (2005), features images of victims being rescued, religious imagery in the form of statues in the aftermath of the storm, the magnitude of the storm's destruction and military forces moving into devastated areas. These are common images among these tributes; however, Jewls' video focuses on the connection between people and the connection between victims and their rescuers. At the same time, the video draws a stark comparison between the concern from politicians and citizens. It juxtaposes an image of New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin, FEMA Director Michael Brown and President George W. Bush, another image of a state police tank with armed soldiers in New Orleans, and an image of a flooded New Orleans neighborhood with a segment of the song "We Believe" by Good Charlotte:

Downtown another day for all the suits and ties
Another war to fight
There's no regard for life
How do they sleep at night (Madden & Madden, 2004)

While the video memorializes the events and victims from the storm, it also makes an overt political statement about how the government handled the massive amount of damage from Hurricane Katrina. This segment of the video closes with an image of a

woman weeping next to a dead body in an impromptu shroud, accompanied by the lyrics “how can we make things right?” With this pairing, Jewls places blame with politicians (e.g. Ray Nagin, Michael Brown, President Bush). At the same time; however, the video emphasizes the powerful connection between victims and military personnel and regular citizens by devoting the much of the video to images of rescue as the accompanying song repeats “we believe in this love.”

Another video, created by YouTube user Laurenis (2006), sets video of destruction, victims and their rescues to Unkle’s “Lonely Soul,” which contains the lyrics “I’m gonna die in a place that don’t know my name/I’m gonna die in a space that don’t hold my fame.” (Ashcroft, Davis, DJ Shadow & Malone, W., 1998) This pairing makes a very political statement about the condition of these victims as they are portrayed in the mainstream media as a mass of unnamed victims stylized as poor, helpless, and sometimes overly greedy (Breed, 2005; Martin, 2005; Harris, 2005). This pairing of imagery and lyrics gives a voice to the concern that these people will remain nameless, and that much like other natural disasters in the United States, they will be erased from collective memory over time. This erasure is what Mike Davis calls “[d]isaster amnesia ... a federally subsidized luxury.” (1998, p. 47) While the government’s failure to provide adequate support for Hurricane Katrina’s victims is well documented through mass media and alternate news outlets, stories of the failure of the government to address recurring natural disasters such as earthquakes and wildfires in California and hurricanes in the Southern United States have been regularly subverted by the government through public relations campaigns (e.g. The Road Home, Gulf Coast Recovery Office) and quick fixes

(e.g. FEMA checks, formaldehyde-filled FEMA trailers). This video functions as a piece of media that introduces this failure into the collective memory by utilizing this form of memorial media. Laurenis, by creating this tribute, utilizes the structure of memorialization to address an issue with the memory of the public and government.

Other video tributes take on a similar activist framing by calling the viewer to action. User K3ruptRush (2007) directly addresses the viewer directly in the video “Hurricane Katrina Memorial” by placing text between images of storm volunteers: “You Watching This Here And Now. Can Change The Life Of A Person, Or A Family...You Can Change The Life Of Many. Listen To You Heart. Please Help. <http://www.katrina.com>” The website Katrina.com was a hub for victims, families and volunteers to connect, help each other find housing, locate evacuated family members, and obtain financial assistance and other support. Another video by the same name utilizes audio ranging from interviews with victims, news media, and statements from government officials including Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco and President Bush, and the song “Cry Out to Jesus” by Third Day. Creator dbuttry (2005) appends to the end of the video a graphic with the Red Cross’ phone number and website and notes in the description of the video “Please donate to the Red Cross.”

This type of remix production points to the aesthetic and history of fan vidding, where fans of pop culture take video clips or images from television shows, movies, anime series and other sources and reinterpret a narrative or explore tangential themes to the original source. Kandy Fong (1980) introduced this concept at a *Star Trek* convention in the 70’s by utilizing slides of Spock from the series set to Leonard Nimoy’s cover of

“Both Sides Now.” The video explores a concept not covered by the *Star Trek* series: Spock’s complicated identity as a sexual being caught between his identity as an alien/human and the cultural confusion that ensues. (Coppa 2007) Fong takes ownership of a much beloved narrative and reinterprets and expands it for fans. Another example, “Wouldn’t It Be Nice” by Laura Shapiro (2007) takes a metatextual approach to representing homosexual or homoerotic interactions on television shows from *Buffy* to *Star Trek* to *Starsky & Hutch*. In this video, Shapiro illustrates a dialogue popular in fandom (i.e., slash, homoeroticism) under close scrutiny and commentary.

Much like how Kandy Fong and Laura Shapiro are creating new narratives around already created media, these Hurricane Katrina video tributes create new narratives about the storm and its victims by reinterpreting existing media. Henry Jenkins notes that fan vidding creates a “communal artform, one contrasting with the commercial culture from which it is derived,” (1992, p.249) which is similar to the reinterpretation of media in these video tributes. The traditional memorial itself is a form of communal art, meant to bring together the public to remember events and people and help define the collective memory of an event. However, often this collective memory is mediated by the images and other media created after a tragic event, and this media is often created in the commercial and powerful environments of news rooms, government offices and pop culture. When video tribute makers take these pieces of media and remix them to portray their own views of Hurricane Katrina, they take on ownership of this memory and reshape it according to their perceptions, which then build on the memories and perceptions of viewers.

Unlike the memetic visual language used in the Hurricane Katrina video tributes, the videos that appear on Iraqmemorial.org are strictly defined in regards to structure and aesthetic. The administrators have clearly outlined what to say and how to shoot a video for the site by asking submitters to submit a sixty second testimony mentioning the soldier's name and a particular memory about them. The guidelines for shooting the video outline how to shoot someone speaking toward the camera and how to control the environment the person is in (e.g., background noise, de-cluttered background).

Many of the videos are of parents or close relatives speaking to the camera, testimonial style, such as the memorial to Lcpl. Alexander Arrendondo given by his father. Arrendondo's father describes his son as a young soldier, killed in the city of Najaf right before his twentieth birthday. He also says Arrendondo believed "it's not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." (Brave New Foundation) Other parents describe their children prior to their service such as the mother of Spc. Jonathan Cheatham, who recalls Cheatham's desire to perform in a marching contest regardless of breaking his arm. Some videos recall the time that soldiers spent in the military, why they wanted to go to Iraq and serve their country. Sgt. Christopher Monroe's memorial is a video he recorded for his father after completing basic training describing how much his life was changing at the time. After watching Monroe's enthusiasm the viewer is presented with a very solemn title card: "In memorandum Sgt. Christopher Monroe 1986-2005."

Most of the memorials follow this prescribed testimonial format with little interpretation by video creators. Many times the only deviation is the inclusion of

photographs of soldiers; however, one video takes some artistic license with how it memorializes Spc. Chris Talley. The video features a small shrine-like creation containing pictures, Talley's childhood creations, and other mementoes. In the video we do not see the narrator, only the spontaneous shrine-like wall: the difference between this video and others is striking. As a result of the connections to objects related to Talley and the voiceover narrative, we get a clearer sense of who he was as a person, not just a fallen soldier in the Iraq war.

Many of these videos address soldiers who have suffered from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and as a result committed suicide or passed away after their return. The memorial to Cpl. Jeffery Michael Lucey not only includes sentiments from his father but also a description of his complicated mental condition after returning from a tour in Iraq. He also discusses trying to get help for his son from the US Department of Veterans Affairs and he sees Lucey's legacy as helping other soldiers who also suffer from PTSD. Pfc. Joe Godfrey Jr.'s father also attributes PTSD to the death of his son who was killed in a robbery and feels "strongly that Joe's circumstances led to his murder that night...it would have not been the case had he not been suffering from PTSD." (Brave New Foundation) Aside from the memorial for soldiers who suffered from PTSD, activism is apparent in another video for Pfc. Steven Sirko where his mother states "I hope the president takes notice of this, and lets other parents have their children back." (Brave New Foundation)

Testimonies like these are vital to the healing process after traumatic events. A similar style of sharing stories and memories was the core of truth and reconciliation

commissions, like the one formed in South Africa after apartheid. The goal of the commission was to discover, document and resolve past government misconduct and human rights abuses. At various hearings throughout South Africa, victims could come and testify about their experiences to their community. As Belinda Bozzoli notes, many of the stories told at the truth and reconciliation commissions were heavily mythologized and the public already had formed a conception of these experiences. (1998) By telling these stories in public, the truth was often reached, and a brought a closure to the egregious offenses against the community. It also brought these stories out of the private sphere and into the public sphere where they could become collective memory, shaped by an official ritual endorsed by the government.

The testimonies given on Iraqmemorial.org exist at a time of uncertainty about the Iraq War and the American government. A recent poll taken by the New York Times/CBS News showed that 81% of the Americans polled felt that the country was “on the wrong track,” citing issues with the economy, the war on terrorism, and the job market. (Leonhardt & Connelly, 2008) Often such dissent is expressed in protests, which have been widespread in response to the ongoing war in Iraq; however, we often do not see such dissent in memorials, mostly because there are few created for the veterans of the Iraq war. Spontaneous shrines have been notorious for expressing the grief over the horrifying circumstances surrounding public tragedy and usually call for change to occur; however, they often do not place direct blame for death or voice concerns about responsible powers. (Senie, 2006) James E. Young notes that monuments were originally built to venerate countries and their historical narratives, as

well that memorialization of victims a country has wronged is a difficult process. (1992) Government endorsement of a memorial to the Iraq veterans simply is not productive at a time when the country is in such disagreement over the war. Issues surrounding Hurricane Katrina, such as irresponsibility from FEMA, slow structural and economic rebuilding, and unpreparedness for another storm also complicate the building of a memorial. How can the governmental or other agency build a memorial when such situations have not been rectified?

These video tributes provide a valuable tool for the public to mourn together and establish a tone of collective memory. While many times these views are fragmented, we get an idea of the over-arching of the common ways these public tragedies are perceived. For example, there are an overwhelming amount of comments on the YouTube video tributes that politicize or call for activism in response to Hurricane Katrina. Many criticize the government, specifically President Bush, Mayor Ray Nagin, Governnor Kathleen Blanco and FEMA for failing the people of New Orleans. User Atahualpa1 responds user dbuttry's video, which features President Bush stating "I'm sure in no time the great city of New Orleans will be back on its feet" by posting:

Video has "Cry out to Jesus" songtrack behind, which doesn't bug me as I'm Christian. But what does bug me is the quotes from Bush – Bush who appointed his inexperienced buddies as the heads of FEMA -- thus the total bungled response to the crisis – and who pulled over 40% of funding to flood crisis in the region the previous year, thus indirectly causing the death of probably 5000+ Americans (more than 9/11), mostly poor and black. **TOTALLY PREVENTABLE! Why? Why???** (dbuttry, 2005)²

² All quotes from user-created content appears verbatim as posted including grammatical errors and misspellings.

Many similar comments also note the lack of levee rebuilding and other preventative measures that could have been taken by government officials. Others compared the response to examples of America's foreign aid. One user, cajunsl11, in response to Jewls' video notes "i sent my oldest son to war, while we were dieing here aint dat sumpin. other countrys got quicker aid from America than New Orleans". (Jewls, 2005) American historian Michael G. Kammen notes that the past is often reinterpreted by present societies, taking into account the needs and perceptions, which creates a constantly renegotiated collective memory. (1993) From these political and activist comments, we can see that the YouTube community shaped the memory of Hurricane Katrina to include the governmental failures and also placed direct blame on particular government officials. The current community sees these beliefs as an important part of the dialogue in memorializing Hurricane Katrina. While over a long period of time, we may see that this plays a smaller role in the historical retelling of Hurricane Katrina, it plays a vital role in the collective memory of the storm today, being shaped and documented within YouTube, a public sphere open to many users to participate and create meaning.

Another way users created meaning was through the use of "flaming," meaning inappropriate and hostile comments. Flamers responded to many of the video tributes with racist comments such as shmouts' comment in response to carey63's video "All I Wanna Say Is They Don't Really Care About Us": "white america has been telling you niggers for YEARS to learn to swim." (2006) Others felt that New Orleans deserved the devastation due to the storm. Par4him responded to andrewcorbin20's video by stating "fall into the lake New Orleans. We dont need a city that only makes racism worst in

America.” (2006) These comments illustrate a view not often portrayed in the mainstream media representations of Hurricane Katrina, but were expressed anonymously through YouTube.

Many users develop this collective memory by responding to the YouTube video tributes with their own personal narratives. In response to Gamemakerman's video “Victims of Hurricane Katrina tribute, The saints are coming,” user alexx437 posts

I lost my mother, home and entire life in that storm. I recently visited for the first time after the storm, and it was hard. I saw where my house was, but it was completely leveled. I even went to my mother's grave.

Thank you for this tribute. (2006)

Other users responded to alexx437's post with sympathy and expressed their condolences for the loss of his mother. Volunteers and military servicemembers shared their experiences as well, like user MtMedic31 who recalls his twenty nine days performing relief and rescue work: “The best and the worst of humanity all in one spot, I will never forget it. Sept is hard month, all the news makes all the faces come back, but I will go again in a heartbeat when my country calls.” (andrewcorbin20, 2006)) Users create a more defined narrative with these comments, by adding their personal stories to the context of the video. By building on the narrative that the video producers make by juxtaposing images and sound, YouTube commenters create a meta-narrative of experiences during and after the storm.

Through this meta-narrative we can see the collective memory of the storm literally being written through a plurality of voices and experiences. In the public sphere of YouTube we see a deep connection with memories, much like the way items left at

spontaneous shrines create a publicly defined space for memory. Unlike spontaneous shrines, however, the memory-making occurring on YouTube occurs over a very long span of time. For example, the video “Hurricane Katrina Images” by Jewls is one of the earliest posted videos to YouTube as a tribute to the victims of Hurricane Katrina. Comments stretch back to around the time of the videos posting on September 20, 2005 and are still being posted as of March 2008. Comparatively, many spontaneous shrines often appear quickly and then slowly decay or are archived, existing only for a brief period of time. Often, if the shrine space is maintained by an outside organization these shrines last for a long period of time and are carefully archived, such as the items left at the Memory Fence in Oklahoma City after the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah building. With the overwhelming response from the community, memorial creators decided to include the Memory Fence into the final physical memorial. (Doss, 2002) Yet, many shrines created to commemorate the victims of car crashes, or roadside shrines, often exist for a period of time and then decay and often cause debate between families and land owners about the placement of shrines. (Owens, 2006) These video tributes on YouTube encourage Internet users to rally around a media object, much like how sites of tragedy encourage mourners to come together and share their grief publicly. The difference between the two is that the dialogue occurring between participants is ongoing and much more involved around the video tributes.

Iraqmemorial.org functions in a similar method, enabling the public to create its own collective memory mediated through a different institutional structure. The memorial website and videos are produced by the Brave New Foundation, founded by

political activist and filmmaker Robert Greenwald, with the the mission to “champion social justice issues by using a model of media, education, and grassroots volunteer involvement that inspires, empowers, motivates and teaches civic participation and makes a difference.” (About Brave New Foundation, n.d.) In order to participate in the memorial, one must send their video to the foundation or can have the foundation help make your video. Unlike the open, de-centralized dialogue around YouTube video tributes, this memorial is hierarchically structured, discouraging open participation.

Yochai Benkler, in *The Wealth of Networks*, notes that commons-based peer production signals a reemergence of folk culture, due to the ubiquity of network connections and access to new tools and platforms. Key to Benkler's argument is the de-centralized structure of initiatives which capitalize on collaboration within a large user base, such as Wikipedia, SETI@Home, and Second Life. This mode of production argues makes culture “legible to all its inhabitants” (Benkler, 2006, p. 300) meaning the public has the power to scrutinize, challenge and change culture by personally engaging culture through production. This democratic approach to culture is important because “[t]o regulate culture is to regulate our very comprehension of the world we occupy.” (Benkler, 2006, p. 298) When larger organizations control how culture is disseminated, portrayed, and accessed, those organizations wield power over the public and can choose to represent public tragedy in a particular light.

The goal of Iraqmemorial.org is to help the public learn about veterans killed in a war that has been highly publicized by news media, activists, and politicians, particularly in America. The structure of the memorial re-regulates the conception of the veterans

who have lost their lives and changes the comprehension of how these people are perceived. If the role of spontaneous shrines is to make private experience public, then the role of video tributes is to make the public experience private. The use of testimony and personal stories creates an intimate connection with viewers, and counteracts the nameless and non-descriptive numbers of casualties in the news. Mainstream media most often covers large death tolls in Iraq, but generally does not cover smaller loss of life or stories about specific servicemembers and their lives. While we experience their deaths publicly in the sense that the numbers represent a great magnitude, we do not experience a deep narrative or often even a personal connection with these servicemembers. By telling stories and testifying to the memory of these servicemembers, the Brave New Foundation is able to regulate how these casualties of the war are perceived: not just numbers, but as unique citizens serving their countries. The comprehension of the world that Brave New Films regulates is one which values the lives lost as a result of the Iraq War and a world where these servicemembers existed and thrived outside military service.

Both Iraqmemorial.org and the YouTube video tributes to Hurricane Katrina act as activist media, challenging the typical structures of memorialization. As both are recent public tragedies in American history, enough time has not passed for a physical memorial to be built. While Hurricane Katrina has a memorial in Biloxi, MS, no memorial exists yet in New Orleans, a city which received much attention from mainstream media and has since become synonymous with the storm. Currently, the Iraq War is ongoing, and often official federally supported war memorials are not created until long after the end of

the war. For example, the National WWII Memorial in Washington, D.C. was erected in 2004, nearly 60 years after the end of the war. These video-based memorials act as temporary spaces for creating memory and grieving for the public until a physical space can be dedicated to a memorial. By doing so, the collective memory of these events is shaped and perceptions are documented outside of a typical memorial structure. By utilizing social media, these video memorials become activist media, challenging the typical structures of power over memory making. Just as spontaneous shrines are a death ritual that is a “changing form in response to the needs of a changing society” (Haney, Leimer and Lowery, 1997, p. 159) these video tributes bridge the time between public tragedy and an official recognition of the event for the public to create meaning and express their loss. Haney, et al. in their article “Spontaneous Memorialization: Violent Death and Emerging Mourning Ritual” view spontaneous shrines as a political act because of their effectiveness in calling for respect and attention after violent death. These video tributes in the same way call for a specific type of attention and respect to two public and divisive tragedies in American history calling for a more personal, private connection with the loss of life.

Chapter 2:

Your World, Your Imagination?: Representation and Social Expectations in Virtual Memorials

Memorials in their traditional form have much meaning bound within their visual language. Usually, viewers know immediately when they are approaching a monument or a memorial because of the way it takes up space in the environment, its appearance, or from the social cues given by those surrounding them. Virtual worlds, which have received much attention from academic scholars for their remarkable development of community, social structures, economy and art, provide an interesting environment to observe the impact digital technologies have on the memorialization process. These three-dimensional environments provide a rich ground for observing social practices that form around memorials, how these correlate to traditional memorial forms, and whether or not they are changing society's relationship to memorialization. What is particularly interesting about the virtual world, Second Life, is a visual referral to “first life,” or rather the actual physical world we inhabit everyday (i.e. “Real Life”). Users of Second Life are given free reign to create, shape and mold the world around them, their appearances and the social relationships they form within the virtual world. Second Life’s slogan “Your World. Your Imagination” describes the approach of many users of

the virtual world who have created buildings, clothing, avatars and other user-generated objects to shape their environment.

Second Life emerged in 2003 as a three-dimensional world that would be populated, shaped, and driven by the needs of its users across the globe. While currently, Second Life boasts a population of 13,414,203 accounts created (Linden Labs, 2008), a significantly lower number of users actually participate regularly in Second Life (Shirky, 2006). The economy of Second Life is based on the selling of goods and land among Linden Labs, its creator and its users. This marketplace is fueled by users trading in actual currency for virtual currency, then using it in the virtual world to buy land, clothes, objects and other goods from other users and Linden Labs itself. Second Life has garnered attention for its viable economic model (Hof, 2006), its news service via Reuters (<http://secondlife.reuters.com>), and as a platform for art-making (Debatty, 2008; *Ars Virtua*).

Recent public tragedies have spurred the creation of memorials in Second Life, and the need to dedicate a “parcel”, or piece of land, at least temporarily to the memory of victims has become not just a phenomenon in the physical world, but also in the virtual world. For example, not long after the recent assassination of former Pakistani prime minister, Benazir Bhutto, a memorial featuring candles, flowers, and a large portrait of Bhutto appeared in Second Life. Soon after its creation, a memorial service was held within the space. Users can leave items at the memorial by contacting its creator, Jeanette Forager. The space resembles a spontaneous shrine because of the many mementoes left at the memorial by. By providing a dedicated space to Bhutto's memory,

Forager aimed to give visitors “a chance to share their pain and offer heart-felt sympathy for the loss of a remarkable woman.” (Holyoke, 2008)

While memorials to many public tragedies like the loss of Bhutto appear in Second Life, it is a ripe environment for observing how the public is memorializing American public tragedy. 35% of its users, or avatars, originate in the United States and these users spend 11.5 million hours in Second Life, just under half the amount of time all avatars spend within the virtual world. John Bodnar notes that memorialization is particularly complicated in the United States because of the important role of patriotism in the formation of American public memory. Not only is patriotism vital to national history, but also to the formation of vernacular and official cultures, which constantly negotiate how events are remembered. (1992)

A noteworthy example of a Second Life memorial concerning American public tragedy is the recreation of Maya Lin’s Vietnam Veterans Memorial, which includes the wall of names, a rendering of *The Three Servicemen* statue, the Vietnam Women’s memorial, and the landscaping surrounding the memorial. Also available for viewing is a video of the twenty-fifth anniversary ceremony at the memorial in Washington D.C. A small pavilion was added, and while an avatar is under it a computerized voice reads out the names of Vietnam veterans. The memorial, created by new media firm Meme Science and commissioned by the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, creates a remarkable simulation of the original memorial down to the placement of names and the detail in the surrounding sculptures. The memorial strives to “provide a form of accessibility for those who are unable to experience the real life memorial.” (Meme

Science, 2007) Providing access to all is an example of one of the common goals of virtual world memorials such as those in Second Life.

Producers mimic physical memorials in Second Life through visual language, control of space and connection to public; however, they also conform to the expectations of participatory spaces with some negotiations between managers and users. In addition to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Second Life, two memorials, one to the victims of the Virginia Tech (VT) shooting and another to those lost in the events of September 11th mimic the visual language of traditional, physical memorials, take advantage of the participatory space of Second Life, and also have complex issues with control of space.

The VT memorial in Second Life emerged out a series of spontaneous shrines that appeared in the virtual world soon after the shooting. Initially, flowers, candles, sculptures and other mementoes were placed on a piece of land near Info Island, a space dedicated to learning within Second Life. Two sculptures appeared that the community found particularly moving. *Why?* by Darrien Lightworker, is a marble-like sculpture of a human figure kneeling, arms extended and looking upward. Small red dots resembling tears float in a stream from the statue's eyes and an eternal flame burns on the base. Another untitled statue by Perefim Cao features a stone heart shape on top of a short tower with the inscription "In memory of those lost at Virginia Tech 16 April 2007."

Second Life Citizen Milosun Czervik, who works at Virginia Tech as a research associate at the School of Education, added a wall to the memorial. The texture on the wall represents the Hokie Stone, which is a type of limestone used throughout the

Virginia Tech campus. It featured the portraits of the 32 victims and a small sign for the shooter, Seung-Hui Cho with the statement:

"The weak can never forgive.
Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong."
-Gandhi

In memory of...
Not who he became, but who he
was beneath the hate and rage.
The peace his family knew
before April 16, 2007.
The friendless and unloved,
who felt dead before they died.
Victims, whoever they are.

Also on the sign was a small Korean flag. Czervik noted on his blog after building the wall that "Cho had his fame all over the world with his videos and pictures." (Czervik, April 23, 2007, par. 2) Each portrait, except for the sign representing Cho, linked to a biography of the victim. Czervik also created a shirt vendor for donors to the Hokie Spirit Memorial Fund (HSMF), which was established to cover the cost of counseling and other assistance to those affected by the shooting.

Soon after the establishment of these user-created memorials, Linden Labs donated a parcel of land for purposes of housing the memorial permanently. Czverik recreated his wall, this time with three connecting walls that enclosed other memorial pieces moved from the original memorial sites. Users left candles, flowers and other items utilizing the space as a rallying point for mourning. Unfortunately, the space was continually invaded by "griefers," or avatars, which harass others, attempting sell VT memorabilia fraudulently and placing images of Cho in the memorial against the wishes of other mourners.

The grievers became such a problem that many of the people who were active in taking care of the memorial felt it needed to be moved to private land. The land donated by Linden Labs allowed anyone to build objects and only Linden employees could remove potentially offensive objects. Many of the people who had closely monitored the building and utilization of the memorial were upset by this because they felt much of the activities by grievers were inappropriate and, without the ability to quickly control the space, it did not perform as “a quite, peaceful place to remember the victims.” (Czervik, Oct 16, 2007, par. 2) The owner of a Second Life real estate company, Bart Heart, donated a parcel of land to house the memorial and to allow the key memorial producers to maintain the space. These producers eventually became an official Second Life user's group and they currently maintain the space.

The memorial in its current state resembles the original memorial to some degree, but changes often occur as a result of having a very active maintenance group. On the west pavilion, many pieces of the original memorial remain, including Cao and Lightworker's sculptures and two others: *Tears for the Lost Futures* by Peewee Musytari and *Monument with Water* by Eshi Otawara. On the west side, a stone wall displays news stories from the *Collegiate Times* about the shootings. In a central location is Czervik's three-walled structure with portraits of the victims, which connect to their respective biographies hosted on VT's memorial website (<http://www.vt.edu/remember/>). Each victim has a stone marker with their name, a small VT memorial ribbon, and a white rose bush. In the middle of the three walls is another VT memorial ribbon laid over the grass. A flagpole with a VT flag from the original memorials is included with

the inscription “We are the Hokies. We will prevail” along the base. On the east side is a space for fundraising with a meter indicating how much money has been donated to the HSMF. The piece of land has an island shaped like the letters “VT,” connected with a bridge to the mainland. On the island are 32 cherry trees, each one representing one of the victims. There are also two statues: one of an angel on a rock and another with an angel on top of a fountain.

The memorial often changes depending on the needs of the community. After the Northern Illinois University (NIU) shootings, a series of five crosses with the victims' names, an image of crosses in the snow at the NIU campus, and an image of NIU's Second Life campus appeared. A series of markers with the images of other students who died tragically in separate occurrences also lines the walkway through the VT-shaped island. On the one year anniversary of the shootings, many additions and changes were made to the memorial. Marston Davids, one of the maintainers of the memorial, added small white candles in front of each portrait. The east side of the memorial changed to include a place to get free VT shirts, a link to a books about the shooting, and links to two VT-sponsored initiatives in response to the shooting. One, VT Engage encourages those in the VT Community to volunteer and bring about positive change in their community. The other link is to the 4/16 Digital Library containing stories, images and other resources related to the shootings. The east side of the memorial now serves as a portion of the memorial that changes depending on the current needs of mourners.

The VT memorial is rooted in the visual appearance of traditional, physical memorials, with its use of stone and sculptural elements, but also through its control of

visitor behavior. While non-virtual memorials do not actually place rules on visitors, there are social expectations for how one behaves at a memorial. While it is physically impossible to fly in non-virtual space, other unusual behavior such as running or speaking loudly is unacceptable due to the amount of reverence and sacredness attributed to memorial spaces. The creators of the VT memorial have re-written those expectations into the virtual space, and constructed a specific kind of social interaction within the space to mimic those at non-virtual memorials. While the social code of those memorials are implied, the literal encoding by virtual memorial producers places explicit expectations on memorial visitors.

A key public tragedy in American history was September 11th, which has proven to be a complex event to memorialize at Ground Zero because of issues between the land owner of the World Trade Center, the memorial committee and the architects involved. In Second Life, many memorials were created to the victims and the events, and in particular the September 11th Memorial located on the parcel called “World Trade Center” has received much attention from the Second Life community (Riel, 2007; Au, 2007; Kronos, 2007). The September 11th Memorial in Second Life was designed by artist Liam Kanno after a call from land owners Winfried Ferraris and Sundra Petrov for a World Trade Center memorial. Kanno experienced the events of 9/11 only three blocks away from the World Trade Center, which influenced him to change his path in life. He quit his job in advertising and began studying humanities and focused on creating art.

The memorial is an enclosed, four-walled space with the names of victims from the World Trade Center, Pentagon, American Airlines Flight 11, American Airlines Flight 77,

United Airlines Flight 175, and United Airlines 93. There are also small pedestals which link to biographies and images of the victims at <http://www.september11victims.com>. It rains constantly at the memorial, accompanied by the sound of trickling rain and soft thunder. The dark obsidian walls featuring the names also show raindrops running down their slanted surface. In a sense, the space resembles Maya Lin's design of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, except the writing on the walls is in bright gold and the walls recede slightly backward into a self-supportive structure rather than a hill. There is a three foot gap between the walkway and the walls of names, which Kanno says represents the helplessness he felt watching people fall from the towers. (Au, 2006) Along the walkway lining the walls of names are items left by visitors. Many are flower bouquets created from interactive "rezzing" boxes, which make bouquets when touched by an avatar. The managers of the space also allow avatars to create and place images at the wall but these objects must be submitted to them first. Some of these user-created objects include teddy bears, a katana sword, a bottle of Stolichnaya vodka and many American flags. In the middle of the four walls is a reflecting pool, with a deep square hole in the very middle, creating a noticeable absence in form. Outside of the four walls is a small, hall-like space displaying small portraits of the victims with even more objects placed by users. Next to the small portraits is a shrine to Candace Lee Williams, who was a passenger on American Airlines Flight 11 on her way to California for a vacation with her roommate. Also in this area are drawings of the World Trade Center, newspaper clippings and a small flower bed.

This memorial restricts the types of interaction visitors can have with the space much like the VT Memorial. Flying, which is usually considered a quick way to traverse spaces in Second Life, is disabled and the only way to leave the memorial is to teleport out to another parcel. The control of the space is very apparent and pointed toward creating a restrained environment. During the process of designing a memorial, the creation of sacred space for quiet reflection is often an important concern. For example, the John F. Kennedy Memorial located a few blocks away from Dealey Plaza, where Kennedy was shot, succeeds in carving out a quiet reflective space in the middle of bustling downtown Dallas. It also sets aside a space for reflection away from Dealey Plaza, which has become a hub of conspiracy theorists, tourists and in itself is a memorial to George Bannerman Dealey. Architect Philip Johnson encased the memorial within very tall white walls creating not only a visual separation but also an auditory separation from the surrounding area, allowing visitors to focus on the low lying altar inscribed with “John Fitzgerald Kennedy.” Johnson’s goal was to create “a sacred place, like an empty tomb” that would “block out the surrounding city.” (Welch, 2000, p. 124) Similarly, the September 11th Memorial creates this space through enclosed walls, but it also blocks out the social structure of Second Life by limiting the participatory abilities of visitors. The limitation of flying encodes an expectation on the activities of visitors allowing them to perform in ways that encourage behaviors typical within a sacred space. Erica Doss notes that rituals around death have often focused on the private experience, and as a result, death is experienced in a very restrained manner socially. (2002) Despite the varied limitations and the often unusual methods of self expression in Second Life, these

expectations are still encoded within the virtual memorials and influence the way visitors attribute meaning to the memorial. A correlation between memorial practices in virtual and non-virtual spaces is created because of this restricted behavior,

The expectation that memorials provide a particular kind of social space influences their design and the restraints that creators place on visitors. The VT memorial until April 2008 did not allow visitors to interact with the space or to behave in ways outside of the social expectations written into memorials. The September 11th memorial is a bit more open, allowing visitors to create and place objects in the memorial with the permission of the maintainers of the site. Interaction with the memorials is mediated by what the maintainers see as appropriate symbols and appropriate interaction. These beliefs and meanings are shaped by and are negotiated through the social interaction with traditional physical memorials and the inhabitants and spaces within Second Life.

Memorials are often created with the intent to honor and inscribe into the collective memory a particular way of thinking about public tragedy. Kenneth Foote outlines how sites of tragedy and violence have different types of outcomes depending on the public needs at the time of commemoration. Some sites may be sanctified, having some sort of everlasting positive meaning, others obliterated, where effort is made to erase the memory of the event. Other outcomes include designation which makes minimal effort in showing an event happened there, and rectification which puts a site back into use and does not attribute a particular meaning to an event. (1997) All of these memorial methods are technologies which inscribe a particular belief or assumption into the collective memory. Carl Couch notes that “it is flawed human memory that gave rise to

many information technologies that were developed to increase the amount and precision of information retained” (1996, p. 6) and in this McLuhanesque manner, memorials extend the public’s memory and hold a particular view of public tragedy within them.

Memorials become technologies of memory, inscribing a particular meaning or belief into collective memory through the processes of sanctification, obliteration, designation or rectification. Couch also noted that members of society use their collective memory to become socially situated with one another, thus, memorials inform our social relationships to public tragedy and the meaning and social expectations they produce inform our relationships to public tragedy. (1996)

The goal of memorialization is to dedicate a public space so that there is always a reminder of what has happened (Foote, 2003). For example, veterans of the Vietnam War wanted a memorial erected so that no one would forget the cost of the war and ensure that the soldiers who died would not be forgotten. This grief, until the erection of a memorial, was held privately by those close to the tragedy of the war and by erecting the memorial, those groups and individuals were able to make their private grief public. It is intriguing then that many people started bringing objects to the Vietnam Veterans memorial thus making their own memorials and shaping a public representation through private efforts. Harriet Senie theorized that spontaneous shrines such as these have grown in occurrence due to the privatizing nature of technologies that have become more and more present in private life. (2006) In virtual worlds and other social media, however, we see the opposite: technologies bring society together and enables a flux in what would be considered public and private. By claiming a space within virtual worlds, these

communities are making a statement about the importance of victims and public tragedy and the meanings of those spaces can then be shaped by the private efforts of many within the networked space. Haas notes that by bringing objects to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the public reestablishes a soldier's personal identity within a mass of many. In a similar way, the establishment of a space for remembering public tragedy within virtual worlds personalizes the tragedy for the virtual world community. In a way, it lets users know that these events are still important inside virtual worlds and impact the residents there.

The claiming of virtual space for creating meaning around public tragedies like September 11th and the VT shootings reproduces prescribed meanings from physical memorials. The utilization of traditional memorial language facilitates the production of these meanings. Both memorials use the image of stone or stone-like materials signifying long term permanence. This material has been vital to memorial practices from the creation of grave markers to larger monuments and memorials commemorating people and events. Materials such as stone and metal are used in prominent American monuments and memorials, which act as signifiers of official representations of memory. Sites like the Lincoln Memorial (a large statue made of limestone and marble), the Statue of Liberty (a copper statue on a stone base), the United States Marine Corps War Memorial (an image from Iwo Jima in granite, bronze and gold), the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (composed of a granite wall and bronze sculptures) all utilize materials like stone and metal and their official nature lends an authenticity and sense of permanence to these materials. Spontaneous shrines, on the other hand, which appear temporarily and

immediately after a tragedy, often do not utilize such materials. Mostly these are composed of photographs, paper-based mementoes, flowers and other plant life, wooden crosses and other objects that decay over time with exposure to weather. Spontaneous shrines are temporal and ephemeral because the types of materials utilized in them decay or are removed over time. Scales of time play an important role in assigning meaning to these materials, as the organic materials of spontaneous shrines often decay faster than those utilized in traditional memorials, thus assigning meaning of impermanence.

The choice to utilize these materials in virtual memorials is rooted in these meanings. When visitors view the memorials, these materials cue particular social expectations. The stone utilized in both memorials simulates an official, sacred environment, which provides context for social expectations placed on visitors. September 11th memorial designer Lian Kanno observed that visitors respected this sacred space: “Most of the time visitors don't say much. They change their clothes into gray suits and dresses, and talk about who they lost. They visit the names on the walls, and give each other hugs.” (Au, 2006) Czervik also noted at the VT memorial very little difference between visitors actions in the virtual and non-virtual locations: “I was struck today how the RL [Real Life] memorials on the Drillfield keep on growing - and how there is almost no difference between the virtual and real locations with regard to sentiment for the victims, survivors, and those impacted.” (Czervik, April 21, 2007, par. 1) These practices that are defined around mourning and memorialization carry over to virtual worlds because of the use of a particular kind of visual language that symbolizes that these are spaces of mourning. Couch notes that communicative symbols shape our

relationships to others and objects. (1996) The referential symbols such as the stone used in the memorials allow us classify our relationship between experiences and signals reverence. It also operates as what Couch calls evocative symbol, which informs our emotions and facilitates our sharing of them. (1996) The creators use this visual language in order to signify a particular emotion among visitors that is consistent with their experiences with mourning.

Both memorials also define the types of interaction that visitors may have with the space explicitly. Flying, which is usually considered a faster way of travel in Second Life is limited within both memorial spaces. Neither space allows the creation and placement of objects without the object having first been approved by someone who maintains the space. This limits the amount of interaction visitors can have with the memorial, which is a characteristic not seen in other memorials within participatory spaces. Many memorial producers fear griefers and in general feel that the Second Life community is irreverent. After the announcement of a Benazir Bhutto memorial on the blog *Second Life Herald*, users commented on how griefers would surely attack the memorial. Many predicted a group of griefers, the /b/tards, would make an effort to defile the memorial. One commenter noted, "I give it approximately 10 minutes before it's covered in dicks." (Holyoke, 2008) These concerns certainly fuel the decisions behind limiting visitor interaction within the VT memorial and the September 11th memorial. Milosun Czervik and Bart Heart noted that the griefers and control over their activities were the main reason they moved the VT Memorial away from public land and into private land. The

September 11th Memorial preempted any attempt to place inappropriate objects by making visitors ask for permission to place user-created objects at the memorial.

Jaron Lanier notes that often a guiding force or “clever individual” is often necessary in collective projects or experiences in order to keep them focused and continue producing meaningful products. (2006) While Lanier is referring to projects such as Wikipedia, which produce knowledge, the usefulness of a guiding force within digital memorials is apparent. The clever individuals in the case of virtual worlds (e.g., Liam Kanno, Milosun Czervik) help mediate the social expectations from the environment of Second Life and from memorial spaces. The idea of “Your World. Your Imagination” does not always work well with the social expectations placed on virtual memorials and some mediation is needed to resolve these two competing interests. While non-virtual social interactions influence the design of memorials, interactions and expectations within Second Life also construct the way the community views interaction with memorials. This relationship is under constant negotiation with the help of memorial maintainers, depending on how grievers interact with memorials and what memorial creators' expectations of those interactions are.

Walter Benjamin noted that with the increase of mechanical methods to produce artworks, the aura, or the sense of awe and sacredness, decreased and new art forms such as film allowed art to be freed of ritual functions. Memorial art has always been situated within ritual, as a way of commemorating events, remembering the dead and key to the process of moving forward post-tragedy (Foote, 2003; Doss, 2002; Kammen, 1993). However, those rituals are often controlled by larger organizations of government,

religion and as sociologist Émile Durkheim asserts ritual is key to forming and maintaining collective memory (Misztal, 2003). While Benjamin argues that mechanically-reproduced artworks are free from ritual, a symbolic interactionist approach where interactions with social structures and objects create meanings show that ritual informs the interaction with virtual memorials. Ritual very much still informs virtual memorial practices, as memorial producers have chosen to allow both expectations and traditions from memorial rituals and the Second Life community. Traditional interactions with memorial spaces still heavily inform virtual memorial practices. Virtual memorial producers, in general, seem to have opted to recreate the environments and expected to translate the social behaviors of physical memorials, as opposed to rethinking or drastically redefining the experience of visiting a virtual memorial.

It appears that over time, control of the virtual world memorials becomes a bit more lax, and allows for more interaction from visitors; however, this is negotiated through forms which can be moderated. The VT Memorial, which did not allow for interaction from visitors in the beginning, recently included a guestbook where visitors could leave notes. Social media that utilizes the Internet has lowered the level of mastery, cost and increased access to tools and audiences to create a more open social structure begin to open doors for a more democratic collective memory. (Benkler, 2006) Because of this open structure, communities no longer need large amounts of funding to buy materials, acquire land or experts to decide how and why to memorialize public tragedy. While those institutions inform the visual language of these memorials, social media allow for negotiation and accountability unlike broadcast models of traditional memorialization.

Couch argued that electronic broadcast media encouraged the growth of “charismatic authority” and discouraged representative relationships. (Chen, 1995) Conversely, social media like Second Life that capitalizes on many-to-many communication provides formative ground for a more democratic social order that is informed by charismatic authority and mediated by representative relationships. We see this flux in the memorials in Second Life that are negotiating the balance between free-form democratic interaction and creation and having control of a space where social relationships and interactions are being shaped by a virtual world composed of the expectations and creations of many.

The power of these virtual memorials resides in their ability to rewrite meanings as public opinion changes. For example, the marker in the VT Memorial for the shooter once featured a Korean flag, as which was placed as a symbol of identity. The flag is now gone, Czervik noted that it was because a visitor approached him and told him it was inappropriate. (April 15, 2008) Unlike the unchanging memorials in non-virtual spaces, these memorials are reflexive to the changing social orders and public perceptions. This is a powerful activist media tool, allowing collective memory to be reshaped according to current opinion rather than being rooted in the beliefs at the time of the memorial's construction. Thus, virtual memorials have the power to mediate our relationship with collective memory-making through memorialization by making the process continually negotiated when old perceptions are in conflict with new ones.

Despite the very open, participatory nature of Second Life, virtual memorials still adhere to the social structures of traditional memorials and producers make an active effort to maintain the sacred space produced by these memorials. In the future, perhaps

traditional memorial forms will continue to appear in virtual worlds but will continually be negotiated by the social interactions that may erode the existing social structures occurring over time. Also, the unique forms of controlled interactivity within virtual worlds could influence traditional physical memorials as well to create spaces that change as public opinion about tragedies changes. Regardless, virtual memorials are powerful expressions of mourning that enable people to connect and collectively grieve together over public tragedy which shakes the very foundation of national identity. As we have seen, these spaces have the powerful ability to enable communities to be public about what has often been their private grief.

Chapter 3:

Forward, Together, Forward: Mourning on Social Networking Sites

When Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold committed suicide after killing thirteen of their schoolmates and teachers at Columbine High School in 1999, the surrounding community bonded together in a nearby space set aside for mourning. This spontaneous shrine site not only became a site for visitors to reflect upon loss and leave tokens of remembrance but also a site “with stakes in larger cultural struggles over national collective identity.” (Doss, 2002, p. 69) Two of the most recent school shootings at the time of this writing are the 2007 Virginia Tech (VT) massacre and the 2008 Northern Illinois University (NIU) shooting - both have complicated digital media production and cultural issues surrounding the events. After the VT massacre, NBC News received what they dubbed the “multimedia manifesto” from the shooter Seung-Hui Cho, which contained digital photographs, video and PDF documents explaining Cho’s motivations for the shooting. In the meantime, social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace erupted with memorial groups and profiles. These rituals and practices informed a similar proliferation of memorial spaces within social networking sites after the NIU shootings in 2008. Two important groups were the “Pray for Northern Illinois University

Students and Families” group on Facebook and the “NIU Safelist and Support” MySpace page. From within these social networking sites, a language for mourning emerged and began to establish standards for how these online communities would approach mourning. In addition, these social networking memorial sites serve as activist media, making the public the main actor in memorialization and enabling them to address complex social issues surrounding public tragedy.

After the VT shootings in 2007, many members of social networking sites changed their profile pictures to VT memorial ribbons, in honor of the victims of the shooting. The ribbon often appeared in either black or maroon, symbolizing mourning for the dead or support for the VT community. When the shootings at NIU took place on February 14, 2008, NIU memorial ribbons similarly became widespread on Facebook and MySpace. Being a “Huskie,” the school’s mascot, was not only a meaningful label for NIU students, faculty and staff, but also for the extended community that radiated out from NIU memorial groups and the friends and families of the victims.

This memetic, shared visual language of the two tragedies signals generally how we are approaching mourning online. As Lev Manovich notes in *The Language of New Media*, there are five qualities to new media, which set it apart from “old” media and give it the “potential to change existing cultural languages” or “to leave culture as it is.” (2001, p. 19). These five qualities, numerical representation, modularity, automation, variability, and transcoding all enable the memorial ribbon image to be easily propagated. Its digitality and the modular composition (the ribbon and university logo) allows users to copy, use and recreate this iconic image that has come to represent a community in

mourning. Not only did this image propagate through digital channels from social networking sites to official NIU websites, but also infiltrated physical spaces appearing on banners at memorial services, and on objects left at the spontaneous shrine and message boards on campus.

After both the VT and NIU shooting the ribbon was accompanied with a slogan emphasizing solidarity and support among mourners and academic institutions. For VT, the slogans “Today, we are all Hokies” and “We are Virginia Tech” and for NIU, “Today, we are all Huskies,” “No one messes with a Huskie,” and “Forward, Together Forward” became mantras signaling the tightening of a community. This community was not only the students, faculty, staff and alumni of the universities, but other members of the academic community and beyond. This is symbolized in the posting of media to the largest Facebook memorial group “Pray for Northern Illinois University Students and Families.” The group featured media made by mourners, a digital equivalent of the items left at roadside memorials and spontaneous shrine sites. Media offerings included not only documentation of the spontaneous shrines at NIU, of the six crosses representing the shooter and victims, but also user-created images of solidarity and support. Most of these images are composed of the NIU memorial ribbon and another university’s logo and the words “Today, we are all Huskies.” Collective folk responses such as these have been common at sites of mass tragedy; for example, teddy bears were a popular theme at the Oklahoma City National Memorial and dog tags were often left at the Vietnam Veterans memorial.

These images are reminiscent of another strategy employed by businesses and corporations: branding. Branding emerged during the industrial revolution as a way of letting consumers know that particular items all came from the same company. Later, branding became a way for companies and corporations not only to sell products but also to sell a lifestyle or corporate “personality”. (Klein 1999) This has larger implications for the branding of online mourning. The NIU memorial ribbon and slogans signal a solidarity, a lifestyle, a common belief in the ability of the community to move past this public tragedy. This branding allows people to opt into the online mourning community, express grief and their authenticity in experiencing loss. This use of branding signals an adoption of corporate language, which has quietly leaked into the folk culture of mourning. This makes mourning a culture that can be commodified, bought into and sold to the public – rather than an organic, networked, and folk response.

This is a dangerous application of branding that at the same time enables powerful resolution of survivor guilt. Because MySpace and Facebook are in themselves corporate entities, who enable this type of grassroots organization and branding development, they exert great power over their online communities. Facebook’s Beacon application and Social Ads are known for using user profile data to target unknowing users into opting into becoming social advertisers. This type of advertising enables Facebook’s corporate members to target specific social groups - meaning it is possible to target members of the Facebook community in mourning. As Naomi Klein notes in her book *No Logo*, corporations with a large market share have the power to censor what products and thus what information is allowed within their privatized space. (1999) MySpace has been

notorious for this type of censorship. In 2006, the New York Times noted MySpace's blockage of social media competitor, YouTube, being referenced or used on profiles. (Bosman, 2006) Independent bloggers and media outlets have been documenting similar practices both on Facebook and MySpace. (Watson & Jones, 2006; Cashmore, 2006; FreeMySpace.com) The lurking danger within social media is the ability of these corporate entities to censor ideas that are not in line with their philosophy, projected lifestyles and beliefs. While the censorship of memorial groups from these social networking sites has not appeared yet, the community branding of memorialization makes it an easy target for censorship. Even more interesting is that branding has become a language accepted by folk, community-driven responses despite their organic, non-hierarchical structures that are unlike the structure of corporations.

The potential for censorship of these folk memorial expressions is not only present on social networking sites, but also from larger entities involved in public tragedy. Soon after the shootings on February 14, 2008, a Facebook group entitled "NIU T-shirts to Support NIU Memorial Fund" was linked to from the memorial group "Pray for Northern Illinois University Students and Families." The shirts the group tried to sell featured the NIU memorial ribbon and were also intended to raise funds for a physical memorial to be built. A few members of the "Pray for Northern Illinois University Students and Families" group posted questions asking about how legitimate these fundraising efforts were and the group's administrator encouraged members to join and noted that "All proceeds will be donated." Soon after the announcement of the memorial shirts, the university issued a policy that disallowed any memorial items to be sold, even in any

university bookstores. Michael Malone, the university's Vice President of University Advancement and Development, stated "We don't want to do anything to be seen as upsetting those involved. No one wants to be seen as capitalizing on this tragedy." (Thomas, 2008) This has larger implications for the NIU memorial ribbon, which often features the logo of the university or at least some visual reference to NIU. While the university has not requested social networking site users remove the image from their profiles and groups, the moratorium on the use of the image in fundraising materials makes this image a commodity owned and controlled by the university - not the community that has propagated this memorial meme. Its control of this commodity also has had an influence on how the community will mourn, effectively shutting out the mass production of objects with the NIU memorial ribbon on them.

In this digital environment where copying and pasting is a regular act of creation, the grief and mourning process for people on the fringe of the NIU community becomes easier to address. Rituals such as these not only show solidarity and the bonding of a community, but also allow mourners to "do something," and to show "that we have symbolic mastery over events." (Doka, 2003a, p. 180) Being public about one's guilt or mourning has always been an important part of moving forward after a loss. Memorial practices such as funeral processions, marking of gravesites, leaving objects at sites of public tragedy, and public testimony are ways for mourners to participate publicly in moving forward. The act of memorialization is the first step in a form of forgetting and traditional memorial practices discourage engaging with the issues of the past and remembering. (Gillis, 1994) In mourning on social networking sites after the NIU

shootings, joining in the online visual culture of mourning appears to play an important role in dealing with survivor guilt, giving internet users a simple way to express their grief. Many of the Facebook and MySpace users who changed their profile pictures after the shootings were not part of the immediate NIU community. These “survivors” nonetheless needed a ritual for expressing their mourning to their social networks and adopting the NIU memorial ribbon as a symbol of that mourning was simple, expressive and fitting for a community entrenched in a very horrific and public event. This need to “do something” also has caused the creation of memorial groups as ritual. “Pray for Northern Illinois University Students and Families” group administrator, Jim Combs states “it's not really support for me; its support for them: the fact that I'm telling them, there are other people out there who care...it's a sense of satisfaction that I'm actually doing something to help these people in their greatest time of need.” (J. Combs, personal communication, March 8, 2008)

Online, these responses are transitory and ephemeral perhaps only responding to the immediate needs of the community. For example, out of a sampling of six Facebook and MySpace users who had changed their profile pictures to the NIU memorial ribbon, three had changed their profile pictures back to non-memorial related images within a week of the event. Posting on the discussion board also points to these social networking memorial groups being a transitory space, serving a purpose for those who need it within a particular span of time. Facebook user Shanna S. posted to a discussion about the membership of “Pray for Northern Illinois University Students and Families”:

Yes, I am one of the people who chose to leave a VA Tech group. It doesn't mean we're not still thinking about it, but

we just don't need to talk about it everyday. This just happened and I'm probably going to be here a while again, but I don't know if I'll be here forever. It doesn't mean I won't remember it forever though. I won't forget. I'll always support the memory of the people who died in these things.³

Facebook group administrator Jim Combs, when asked how he sees the group functioning in three years, responded:

it might last that long on Facebook, but I think the attention is going to die down quite a bit over that period of time. Because there are other groups that are forming out there, and they're not just a support group, there are several others doing fundraisers, there's another one selling t-shirts, there's another one that I joined that is selling the wristbands and all of the proceeds are going to go to the families of the victims. So, I feel that those groups are going to last a little longer than mine will, but eventually the attention on all these groups is going to die down. And the same thing happened with Virginia Tech groups, people are still a part of the groups but they don't actually do anything there. (J. Combs, personal communication, March 8, 2008)

It seems that all of these groups will last as long as the mourning community needs them and then slowly disperse into more activist-oriented groups.

Public tragedies “shatter our assumptions, that is, our underlying model of a safe, meaningful, and benevolent world.” (Doka, 2003b, p. 4) What happens after public tragedies like the shooting at NIU is that the public begins to question the hegemonic standard or what is taken to be natural, normal or dominant in culture. School shootings, despite their frequent occurrence in the past ten years, still shake the foundation of American identity and the institution of education. The level of response after each

3 Many of the discussions on Facebook have been deleted by moderators. Please refer to the appendices for screenshots and other documentation of the online discussions if no citation is provided.

shooting has escalated for communities, school administrators and news media due to the unexpected nature of the shootings, many times creating dialogue around complex issues.

Facebook and MySpace, icons of today's digitally-oriented youth culture, have become spaces with the potential for changing hegemonic beliefs. Facebook originated as a social networking tool for college students at Harvard University to connect and get to know each other. Later, the tool expanded to other academic institutions and in 2006, anyone with an email address was allowed to create an account. Perhaps because of Facebook's history as a college-oriented web site, it often becomes a rallying point for issues that college students are concerned with. Facebook has become an intermediary for college students, allowing them to connect regardless of academic affiliation.

Sociologist Émile Durkheim viewed “intermediary institutions, located between the individual and the state, as capable to act as an effective buffer against political domination and social fragmentation.” (Misztal, 2003, p.130)

The Facebook group “Pray for Northern Illinois University Students and Families” became a portal, which mediated interactions between mourners, students, NIU's administration, media outlets, and activists. After most school shootings, debates about gun control, mental health, school responsibility and memorial practices arise and are well documented by media outlets. Many times there is no open forum for discussion among the public about these issues, and dialogue is mediated through news media, the school and afterward by scholars. Immediately after the shooting, the public turned to Facebook as a space to mourn, get news and engage in dialogue about these complex issues. As a result, groups like “Pray for Northern Illinois University Students and

Families” performed less as a hub for mourners and more as a space for discussion about these issues.

The most complex and immediate issue to arise within the social networking sites’ communities was the planned picketing of vigils and funerals by the Westboro Baptist Church (WBC). The church is notorious for picketing the funerals of Iraq war veterans, homosexual hate crime victims, and many vigils and memorials in response to violent public tragedy. Members and founder Fred Phelps claim that God is angry with the moral state of America and violent events such as school shootings are “adumbrations of God’s fierce wrath against a nation that lives in callous disobedience to His commandments.” (Westboro Baptist Church, “God Sent The Shooter”, n.d.) Soon after the events at both VT and NIU, the Westboro Baptist Church announced they would picket all funerals, memorials and vigils. While VT was able to keep members of the church off campus and away from the funerals of victims, NIU experienced an ongoing battle with the church through online media production which was disseminated through Facebook and MySpace.

On February 14, immediately after news of the shooting, WBC sent out a press release stating “Thank God for the Shooter at Northern Illinois Univ. God sent the Shooter. In His Wrath & Vengeance Against an Ungrateful Nation that has Forsaken Him & Embraced Filthy Fags.” (Westboro Baptist Church, 2008) The church also posted to its website, godhatesfags.com, their picketing schedule including the funerals of the NIU shooting victims and other memorial services. The memorial groups of Facebook and MySpace both had a high level of response to this press release. On Facebook, there was

an outcry for a counter-protest in hopes of visually blocking the church's members at funerals and memorials. One user, Marion Dizwonnik, created a coalition named Take a Stand, which would counter-protest and help keep the church's members off campus. His messages were posted to both Facebook and MySpace groups as well as an antagonistic video hosted on YouTube stating "in order to be removed from our society, you will be struck down." (NIUHonor, 2008) Another Facebook user, Rich Peters III, "J.R." posted a video aimed at the WBC asking "If someone happened to walk into your church's Sunday morning services with a couple of semi-automatic weapons and killed a couple of your members, would you protest those people's funerals as well?" (richprince78, 2008) Other users, particularly on Facebook, engaged in debate over how to best address WBC's protests. Many felt that the coalition Take a Stand was too forceful and their belief in taking violent action if necessary was too extreme. Other similar groups formed, including the Black Guard who utilized Facebook's groups application to gather a member base.

In general, there was intense debate on how to deal with WBC protesters on the discussion boards of the Facebook groups and a short lived debate in the comments of the MySpace memorial profile page. Administrators of both Facebook and MySpace seemed to have a difficult time negotiating the role of the group or page as a memorial space and a space for debate about WBC. The MySpace page "NIU Safelist and Support," which had many comments about the WBC soon removed all the comments related and later re-posted those comments. While no debate among the friends of the memorial MySpace page occurred, the MySpace group "Protect NIU from Kansas Westboro Baptist Church"

only had a small amount of discussion with seven discussion topics and nineteen posts. Comparatively, the Facebook group “Pray for Northern Illinois University Students and Families” had four discussion topics and ninety-six posts as of March 6, 2008. Also, the Facebook count does not include multiple discussion topics that were deleted by administrators in order to focus the discussion of WBC’s protest into one topic. Administratively, it was hard to handle the amount of debate on the Facebook group's discussion boards:

it was a couple days after the group had started, about half the topics were about the WBC... I ultimately decided that I was going to create one official thread for talking about the WBC and I said this is going to be the only place to discuss that, any news you have, and I also said in there that if there are any other threads about this, I am going to delete them because there's too much to keep track of. (J. Combs, personal communication, March 8, 2008)

In addition to organizing counter-protests, the mourning community used the Facebook discussion boards to engage in dialogue about the proper way to memorialize the shooting. The topic receiving a large amount attention within the Facebook group “Pray for Northern Illinois University Students and Families” is “6 Crosses?” The spontaneous shrine that had been erected on campus featured six crosses, with five bearing the names of the victims and one that was blank. Debate on the discussion board ranged from what the meaning of the sixth cross was to whether or not the shooter, Steve Kazmierczak, deserved to be memorialized with a cross. Similar discussions have erupted at other school shooting spontaneous shrine sites such as the one at Columbine High School; however, these often were not civil conversations but explosive interactions. For example, at Columbine a father violently removed the two crosses

representing Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris. (Doss, 2002) This dialogue served as a form of activist media, challenging the common belief that those who kill themselves after carrying out school shootings are evil people who do not deserve to be memorialized. One user changed his mind by participating in the discussion stating “i had to wrestle with myself on this issue after the VT massacre...and i have to say that yes, the shooter should have a cross...”

Other memorial practices were also discussed. Soon after the NIU administration and Illinois state government announced that Cole Hall would be demolished and a new building, Memorial Hall, would be erected in its place costing 40 million dollars, dialogue about the proper way to memorialize the event began. Many understood the need to erase such a horrific site from the landscape of the university. Kenneth E. Foote (1997) notes that obliteration is a common response to events that are horrific, unexpected and involve mass murder. While at first, this act seems to fall into another category Foote outlines, sanctification, with the dedication of a new space, it signifies a key component of obliteration: the need to forget. Students recognized the attempt to erase the events and felt that moving forward and forgetting were not the best ways to address the creation of a memorial. Utilizing Facebook, the students developed a petition for the administration to reconsider its plans (Save Cole Hall, 2008). As a result, the administration has put its plans on hold and will form a committee of students, faculty, alumni, staff and effected families to decide the best possible memorial that represents the needs of the community. (Brunell, 2008)

Social networks when dealing with collective mourning experience rituals that create segregation and aggregation simultaneously. (Rubin, 1990) While each person deals with death personally seeking help from psychiatrists, clergy, and other individual types of support, social networks also aggregate through rituals like funerals, vigils and other public mourning experiences. What is unique about the mourning occurring on Facebook and MySpace is that this process is accurately recorded, and one can follow this process. Members of these social networkings sites connect by expressing personal experiences and segregating themselves on political beliefs in regards to memorialization and debate but at the same time aggregate by joining together in an emerging mourning ritual mediated through digital technologies.

Harriet Senie notes in her article “Mourning in Protest: Spontaneous Memorials and the Sacralization of Public Space” that because of the privatization of culture by technologies such a as television and the Internet “many of us feel an overwhelming need to make real what is increasingly mediated - to recapture the here and now. To stand on the ground where something happened is to feel the reality of the event - to feel meaningfully linked to others and to history.” (2006, p. 45) To some degree, Senie is correct - when these events are mediated by the mass media the public reaches out and tries to connect. This is often through donating money, collecting goods, making a pilgrimage, leaving an object at the physical site, etc. We experience mourning as an emotion to act upon: we need to take action and do something. However, new technologies are not making mourning private on the Internet where people are finding online publics like Facebook and MySpace to connect with other mourners without

actually interacting in a physical space. They are making "real" what is increasingly mediated - but through the means of mediation. Changing profile pictures, joining mourning groups, and all the other new media production around the tragedy signals that the public is using the mediating technologies to become meaningfully linked to one another and to the history of this event.

What emerged in these two memorial spaces within social networking sites was not only a space for mourning and connecting with community but also a space where activism was key in dialogue among users. These spaces within social networking sites served not only memorial purposes but also allowed users to advance specific agendas and organize around these agendas. Graham Meikle, author of *Future Active*, outlines how early Internet activism was “a grassroots, bottom-up approach to communication and action.” (2002, p. 14) Meikle later discusses how when corporations began to utilize the Internet, it became more closed and limiting in its approach to information and choice. However, we are beginning to see another shift, which is something in between the two: the establishment of corporate controlled publics that encourage mediated rhizomatic communication. These memorial spaces on social networking sites represent this shift and turn the practice of memorialization into a participatory function, which in itself is a form of media activism challenging the structure of memorial power. Whereas public memorialization was something controlled by the government or other powerful institutions by placing monuments in public space, we have seen a networked response. Similar to the creation of spontaneous shrines, the public is turning to online spaces to mourn collectively; however, unlike spontaneous shrines, these online spaces turn into

launching points for activism and discussion of complex issues. These spaces also created unique activist digital rituals for those impacted to participate in, thus allowing them to create a culture around mourning. Much more inspiring is that that mourners are “envision[ing] a world where all of us can participate in the creation and circulation of central cultural myths.” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 256) As demonstrated through the memorial practices on social networking sites, online mourning communities have power to shape the beliefs and ideas around cultural phenomena.

Conclusion

When my investigation into digital memorialization began, I wanted to answer the following questions:

- Can digital memorialization democratize the memorialization process? Will it shift the power of memorialization to a wider range of people? By doing so, can they democratize collective memory?
- Are digital memorial producers concerned about permanence? Do digital memorials need to be ever-lasting or can they be temporal?
- Do digital digital memorials correlate to traditional memorial practices?
- How can mourning, a very private, solemn and personal experience be shared, created and carried out in digital spaces that are, for the most, part out of the control of users? How does participatory culture change/maintain issues of power, freedom of speech, and alternative views of tragedy?
- How do digital memorials function as activist media?

To conclude, I will answer these questions based on my observations within social networking sites, video sharing sites, and virtual worlds.

Democratization of memorialization and collective memory

All of the memorials analyzed within my thesis enabled many people to contribute to the way the memorial existed. The membership of the Facebook group “Pray for Northern Illinois University Students and Families” reached over 150,000 members in

just a week, and the amount of discussion and media posting was not just from students at NIU, but also other universities around the globe. The YouTube video memorials became meta-texts, incorporating the views of video creators with those of commenters, which established a complex memory of Hurricane Katrina. Iraqmemorial.org enabled families and friends to create a more personal experience of the casualties in the Iraq War. In Second Life, while the virtual memorials were tightly controlled and produced by a select few, there was some opportunities for visitors to write their own memories into the memorial through guestbooks and by leaving objects. In general, all of these spaces provided some sort of opportunity for the public to add their voices to the memorial and shape it in some way. These spaces each created a democratic process of mourning; however, some were more liberal in that process than others. The YouTube memorials were the most democratizing, as there was no moderation present in determining, which content could be present. At the other end of the spectrum would be Iraqmemorial.org and the virtual memorials in Second Life, which both require some sort of approval before content or an object can appear within these spaces. The groups on Facebook and MySpace balanced the concern for appropriateness and democratic participation and responded to the changing needs of its member base. Overall, it appears that all of these examples had some a typ of mediated democratizing influence on memorialization.

Through this plurality of voices, we see a more inclusive collective memory forming. As many traditional memorials do, all of these serve as documentation of the complicated relationships the public has to tragedy. The digital memorials have less of a unified message whereas the traditional memorials promote one particular way of

viewing tragedy. Collective memory formed by digital memorials that enable the public to contribute to their form and becomes a “source of solidarity” (Misztal, 2003, p. 133) because as Durkheim suggested a plurality of voices allows for the truth to emerge out of diversity and discourse. Halbwachs would agree that these memorials develop a more democratic collective memory as well because it is continually rewritten by and embedded into the consciousness of a group. (Bodnar, 1992)

Permanence vs. Temporality

For many of the digital memorials I examined permanence was a concern. When I interviewed Jim Combs about the NIU Facebook group, he mentioned that he was not concerned with the long term permanence of the group. He noted that many members of the group had already moved on to other, more specific, goal-driven groups and were using those as support groups. (J. Combs, personal communication, March 8, 2008) He saw his group as a part of the process of mourning, but not something that would active over a long period of time. The Second Life citizens, Winifried Ferraris and Sundra Petrov who own the parcel containing September 11th Memorial have the goal of keeping it permanent. (Au, 2007) A kiosk asks visitors to donate money to the a fund to pay for the parcel, as most residents in Second Life pay a monthly fee to own land. So far, they have been successful in paying the monthly fee and seem highly motivated to have it exist as long as possible. Milosun Czervik noted on his blog that he wondered how long the memorial would last; but, the group of maintainers and the real estate company that owns the land are extremely dedicated to keeping the memorial present in Second Life. During my research on YouTube video memorials, one memorial was removed by the

video creator for unknown reasons. It seems that YouTube is a lasting institution, as it has become a major player in popular culture. There is a possibility that these video memorials could be taken down for violating copyright law, as all of them utilize copyrighted material most likely without permission. In general, nonetheless, if the video creators decide to leave their memorials on YouTube, they will be very permanent pieces dedicated to the memory of Hurricane Katrina. Iraqmemorial.org also seems to be confident in its longevity, as it tells its users that there is no deadline for submitting a video, and they would like to have a video for every soldier lost.

Depending on the cost, needs of the social network, and determination of memorial producers and maintainers these memorials could exist for long periods of time. It appears that permanence depends heavily on the form or space the memorial exists in, whether or not it is expensive to maintain, and if there is a support group to provide long term maintenance.

Relationship to traditional memorials

Before I started investigating digital memorials in depth, they appeared to be radical departure from traditional forms of memorialization. Many of these memorials do depart from the typical power structures embedded in memorials, but most maintain some form of a power structure. The virtual memorials in Second Life are very similar to the the visual forms of traditional memorials but function slightly different. While the maintainers of the memorial sites do exert much control over visitors, they are responsive to the needs of society. Both memorials continually negotiate what level of interaction

from visitors is appropriate, taking into consideration the expectations from the Second Life community and acceptable behavior at memorial sites.

Both the memorials on social networking sites and video sharing sites mimic spontaneous shrines but they operate very differently by taking on overt political statements from contributing media creators. The discussion boards and the comments on YouTube videos are prime examples of how digital memorials depart from traditional memorial formats by opening dialogue about public tragedy, often allowing dissenting views to be exposed. It is unlikely that this type of expression would be allowed in a traditional memorial format.

All digital memorials increase access to memorial spaces and allow people to access these sites of mourning quickly and efficiently. Unfortunately, for these memorials to be truly democratic and reach everyone, the issue of the digital divide must be resolved. Without equal access, collective memory will never truly be democratic and these digital spaces will only serve a particular group of people

Shared experiences, power, and freedom of speech

Mourning has been a very private practice regulated to private spaces (Doss, 2002); however, recently we have seen a shift from private to public mourning perhaps as public tragedies in American shake the very foundations of our national identity. Erica Doss views spontaneous shrines as an example of this shift, and digital memorials follow. Both of these practices enable the processes of segregation and aggregation that Nissan Rubin sees as important to the process of mourning for social networks. Social media has

been key in promoting this process, as it allows Internet users to share information through private and public communication channels.

Power has been central to my analysis of digital memorials as there are many different players involved in the creation, maintenance and general existence of digital memorials. Memorial producers often wield the most power over digital memorial spaces because they have access to tools to limit or expand the interaction visitors can have with the memorial space. Visitors also have influence on these spaces when given the ability to contribute, often providing a plurality of views regarding the tragedy, how it should be memorialized and contributing personal stories. While censorship by companies that sponsor the spaces such as Facebook, YouTube and MySpace has not occurred, it is possible that they could impose their power in the future by regulating the use of copyrighted material and censoring dissenting views. What is unusual about digital memorials is that the ways that these powers play out are well documented within the spaces.

While most of the time, freedom of speech is upheld inside digital memorial spaces but is negotiated by social structures. This was apparent in the virtual memorials, and on Facebook but is less apparent on YouTube and Iraqmemorial.org. While the Brave New Foundation has the ability to censor videos from families and friends, most viewers would not know unless this censorship became public. YouTube has a voting system which allows users to mark content only as inappropriate, spam, or to give points to better comments and subtract them from less useful comments. Even though this enables

the community approved comments to have higher visibility, there seems to be rarely any removal of comments that could be deemed inappropriate.

Digital memorials as activist media

Many of the memorials I have examined take on some sort of political issue to debate and make public. The NIU Facebook group's discussions over Cole Hall and the Westboro Baptist Church are prime examples of this: the NIU community used Facebook to organize and decide what was the proper way to address both issues. Many of the YouTube memorials make political statements about the treatment of Katrina victims and the actions of government officials. Iraqmemorial.org in itself does not make an overt political statement, but Robert Greenwald, who is a highly visible member of Brave New Foundation, has openly critiqued the war for the way in which it benefits corporations. (Greenwald, 2006) It appears that digital memorials allow for dissenting views to be incorporated into their spaces, rather than taking an uncritical approach to public tragedy.

All of the digital memorials examined challenged the typical structures of collective memory-making through memorialization. Activist media, as I defined earlier based upon John Downing's definition of radical media, challenges hegemonic ideologies and agenda setting. These digital memorials represent a new method of memorialization that capitalizes on vernacular culture rather than official culture and benefits from this plurality of voices. By offering the public some sort of access to shape these memorials, it produces a more democratic memory that changes with the needs of society. Such a reflexive approach has truly only been seen in the creation of spontaneous shrines, which

have only been accepted into official memorials in recent years. Digital memorials subvert the hegemonic practices of memorialization and offer an alternative method of memory-making.

Avenues for Future Inquiry

The area of digital memorialization has been explored by many artists within online spaces and through tactical media, but academic inquiry into how digital memorialization occurs, the methods memorial media producers use, and how the public responds to these spaces has been sparse. Greg Ulmer (2005) in his book *Electronic Monuments* begins an analysis of how electronic media can inform memorial practices through an exercise given to his students. The exercise consisted of the formation of a consultancy, the EmerAgency, with the goal of propagating “electracy” (the digital equivalent of literacy) through the construction and analysis of electronic monuments, which he calls “MEMorials”. Ulmer's approach is extremely useful in gaining insight to how memorial producers respond to the needs of memorial making, but lacks a close analysis of how folk culture utilizes digital media within the process of memorialization. Instead, Ulmer's book is useful for looking at how cultural critics can use the form of memorial as a tool for analysis and critique.

Ulmer does make a very poignant observation when he states “the institution most responsible for producing the rhetorical practices for digital memory is entertainment.” (2005, p. xxii). All of the memorials analyzed in this paper exist within spaces that were meant for entertainment, but have much investment in connecting people. New media in general has been a powerful tool for memory making and for establishing connections between people; but perhaps is has been most powerful in shaping our expectations with

memory. In a society that relies on cell phones to store phone numbers, hard drives to store massive amounts of information and the Internet to better facilitate learning and daily tasks, the task of memorization has been increasingly allocated to technologies. It is not surprising then that our media produced by folk culture and the entertainment industry has relied on the form of testimony and representations of “real” moments. Two examples of the adoption of techniques of memorialization exist in reality television shows and the movie *Cloverfield*, which both use video testimonials to retell memory. Similar to vlogging, the participants in reality television shows often give testimonials about their experience and relationships to others in on the show. When a participant is voted off the show, the testimonials are usually somber and participants usually speak as if the missing person is gone forever. *Cloverfield*, a modern day monster film, utilizes the form of testimonial throughout the movie, as it is told from the perspective of a person with a digital video recorder. The ending of the movie portrays the final moments of two characters speaking into the camera about the monster that has attacked New York City and who they are. These are moment of digital memorialization that have crept seemingly unnoticed by cultural critics and could benefit from analysis.

New memorials in physical space also could benefit from incorporating elements of digital memorialization and bridge the gap between traditional structures of power and the emerging folk expressions within digital memorialization. Maya Lin has recently announced a new memorial to endangered and extinct species that will utilize digital components to educate the public and allow them to interact with the memorial space in new ways. (O'Connor, 2008) Lin's reshaping of the memorial landscape into spaces for

activist art will be very overt in this memorial, rather than subverted and less obvious as her work on the Vietnam Veterans memorial. Perhaps this memorial will speak to a new method of memorialization that utilizes digital media and activist tactics to fully incorporate activist methodologies into the memorialization process. Future memorials will certainly need to take into account digital technologies, participatory culture and the ways the public can reshape collective memory through the memorialization process.

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Virtual Memorial Sites in Second Life

Benazir Bhutto Memorial: <http://slurl.com/secondlife/Wells/147/196/60>

September 11th Memorial:

<http://slurl.com/secondlife/World%20Trade%20Center/175/85/26>

Vietnam Veterans Memorial: <http://slurl.com/secondlife/The%20Wall/36/30/24>

Virginia Tech Memorial: <http://slurl.com/secondlife/Memorial%20Park/130/113/25>

Appendices

For a comprehensive archive of documentation and other related material, please visit http://tastyshebert.com/wiki/index.php?title=Related_Material

Appendix A: Interview Materials

Informed Consent Form

Digital Memorialization: Collective Memory, Tragedy, and Participatory Spaces

You are invited to participate in a study that will gather information about producers of digital memorial media and their practices. The study is conducted by Sara Hebert. Results will be used to Sara Hebert's master's thesis within the Digital Media Studies Program at the University of Denver. Sara Hebert can be reached at (hebert.sara@gmail.com). This project is supervised by her thesis advisor, Dr. Adrienne Russell, Mass Communications and Journalism Studies: Digital Media Studies, University of Denver, Denver, CO 80208, (303-871-7786, Adrienne.Russell@du.edu).

Participation in this study should take about 30 minutes of your time. Participation will involve responding to approximately 10-15 questions about your participation in digital memorial media creation, oversight, or virtual community involvement. Participation in this project is strictly voluntary. The risks associated with this project are minimal. If, however, you experience discomfort you may discontinue the interview at any time. We respect your right to choose not to answer any questions that may make you feel uncomfortable. Refusal to participate or withdrawal from participation will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Your responses will be identified by your user or avatar name associated with the digital memorial examined and only the information you have provided through this media (e.g, your Facebook account, blog, website, etc.) will be used to identify you. This is done to protect the confidentiality of your responses. Your responses will appear in Sara Hebert's completed master's thesis in any of its published forms and may also appear on her research blog (<http://hewlettsdaughter.blogspot.com>). However, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena. Although no questions in this interview address it, we are required by law to tell you that if information is revealed concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse and neglect, it is required by law that this be reported to the proper authorities.

If you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the interview, please contact Dennis Wittmer, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-2431, or Sylk Sotto-Santiago, Office of Sponsored Programs at 303-871-4052 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121. You may keep this page for your records. Please either sign and return this consent form to Sara Hebert at hebert.sara@gmail.com or respond back with an email state you have read, understand and have received this consent form, and you agree to participate in an interview. If you do not understand any part of the above statement, please ask the researcher any questions you have.

I have read and understood the foregoing descriptions of the study. I have asked for and received a satisfactory explanation of any language that I did not fully understand. I agree to participate in this study, and I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time. I have received a copy of this consent form.

This study was approved by the University of Denver's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research on March 27, 2008.

Signature _____ Date _____

_____ I would like a summary of the results of this study to be mailed to me at the following postal or e-mail address:

Transcribed interview with Jim Combs, Group Administrator of the Facebook group “ Pray for Northern Illinois University Students and Families”

I have read a little bit of the news stories you were interviewed and quoted in and I have sense of who you are and why you started it, and I kinda just want to hear want to hear in your words why did you choose Facebook for a group for outreach and what were some of the decisions that influenced that.

Ok, um, for putting it on Facebook, Facebook is really the only that I have, you know. I prefer not to use Myspace because I feel its a little too personal, and too easy to hack into and Facebook is a little more secure with that. Group-wise, I choose to start it there as kind of a support group because I feel like with college students they turn to Facebook first instead of you know, they'll go to the news, they might turn on the tv or something and then like the next thing they turn to is the Facebook and see if anything is going on there. So I figured, ok, if people are going to be turning there, I might as well start a Facebook group, just start a support group so, I think I started it about an hour and half after the initial shooting and I think it was about 4:30 that I started it and uh I invited everybody that I knew. With every group, its a little slow to start out with, so I figure within 10 minutes I only had like 15 members so I logged out and came back a couple hours later to find out there were over five thousand people so I said ok i better start keeping this updated so around 9 o clock of that evening it had just about 10 thousand members and that was when I was first contacted, and that was by the Chicago Tribune by a reporter that wanted to get my end of things you know the same thing first how why I start it and how did I handle things so I went to that interview and it took about 10 minutes or so and then overnight the group grew even more to I think I woke up the next morning 8 or 9 oclock to 30 or 40000 members. It became my priority to keep it clean because alot of people that joined the group when they heard about what happened. Many people would post things that were inappropriate like links to site that were about dating, you know, pornography, and I just couldn't have that. I think it took several hours to get everything cleaned up and once I got it cleaned up, everything got dirty again and it got the point where I had to keep on it to keep it clean and for awhile there since I had been so many times by private inbox messages it got to the point where I was blocked from using the inbox message for 2 days. Yeah, because I had sent out so many responses to all these messages I was getting. And it got to the point where I felt like this was too much fro one person to handle, so I tried adding a few more admins, but because the group was growing so fast, the Facebook wasn't able to to keep up with it, so I wasn't able to add anyone for at least 2 weeks. Now, I've taken care of that. Its now to the point where I have 5 other people helping me. They're all listed as admins on the group. I've

sort of assigned, if you will, certain parts of the group for them each to monitor and keep clean so it really lightens up that workload too.

Can you tell me a little about the process you went through choosing admins?

Well actually one of the admins is a close friend of mine and I see him a couple times a week. Another one of the admins...another one of the admins was the admin of the Virginia Tech group. And I did look over it and he was one of the admins of the group. Then I added three more people from Northern who had befriended me on Facebook, because before I added anyone I put up a little note in one of the discussions boards saying I was looking for admins and I told them I would only choose admins who were at Northern because of all people, they would know what was appropriate or not for the group. So I choose the 3 of them, and I told them I couldn't have them contact me through Facebook because I didn't want to get blocked again. So what I did was that I had another email that I had them send me. You know who they are and why they want to help the group. So I choose 3 of them and its been alot easier for me to handle with them and they all appreciate the work that I've done with the group as well. So, its very good now.

So I've been following the group since you started it because of my research and I noticed there were alot of like, spam messages and you mentioned that being an inappropriate and you didn't want that to be part of the group. Was there any other things that were posted that you felt were insensitive or inappropriate besides the spam type posts.

Well there were a few people who would use the group and the events of that day to bash certain groups. The first person in particular was the worst because he would get on and he had several discussion boards and wall posts that were bashing the Christian religion and i had gotten the most responses, this guy must have had close to 50 inbox messages about this guy alone. And I figure I better take a look into this. I found every single one of his his discussions and deleted them all and they were all about bashing the Christian religion mainly because there is a church called the Westboro Baptist Church I think its locate din Kansas and they were saying they were going to protest the vigils and funerals and this guy was kinda looping the entire religion into that and I couldn't have that and I said that this was an isolated incident and they don't speak for all Christian s and I figured this guy was the main was doing it, so I did have to ban him from the group. And later I get an inbox message from him because I had banned him and he sent me something that wasn't exactly nice so I just reported him and blocked him. He said it was too sad the shooter didn't get me. So I figured, ok well I'll just report you and block you. So, there was that, there have been people who - there was one guy who said he saw the shooter kill himself there was another who was talking about they should demolish Cole Hall, and you know just stuff that was actually related to the shooting that wasn't that was way insensitive to talk about.

One of the things I really wanted to talk to you about was the group's response to WBC because its really interesting how your group became this hub for people to debate and discuss how to address them. And I noticed you tried to wrangle that discussion into one discussion topic. I was wonder if you could talk about how you approached that discussion and was there a point where you said I can't control this discussion...Can you tell me about your decision making process?

I decided since I think it was a couple days after the group had started, about half the topics were about the WBC and I had read them all and they were all about how the WBC was coming they're going to protest we should all stand up against them. I ultimately decided that I was going to create one official thread for talking about the WBC and I said this is going to be the only place to discuss that, any news you have and I also said in there that if there are any other threads about this, I am going to delete them because there's too much to keep track of. It seems like because the funerals are over they're not talking much about the WBC anymore. Because that was the main focus mainly, they just wanted to protest the funerals and the vigils, but because that's all over it seems its settled down a bit.

Were you personally involved in any of the counter protests?

No, I wasn't involved with any of the protesting.

I had received a message from a student at the university and he gathered up all this information about the WBC and the way he wrote this, I felt I couldn't put this better. I put the notice at the top saying I will delete other topics this will be the only discussion topic about it and then right underneath it I said I received this message to pass this along. And I copied and pasted it. Its got all this information about the WBC and their plants to protest the vigils and the funerals. And you know how to go about protesting them in a more peaceful manner just not acknowledging them, covering them up with banners and signs, and you know almost in like sending a message of love instead of hate. When i posted that up it got several hits right away, but it doesn't seem to be touched in quite awhile. I think the last posting was almost two weeks ago.

One of the more interesting things I thought about that discussion was that this group Take A Stand, and I think there was a user Marion D. For someone who was following the discussion it seemed to be the first discussion about the WBC.

That guy has been one of the people who have been constantly updating about the WBC and he was one of the ones who started many of the other topics I had to delete You know because some of them were ok some of them weren't but besides the fact it was good or not its going to be deleted. If you have something to post, post it in the other discussion board. So, you know he's been constantly updating what their plans are, what time to be there, what the students could do to you know stop the WBC. So yeah, he's been constantly on that. Telling the students to inform other students about what's going on.

I want to shift focus for a little bit and talk about how you see the group functioning over a long time. Are you worried about the longevity or permanence of the group? Do you see yourself say in 3 years still managing the group?

I honestly, I don't see...it might last that long on Facebook, but I think the attention is going to die down quite a bit over that period of time. Because there are other groups that are forming out there, and they're not just a support group, there are several others doing fundraisers, there's another one selling tshirts, there's another one that I joined that is selling the wristbands and all of the proceeds are going to go to the families of the victims. So, I feel that those groups are going to last a little longer than mine will, but eventually the attention on all these groups is going to die down. And the same thing happened with Virginia Tech groups, people are still a part of the groups but they don't actually do anything there.

I was wondering where you got your memorial ribbon image from. Do you have a sense of where it originated?

With that, the original photo for the group was just a picture of the Huskie head with NIU, that was the original photo and not long after, because I had allowed the members post photos and all those kind of things and I think within the very first few photos, there was a picture of a huskie with a ribbon. I don't know the origin of that photo or where it came about but I figured this is a bit more appropriate for the groups, and I changed it to that and its been that ever since. And like I said I don't know the origin, and I don't know who created it but I've been using it as the "face" for the group.

The group's main purpose is to provide support for people in the mourning community. Personally, for oyu, was it useful for you as someone who is transferring to NIU...what sort of support has it given you personally?

Well, I think, for me, its not really support for me, its support for them. The fact that I'm telling them, there are other people out there who care. its not support for me, its support for them, its a sense of satisfaction that I'm actually doing something to help these people in their greatest time of need. With the support, you know, I told one of the newspapers, that they don't take anything physical from the group its more of a spiritual and mental aspect in knowing that word is out there other than what's been posted on the news. There are thousands upon thousands of people around the country, even around the world that are sending their support any way they can - signing their names on walls, sending messages to the entire group or even just praying in the privacy of their own homes.

Are you aware of anyone who reacted in a strongly negative direction to the group. Do you know of anyone who said this is a violation of the sanctity of this space, etc.

I haven't come across anyone like that, but I'm pretty sure one of the other admins has because like I said one of the admins that's one of my friends has a lot more free time than I do because I'm a fulltime student and he's out of college and he has alot more time to go onto the group and every so often he will send me a little notice on facebook or a phone call saying I found someone who is saying this group is nothing but trouble, you're just doing this for publicity this is, you don't really care about the group. With the admins, I give them full privilege to use their discretion however they see fit, as long as its within reason. i told them if they see anything inappropriate remove it and if its really offensive they need to ban the person right then and there and if its something a little more questionable they should consult me first about it. From what I've heard, through the other admin there were peopel using this as an opportunity to say I wasn't doing this for what I said I was doing this for.

I know there has been controversy about memorial items being sold.

There's alot of fundraisers to keep up with and I probably don't know about it specifically. The only one I know about specifically is the wristbands, because I've been in contact with him a couple times, and the shirts, because there's been so many links and contacts about the shirts its jsut too much to keep up with.

Do you want to add anything else?

Well like i said I'm not going to stop looking over this group because the group seems to be dying down and stuff. I'm still going to take some interest in this group for some time to come, because it seems like if I stop taking care of the group things will go into turmoil, and eventually the group is going to lose its credibility and many people will leave and it might even reach someone important that says well this group has been nothing but trouble. So I'm going to keep on top of this group for as long as I can and as consistently as I can but ultimately its going to be tough like I said, I'm a fulltime student and there are other things I need to take care of but its going to be a priority for sometime to come

And you're transferring to NIU soon?

Yes, i am going to be transferring there in the fall and I'm just waiting for it to happen now, I guess.

What school do you currently go to? What is Harper?

Harper is William Raney Harper college in Palatine, IL. I'd say its a fairly big college for a community college its got about ten thousand studetns or so and it functions just like any other college and I attended Iowa State University and other than the fact that Harper doesn't have a greek community it really doesn't have a major sports team, academic wise

its almost the same except ranking in that it is a community college and Iowa State is an accredited university.

Appendix B: Video Memorials

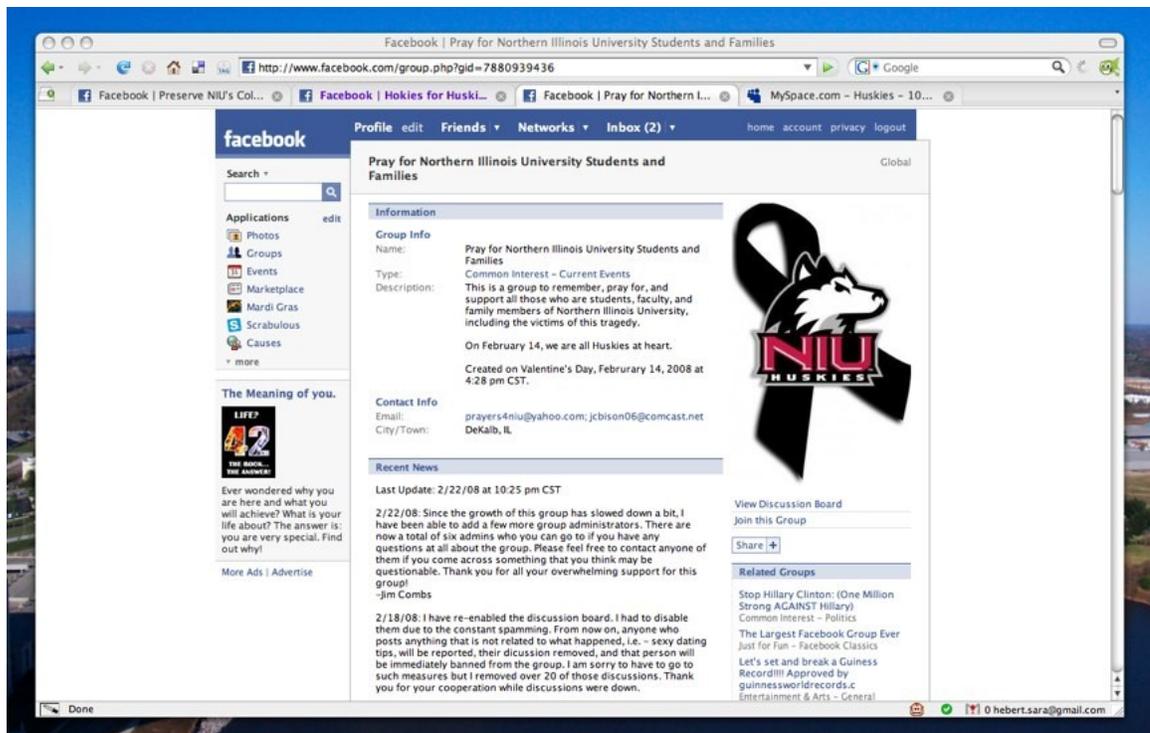
All video memorials discussed in this thesis is available at http://www.youtube.com/view_play_list?p=321C25FD1A31E4A6 or by contacting Sara Hebert via email at hebert.sara@gmail.com.

Please also refer to the bibliography for the URL's of specific videos.

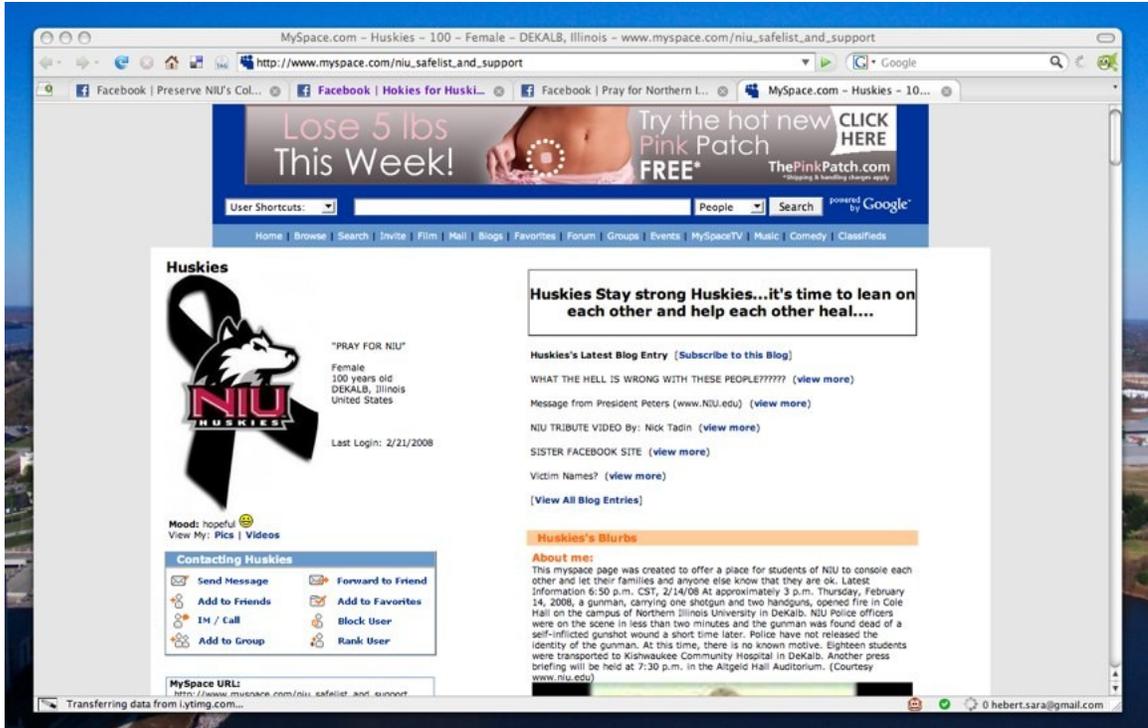
Appendix C: Documentation of the Facebook Group “Pray for Northern Illinois University Students and Families” and the MySpace Page “ NIU Safelist and Support”

More documentation can be downloaded at http://tastyshebert.com/niu/niu_doc.zip

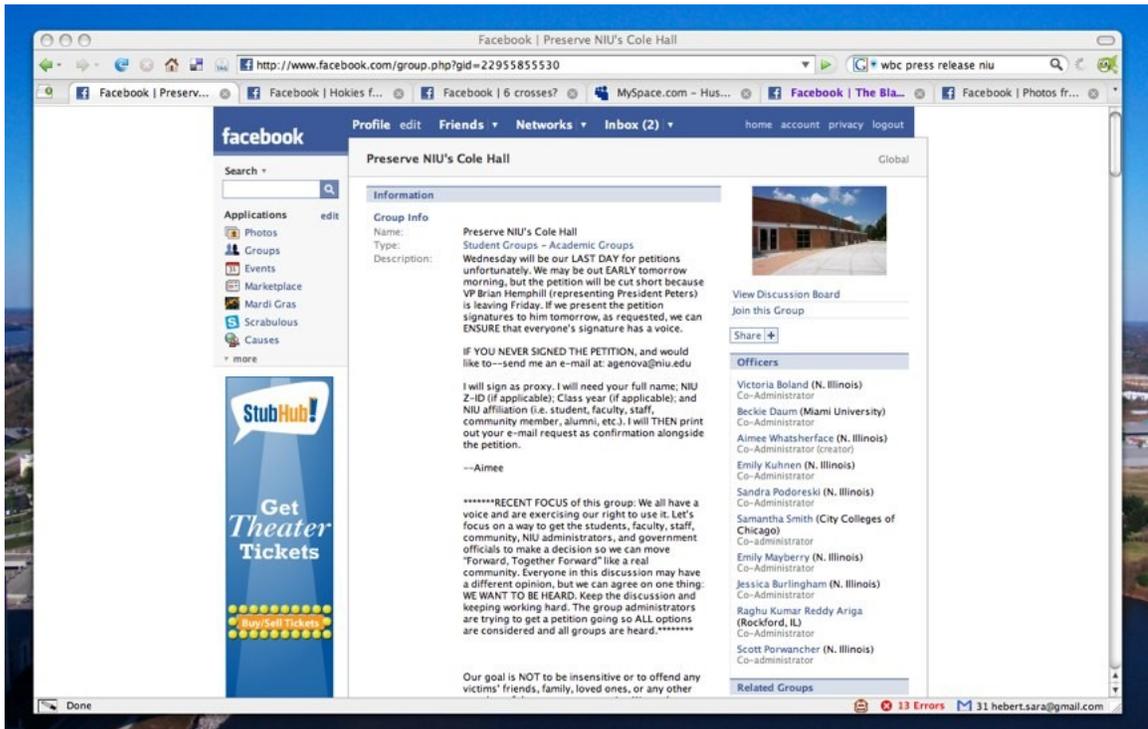
Memorial Groups on Social Networking Sites



Facebook group “Pray for Northern Illinois University Students and Families”



MySpace Page "NIU Safelist and Support"



Facebook Group "Save Cole Hall"

Content from Pray for Northern Illinois University Students and Families

Motivation for joining the group on Facebook:

 Post #6	<p>John Sorce (Chicago, IL) replied to Dave's post 5 hours ago.</p> <p>I joined this group (and several others) for information and support. In a few weeks I will probably leave it. I only intend to remain part of one group in remembrance (one in memory of my friend). It is not disrespect, but a removal of groups I am no longer active in. After a while, facebook groups tend to pile up. I pick and choose which groups I permanently remain in.</p>	Send Message Report
	 Post #4	<p>Rick Fischer (Old Dominion) replied to Dave's post 23 hours ago.</p> <p>"A lot of people join these groups because everyone else is and then take off."</p> <p>it'd be foolish of me to think that the bandwaggoning you're accusing doesn't take place. but i get the sense you're trying to place a label unfairly on a large number of people.</p> <p>this is facebook...i use this as a social site and a chance to debate. i have a tendency to leave groups that become "dead"...where there's nothing to discuss/nothing to stand for. it's not meant in any way as a sign of disrespect, but rather an understanding of moving on.</p> <p>as for your CNN complaint, they're still on my shitlist for playing politics the DAY OF the Virginia Tech shooting. so them doing something dumb and insensitive just isn't news to me. i do think it shows a sad truth of today's society though: that a shooting at a school isn't big news anymore unless people are killed. it's as if we're becomming immune to these incidents. that's not right.</p>
 Post #3		<p>Shanna S. replied to AJ's post 23 hours ago.</p> <p>Yes, I am one of the people who chose to leave a VA Tech group. It doesn't mean we're not still thinking about it, but we just don't need to talk about it every day. This just happened and I'm probably going to be here a while again, but I don't know if I'll be here forever. It doesn't mean I won't remember it forever though. I won't forget. I'll always support the memory of the people who died in these things.</p>

Debate about the six crosses on campus:

Facebook | 6 crosses?

http://du.facebook.com/topic.php?uid=7880939436&topic=4688

Facebook | 6 cross... Facebook | forever l... Facebook | Search Facebook | Videos f... NIUremembers.com...

facebook Profile edit Friends Networks Inbox (1) home account privacy logout

Search

Applications edit

- Photos
- Groups
- Events
- Marketplace
- Mardi Gras
- Scrabulous
- Causes
- more

Win Free Wedding Products

Register to win \$300 in wedding products plus \$1,000 in airfare for your honeymoon. Click here to enter. Ends March 31.

6 crosses?

Back to Pray for Northern Illinois University Students and Families

Discussion Board Topic View

Topic: 6 crosses?

Displaying all 10 posts by 9 people.

Jenn Karstens (N. Illinois) wrote 11 hours ago. [Send Message](#) [Report](#)

Post #1
1 reply

I was wondering why there are 6 crosses by the student center. Does anyone know why?

Benjamin Ghrist (John Brown) replied to Jenn's post 11 hours ago. [Send Message](#) [Report](#)

Post #2
2 replies

one for each victim. this excludes the shooter who we naturally hold a grudge against as the source of the tragedy.

in a sense I think he could deserve one, since he was ultimately a victim of a troubled mind, and undoubtedly an unfulfilling, unsupportive life.

but let's focus on the immediate victims for now.

Peter Allen (SIU Carbondale) replied to Benjamin's post 9 hours ago. [Send Message](#) [Report](#)

Post #3
1 reply

i had to wrestle with myself on this issue after the VT massacre...and i have to say that yes, the shooter should have a cross...

of course, there is no defense for what the shooter did or why he



Post #37
1 reply

Aurora Heines (Virginia Tech) replied to Peter's post 8 hours ago.

[Send Message](#)
[Report](#)

What a lot of people don't realize is that the 33rd hokie stone that was placed at our memorial in the beginning wasn't actually for the shooter, although people did leave messages helping them deal with the tragedy for him. The stone was actually for his family. It was to show respect for them knowing that they too had lost someone they cared about.

6 crosses?



Back to Pray for Northern Illinois University Students and Families

[Discussion Board](#) [Topic View](#)

Topic: 6 crosses?

Displaying posts 1 – 30 out of 52 by 42 people.

[1](#) [2](#) [Next](#)



Jenn Karstens (N. Illinois) wrote
on Feb 15, 2008 at 11:26 PM.

[Send Message](#)

[Report](#)

I was wondering why there are 6 crosses by the student center.
Does anyone know why?

Post #1
1 reply



Benjamin Christ (John Brown) replied to Jenn's post
on Feb 15, 2008 at 11:30 PM.

[Send Message](#)

[Report](#)

one for each victim. this excludes the shooter who we naturally
hold a grudge against as the source of the tragedy.

Post #2
2 replies

in a sense I think he could deserve one, since he was ultimately a
victim of a troubled mind, and undoubtedly an unfulfilling,
unsupportive life.

but let's focus on the immediate victims for now.

Other discussions:



Justin Godwin (Lakota West High School) wrote
at 5:23pm

man sick fucking losers with no life that just
snap always do dumbshit like this.. maybe its
time to put enough fucking security in schools
and universities that random people with guns
cant just walk into a classroom and start open
firing. rip to everyone who was injured except
for the shooter of course.

[Message - Report](#)



Post #28
3 replies

Jamie Black (N. Illinois) wrote
on Feb 17, 2008 at 6:14 AM.

[Send Message](#)
[Report](#)

you can't forgive what this guy did. no fucking way. and there is absolutely no way that he deserves a cross. no matter what his mental probs were, its apparent that he knew of them and he chose not to medicate himself. he deserves no sympathy, it looks like he had this all planned out and he deserves nothing from us. yeah feel bad for his family, not for the fucked up guy he became. he deserves nothing. absoultey nothing.



Post #29

Maureen Gard (Chicago, IL) replied to [Jamie's post](#)
on Feb 17, 2008 at 8:39 AM.

[Send Message](#)
[Report](#)

No one is saying they feel bad for him by any means. The cross they put out for him is a symbol of a life lost, not a sign of forgiveness. And just because he stopped taking his meds, whatever they were for, doesn't mean he knew what would happen when he stopped taking them. We don't know what they did to him or anything. It is NOT our job to judge, leave that up to God.



Post #30

Natalie R. (N. Illinois) wrote
on Feb 18, 2008 at 12:47 PM.

[Send Message](#)
[Report](#)

Have any of you looked at anything they have said about him, seems like he shouldnt have been put in a mental home, maybe thats what messed him up. Also his med for depression honestly made no difference in this situation, taking them or not....millions of people take what he was on...Im supposed to take similiar meds and I dont...doest make me do things liek this...ldk just seems like he was a sincere, normal, loving guy according to his poor girlfriend and something went terribly wrong.

Facebook | Pray for Northern Illinois University Students and Families Discussions

http://du.facebook.com/board.php?uid=7880939436

Facebook | Pray for... | Facebook | forever i... | Facebook | Search | Myspace.com Blogs ... | NIUremembers.com...

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Pray for Northern Illinois University Students and Families Discussions

Back to Pray for Northern Illinois University Students and Families

Discussion Board

Show: All Topics Sort by: Latest Replies Search all topics

Displaying topics 1 - 30 out of 133. 1 2 3 4 5 Next

If this guy had killed 5 Iraqis in Iraq, he'd be a hero. Latest post by David Villarreal Posted 44 seconds ago.
111 posts by 26 people Created 3 hours ago. Page 1 2 3 4

Important News: Protect the Honor of our brothers and sisters. Latest post by Steve Golden Posted about a minute ago.
5 posts by 3 people Created 21 minutes ago.

White Man Can't Jump OR Mass Murder Latest post by David Villarreal Posted about a minute ago.
40 posts by 14 people Created 3 hours ago. Page 1 2

A poem, I once dedicated to VT but now I dedicate to BOTH VT and NIU Latest post by David Villarreal Posted 5 minutes ago.
8 posts by 7 people Created 8 hours ago.

Take A Stand : News, Video, Media Latest post by Marion Dzwonnik Posted 10 minutes ago.
36 posts by 16 people Created on Feb 15, 2008 at 9:23 AM. Page 1 2

These kids had got to get off Prozac Latest post by Lindsay C. Posted 11 minutes ago.
13 posts by 8 people Created 4 hours ago.

Colleges and Universities Supporting NIU Latest post by Ashley Cary

verizon wireless
RED HOT DEAL DAYS
Hot Deals. Hot Colors. Save up to 50%. Limited time only. Free Activation Fri - Mon. Free Shipping.

Westboro Baptist Church related material:

< Back Huskies home | Subscribe | rss | add to blog group | sign out

Huskies



Last Updated: Feb 15, 2008
Send Message
Instant Message
Email to a Friend
Subscribe
Invite to My Blog

Gender: Female
Status: Single
Age: 100
Sign: Aquarius
City: DEKALB
State: Illinois
Country: US
Signup Date: 02/14/08

Sunday, February 17, 2008

WHAT THE HELL IS WRONG WITH THESE PEOPLE???????

Welcome to the WBC picket schedule:

..> ..>

Upcoming Picket Schedule

02/18/2008 10:15 AM - 11:00 AM Cicero, IL	Our Lady of the Mount Catholic Church 2414 S. 61st Street Ave. This is for the funeral of Catalina Garcia.
02/18/2008 1:00 PM - 1:45 PM St. Charles, IL	Baker Memorial United Methodist Church 307 Cedar Ave. This is for the funeral of Ryanne Mace.

THESE PEOPLE ARE NOT CHRISTIANS THEY ARE SICK, PSYCHOTIC, PUSSIES THAT OUGHT TO SHUT THEIR MOUTHS BECAUSE THE ONLY ONES GOING TO HELL IS THEM!

~That's all for now...~

5:13 PM - 0 Comments - 0 Kudos - Add Comment

MySpace.com - Huskies - 100 - Female - DEKALB, Illinois - www.myspace.com/niu_safelist_and_support

http://profile.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=user.viewprofile&friendID=334 vt colors

Facebook | Pray for Norther... Facebook | To those in avail... Facebook | Myspace link MySpace.com - Huskies - 1...

Huskies's Friends Comments

Displaying 8 of 9 comments (View All | Add Comment)

I MADE HUCKABEE! Feb 15 2008 4:12 PM




NIU strong, reliable, fierce
no one messes with a
HUSKY

Mr. Blue Devil Feb 15 2008 1:50 PM



The Village of Geneva & Warren Township High School mourns with you.
On behalf of the residents of Gurnee and the alumni and current students of Warren Township High School, we extend our heart-felt condolences to you in the midst of your grief.
STAY STRONG HUSKIE NATION!

Sandman Feb 15 2008 11:19 AM

MySpace.com - Huskies - 100 - Female - DEKALB, Illinois - www.myspace.com/niu_safelist_and_support

http://profile.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=user.viewprofile&friendID=334 vt colors

Facebook | Pray for Norther... Facebook | To those in avail... Facebook | Myspace link MySpace.com - Huskies - 1...

NIU STAY STRONG HUSKIE NATION!

Sandman Feb 15 2008 11:19 AM



Online Now!

I've gotten reports from WBC they are showing up at our campus at 3:00PM and might be here all weekend. Spread the word. IF YOU WANT TO JOIN US, MAIL ME - We are planning to Organize at 2:30 IN FRONT OF THE VCB!

deaftina Feb 15 2008 10:35 AM



*Keeping You
In My
Thoughts
and
Prayers*



Your Angel Yours

Read i.ytimg.com 2 hebert.sara@gmail.com



Post #79
1 reply

Marion Dzwonnik (N. Illinois) replied to Amber's post
on Feb 18, 2008 at 2:06 PM.

[Send Message](#)
[Report](#)

I'd like to remind everyone that the group I formed Take A Stand, insured that WBC did not hold up signs on NIU and did not protest the vigil. I originally formed this group to keep them off our campus. They directly addressed us after Friday in a new flier, and we had many people working on phones and planning ways to delay them and make them late to the funerals today. Many of our plans worked and we kept them out of sight and off our campus. I've also spoken to a few of the senior members of WBC, and I know what we are doing is effective.

I know many of you supported us and I know many thought we were crazy. But I'd like to remind all of you that everything we did was designed to intimidate and irk WBC. So before you bash us, keep in mind what we actually accomplished.

Now I'd also like to announce our success with the help of many other groups in blocking and derailing WBC from the funerals today. At one site, we managed to keep WBC derailed for about 2 hours. From the people in St. Charles, to the people in Cicero, good job - and thank you to everyone that helped us succeed.

This isn't over yet, and we have a lot on the table. Our main goal now is derailing WBC's plans in the future.. We have people following them, we know what they are driving and what forms of transportation they are using. Knowledge is power, and we will do what we have to, even if we go to jail to stop them.



Post #80
1 reply

Marion Dzwonnik (N. Illinois) replied to Marion's post
on Feb 18, 2008 at 2:44 PM.

[Send Message](#)
[Report](#)

They had originally send 6 to each protest from what info i have and from what WBC told me. We managed to stop all but 3 at each funeral with the help of many others. So splitting them and drowning out them with the help of dozens of people was great. Good job.

Facebook | Important News: Protect the Honor of our brothers and sisters.

http://du.facebook.com/topic.php?uid=7880939436&topic=4735

Facebook | Importa... | Facebook | forever i... | Facebook | Search | Myspace.com Blogs ... | NIUremembers.com...

Marketplace
Mardi Gras
Scrabulous
Causes
more

Wedding Profile Box
Announce your engagement on your profile! Showcase your Wedding Party with profile pics. Discuss your plans on your wedding wall.

Displaying all 4 posts by 2 people.

 **Marion Dzwonnik (N. Illinois)** wrote 19 minutes ago. [Send Message](#) [Report](#)

Post #1
1 reply

Take A Stand: Important News

Everyone who has supported and joined us, I'd like to thank right for doing a great job today, as far as I can tell from the phone conversations and insiders we have scared the WBC off our campus.

They directly addressed us in their latest ad, but with the coordination of students and friends, and the numbers we have standing ready - to even go to jail to get rid of these people - we have won the first phase of this.

We where guarding the vigil on Friday with students and supporters on radios and cell phones and networking with laptops ready in the hallways and doors of the Holmes Student Center.

Then the next day they posted this in response to our video and warnings:
http://www.godhatesfags.com/written/fliers/20080215_niu-carnage.pdf

The second phase of this fight is to get them away from the funerals of our friends. We are doing our best to coordinate with other groups to work as peacefully as we can to make them leave.

I repeat. We have scared the WBC from protesting our campus. But the fight is not over yet.

Be ready to Take A Stand for the funerals of our brothers and sisters.

- Marion

~~~~~

Keep sreadino the word.

facebook

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Cash for your Wedding?  
  
Need some cash for your wedding? Register today at [jacked.com](http://jacked.com) to get your chance at winning a \$100,000. Get Jacked!

**\*\*\*Menace of Violence.. MUST READ\*\*\***

Back to Pray for Northern Illinois University Students and Families

Discussion Board Topic View

Topic: **\*\*\*Menace of Violence.. MUST READ\*\*\***

Displaying the only post.

 **Codi Johnson (Dupage)** wrote 15 hours ago. [Send Message](#) [Report](#)

Post #1

Robert Kennedy gave a speech called "Menace of Violence" and they were discussing it on the radio this morning as well as the WBC protests that are taking place. I am disgusted by the WBC and I really think that people need to look around at what is going on and just stop for a second before we all kill each other. Here's the beginning of it and the link to the full speech. You should all read it.

"Menace of Violence"

This is a time of shame and sorrow. It is not a day for politics. I have saved this one opportunity, my only event of today, to speak briefly to you about the mindless menace of violence in America which again stains our land and every one of our lives.

<http://www.rfkmemorial.org/lifevision/onthemindlessmenaceofviolence/>



Post #26  
2 replies

**Marion Dzwonnik** (N. Illinois) wrote  
on Feb 15, 2008 at 11:09 AM.

[Send Message](#)

[Report](#)

I've gotten reports from WBC they are showing up at our campus at 3:00PM and might be here all weekend. Spread the word. IF YOU WANT TO JOIN US, MAIL ME - We are planning to Organize at 2:30 IN FRONT OF THE VCB!



Post #76  
2 replies

**Amber Jokers** (no network) replied to Carl's post  
on Feb 16, 2008 at 6:55 PM.

[Send Message](#)

[Report](#)

Unfortunately Carl, I attempted to get involved with these groups when I first heard about the WBC's plans to come to campus. I was a little turned off by the prospect of "Take a Stand" though when they began discussing the ideas of using violence as a means if nothing else was possible. This group that I would like to form really does not have anything to do with WBC unless they choose to show up. This has nothing to do with them being currently on campus. What I would like to do, is show up a each of the funerals in groups of ten or more bearing American flags and NIU flags and to be able to send these students off with the salute that they deserve. It is the same thing that this Patriot Rider group does, ours would simply be a smaller effort. To anyone who plans to contact them, I already have, and they have already replied to me. I have spoken with the President of their group. He informed me that their cree is not to keep out groups like the WBC, but instead impressed upon me the importance to them of honoring their fellow soldiers. Why can we not do the same?

Facebook | Official WBC Protest Discussion Board

http://du.facebook.com/topic.php?uid=7880939436&topic=4645&start=30&hash=8c1ce99660b0df98eb735c7

Facebook | Official WBC Prot... | Facebook | forever in our he... | Facebook | Search | Facebook | Videos from Pray... | NIUremembers.com, Remem...

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Official WBC Protest Discussion Board

Back to Pray for Northern Illinois University Students and Families

Discussion Board Topic View

Topic: Official WBC Protest Discussion Board

Displaying posts 31 - 59 out of 59 by 44 people. Prev 1 2

Post #31  
Lenora Jaramillo (New Mexico) wrote 15 hours ago. Send Message Report  
WBC wanted to protest the VT funerals last year but there was a fight against it and the WBC backed out. We can fight against loony Phelps and his disgusting followers.

Post #32  
Kathy Schmeier (Columbus State University) wrote 15 hours ago. Send Message Report  
I think this is a great idea, to drown them out. despite my being an atheist, i would be right by your sides against these hypocritical douce bags. though i must say, proceed with your counter protest with caution. this "church" is a group of frauds. it has no matter to me whether they actually believe what they preach (which i doubt), but using extremist religion to justify any premature death is downright evil. all they are doing is provoking violence so that they can reap the benefits, and not just by publicity. they provoke good natured individuals to commit assault and battery, or vandalism against them and then sue them for all they can. no matter how they provoke you, do not commit any sort of violence against them, because that is all they are there for.

Post #33  
Allison Wilhelm (Westwood High School) wrote 14 hours ago. Send Message Report  
I can't believe that assface is dragging school shootings into the issue. Innocent people were shot and all this guy cares about is

verizon wireless  
RED HOT DEAL DAILY  
Hot Deals.  
Hot Colors.  
Save up to 50%  
Limited time only  
Free Activation  
Fri - Mon  
Free Shipping

God's curse upon America is irreversible, because America has persecuted #B.C.

## Westboro Baptist Church

(WBC Chronicles – Since 1955)  
3701 SW 12<sup>th</sup> St. Topoka, Kansas 66604 785-273-0325 GodHatesFags.com  
Religious Opinion and Bible Commentary on Current Events

Thursday, February 14, 2008

NEWS RELEASE

# **Thank God for the Shooter at Northern Illinois Univ. God sent the Shooter.**

**In His Wrath & Vengeance  
Against an Ungrateful  
Nation that has Forsaken  
Him & Embraced Filthy Fags.**

**WBC will picket their  
hypocritical funerals &  
memorials & "vigils."**

**Yes. In religious protest & warning; to wit: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked." Gal. 6:7. God Hates Fags! & Fag-Enablers. Ergo, God hates fag-dominated Northern Illinois Univ., fag-saturated Illinois, and fag-run America. What part of this 12-word sentence don't you idiots understand? "Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind; it is abomination." Lev. 18:22.**

*Memorial Ribbon Images:*



**Huskies's Friend Space (Randomized)**

Huskies has **38** friends.

**Teresa**



**Jen loves her huskies! 2-14-08**



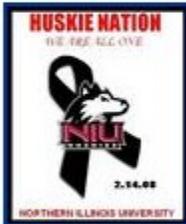
**Mannosnews**



**Natalie**



**Raven**



 **Online Now!**

**Katie™**



**Swift Official Music Page**



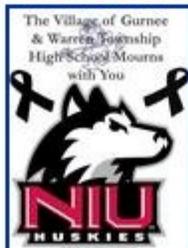
**Marcel**



**deaftina |**



**Mr. Blue Devil**



**delightful**



**michelle.**





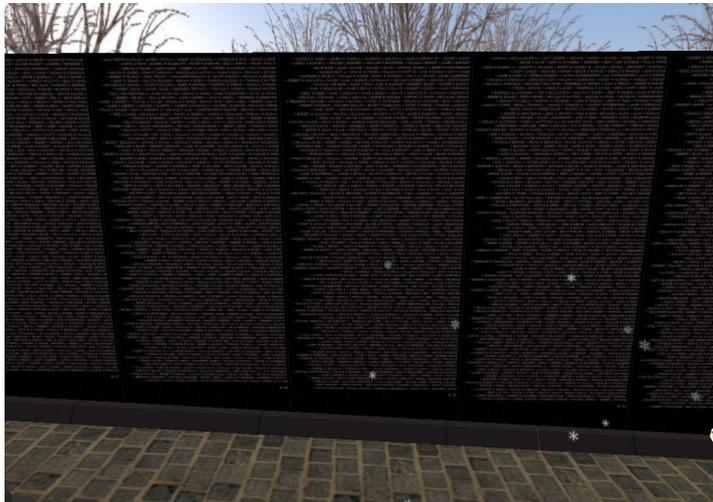
*Today We Are All  
Huskies.  
2-14-08*

## Appendix D: Documentation of the Second Life Virtual Memorials

### *Benazir Bhutto Memorial*



### *Vietnam Veterans Memorial*



The Wall of Names

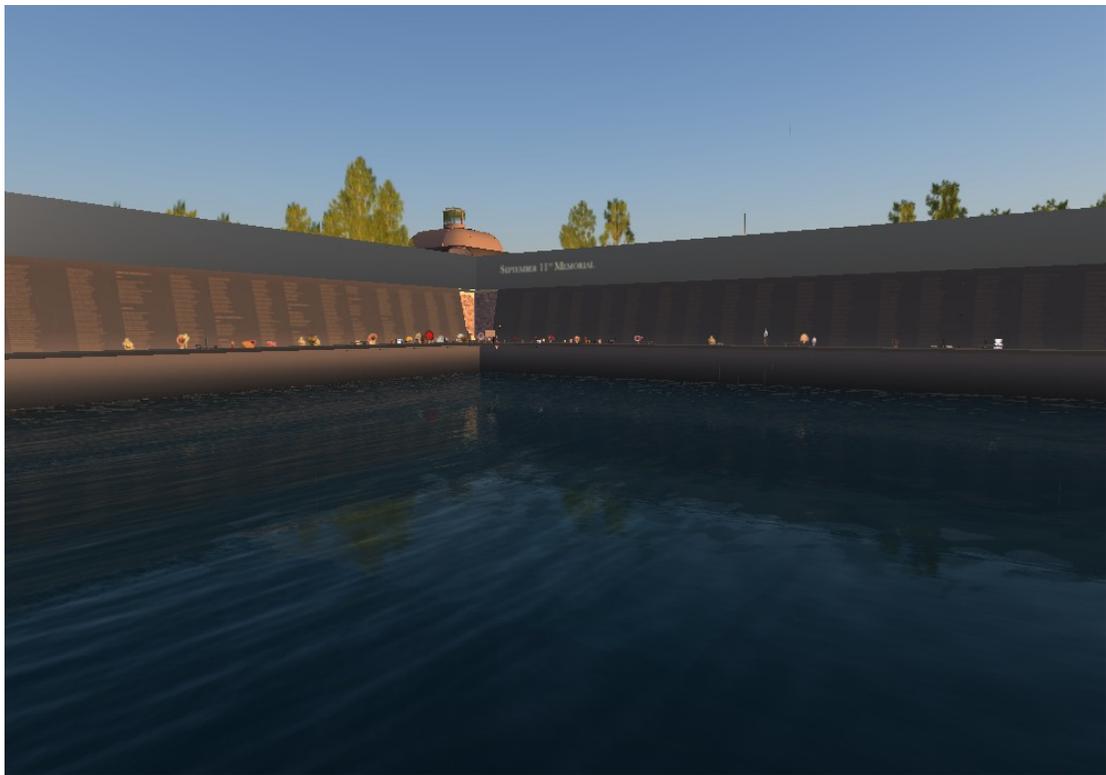
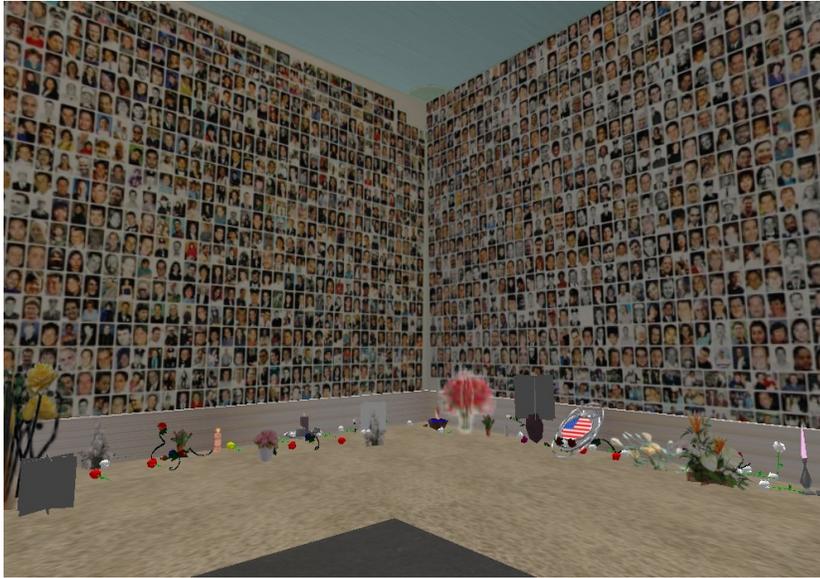


*The Three Servicemen Statue*



The Vietnam  
Women's  
Memorial





*Virginia Tech Memorial*



West side of the memorial



East side of the memorial



Why?by Darrien Lightworker



Untitled by Perefim Cao