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The Dead and Public Obligation, Grief, and Action: A Rhetorical Analysis of the Impact of Invoking the Dead in Public Art

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Abstract

Humans have a natural instinct to grieve the deaths of loved ones. In the 21st century, information immediacy has facilitated a shift in this grieving process. Private grief is becoming more present in the public sphere. Using Craig Rood's 2018 framework, the warrant of the dead, this essay aims to analyze this shift; specifically, this essay utilizes Maureen Cain's 2019 art project The United States of Ammunition as a case study in private grief in the public sphere. Rood (2018) theorizes the warrant of the dead utilizes the memory of victims to force action of the audience members; however, this framework suffers from fleeting engagement. The warrant of the dead framework was initially used to discuss the gun control rhetoric of President Barack Obama after mass shootings during his presidency. This essay expands upon that discussion in the realm of the visual rhetoric of Cain's photographs. The intersection of public artworks, memorialization, and counter-monuments offer a rhetorically compelling backdrop for this analysis. At this intersection, we are able to isolate the effects of visual rhetoric—in this case, the photographs of Cain's project—on the viewer. As it is apparent it is impossible to avoid interacting with or encountering death in our current world, it is necessary we analyze the potential uses of the warrant of the dead. Evoking our dead can be a powerful tool to incite action and change in our communities.

Keywords: grief, counter-monuments, memorialization, visual art, public art

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Introduction

After accidentally receiving a box of ammunition in July of 2019, artist Maureen Cain was inspired. Armed with spent casings and several cans of spray paint, Cain embarked on a road trip to create *the United States of Ammunition*: a pop-up art installation in which the colored casings are displayed around the United States at sites where gun violence occurred. The displays are temporary, only set up long enough to capture a few photographs which are then printed on postcards and shared on their website. Cain explained the rainbow colors make it easier to look at, but it's still an ugly subject (M. Cain, personal communication, November 27, 2019). Cain's goal was to bring attention to the magnitude of gun violence impacting the United States. Specifically, they wanted to highlight the array of gun violence. Cain said, "It's not just mass shootings. It's suicide and violence against women. It's police brutality and police being shot and gang violence," (Janssen, 2019). What initially began as a one-time road trip has morphed into a much larger project. Cain hopes to bring the project to each of the fifty states.

The United States of Ammunition has received a variety of reactions, both negative and positive. Some view the project as a "cool way to address a hot button issue without being divisive" (Zimmer, 2019). Others have harassed Cain and her team while visiting different sites (M. Cain, personal communication, July 10, 2020). This conflict of interpretation can be attributed to Cain's gun control rhetoric. More generally, the art project creates conflict because it addresses death in the public sphere.

The United States has long been characterized as a death-denying society (Doss, 2008 a p. 27). In a death-denying society, conversations or actions relating to death, dying, or even

grieving are limited to private interactions. Modern Western ideology further separates private and public actions surrounding grief; specifically, there are distinctions between grief and mourning. Grief is private, while mourning is allowed to be external (Doss, 2008 a p. 19). Mourning consists only of socially acceptable actions, all of which, must keep the death impersonal to the public audience viewing the mourning.

However, cultural expectations surrounding grief are changing. Literature within grief, memory, and death studies all indicate a shift in societal beliefs within the United States (Huyssen, 2000; Santino, 2004; Doss, 2008 a). Culturally, death is now being confronted in the public sphere. As grief enters the public sphere, new understandings of death are developed. Performative responses to tragedy showcase how private grief can influence public discourse and action. For example, after 9/11, there were many discussions about how best to commemorate the unprecedented volume of national grief. Families of those who died, both those at the scenes and the first-responders, held different ideas of how to best accomplish this (Stow, 2012 p. 688). This conflict of representation indicates a cultural shift of grieving practices.

Some contend that this shift is a natural response to societies interacting with and uncovering memories about their past (Huyssen, 2000; Klein, 2000). As a society acknowledges that memory is not "a property of individual minds" but rather, is owned and formed by the collective populous, that society will shift their grieving accordingly (Klein, 2000 p. 130). If memory is public, then so too is the grief surrounding those memories. Huyssen (2000) focuses more on the uncovering of memories, arguing that if a society is "in danger of forgetting", they will respond by moving to public memorialization strategies (p. 28). Still others, note the influence of increased awareness of tragedy via ever-present media coverage (Gibson, 2011).

Because we have access to instant notification of tragedy, deaths that would have remained personal are grieved sooner and by more people than ever before.

Humans have always needed a way to respond to grief in their lives (Doss, 2008 a). As grief is pushed more into the public sphere, we are more consistently interacting with our own grief and the grief of others. Our previous grieving practices do not meet our current grieving needs. It is impossible to ignore the volume of death constantly shadowing day-to-day life. Gun Violence Archive (2021) reports a continued rise in gun-related deaths since 2009, culminating with more mass shootings in 2019 than days in the year (Silverstein, 2020). Even as the COVID-19 pandemic forced Americans into isolation, 2020 managed yet another record breaking mass shooting count of 612 (Bates, 2020). Homicide rates have risen in 28 major United States cities (Rosenfeld & Lopez, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic itself claimed the lives of over 500,000 Americans at the time of writing this essay ("Coronavirus in the U.S., 2021). Death is constantly in the public eye, forcing the adaptation of public grieving practices.

This essay aims to understand how changing grieving practices have resulted in an increased creation of counter-monuments and public art memorials; specifically, it addresses the call to action for the living viewer of the art. Using Craig Rood's 2018 framework, the warrant of the dead, this essay examines how Cain's *United States of Ammunition* addresses the living's obligation to act in the wake of tragedy.

Literature Review

In order to provide context for the current function of counter-monuments, it is necessary to understand how the shift in grieving practices has influenced memorialization. This has ultimately resulted in the common use of counter-monuments. Public art has facilitated the increased use in counter-monument usage because of the relationship between the artist and the

viewer. This literature review explores the connections between these themes as they relate to the current state of grieving practices.

Memorial Mania

Doss (2008 a) coins the term "memorial mania' to describe the recent shift in moving grieving from the private to the public sphere, and more specifically, how public grief presents itself in the necessity of public memorials (p. 7). The goal of a memorial becomes making a death or deaths visible and sharing private grief. (Gibson, 2011 p. 152). Public memorials showcase contemporary understandings of death. In a way, they remove the previously understood finality of death. As public memorials to the dead are created, the public continues to interact with the memory of the deceased. Therefore, relationships with the dead are no longer limited to those who intimately knew the dead. The public is allowed to grieve these deaths as well, even if they were not personally impacted by the death. The dead continue to live through their memorials, facilitating a bond between the living and the dead (Doss, 2008 a).

As notions of grief and death change, attempts at memorialization change accordingly. Memorials are no longer confined to "proper" art forms like marble statues and grand buildings (Doss, 2008 a. p. 5). Memorials have begun to leverage alternate art forms, focusing on the performance of public grief. within this recent shift, personal deaths are now encapsulated within the social conditions that caused the deaths (Santino, 2004). The grieving process, therefore, is not limited to death itself, but also can include societal upset about the conditions in which a person or persons died. The deaths themselves are not grieved, but people also publicly draw attention to whatever caused their death. Alternative memorials allow for ordinary citizens to publicly share their grief, continuing the transfer of private grief to public grief (Gibson, 2011). For example, roadside shrines commemorating someone who has died in a vehicular

accident share individual loss that would otherwise be grieved privately by those who knew the victim with everyone who drives past the shrine. Public grieving asserts that an individual's trauma is actually everyone's trauma (Bednar, 2015).

Counter-monuments

It is important to note these complexities of public grief because the concept of memorial mania stems from newly complex understandings of the role memorials play in civic unity and social order (Doss, 2008 b). While memorials have always sought to commemorate the dead, Ware (2008) asserts that memorials chiefly serve the living, not the dead. As contemporary understandings of grief grapple with the relationship between the living and the dead, it necessitates new forms of public mourning (Doss, 2008 a p. 11). Therefore, the "counter-monument" was born. The counter-monument first gained scholarly attention in Germany, where artists began creating monuments designed to engage with the complicated horrors of the Holocaust and World War II. Young (1992) analyzes what is widely accepted as the first monument in this new "counter-monument" category, saying counter-monuments exist to challenge the very memories they commemorate (p. 271). *The Monument against Fascism*, a twelve-meter high pillar made of hollow aluminum coated in soft lead, was unveiled by artists Jochen and Ester Gerz in 1986 in Harburg, Germany. At its base was a plaque that read:

> We invite the citizens of Harburg and visitors to the town, to add their names here to ours,. In doing so, we commit ourselves to remain vigilant. As more and more names cover this 12 meter tall lead column, it will gradually be lowered into the ground. One day, it will have disappeared completely and the site of the Harburg monument against fascism will be empty. In the end, it is only we ourselves who can rise up against injustice. (Gerz & Gerz, 1986).

As people interact with the monument, it disappeared, until 1993 when the last of the pillar was lowered into the ground. This monument pushed its viewers beyond mere viewing, inviting commitment to a new mindset. Young (1992) contends this is the primary function of a counter-monument: necessitating interaction by the viewer. Thus the viewer becomes an active participant in recalling the memory of the dead, and—in the case of Harburg's monument—the viewer is asked to make a commitment to "remain vigilant", an action they will continue to take.

Counter-monuments (or counter-memorials, anti-memorials) initiate action by their viewers in a variety of ways, namely by tapping into the many levels and expressions of grief (Ware, 2008). As Doss (2008 a.) notes, memorials, and their meanings, are affected by the social, cultural, and political environments in which they are created and viewed. Counter-monuments seek to capture what is impossible to capture in a traditional monument (Stubblefield, 2011). They challenge norms within celebration, grief, and remembrance (Osborne, 2017). Critically, counter-monuments problematize their subject, rather than honoring or glorifying it as conventional memorial practices do. Counter-monuments resist the dominant narrative surrounding their subject, allowing for different viewers to each establish different personal connections to the monument (Krzyżanowska, 2016).

Notably, counter-monuments carve out a space in the normal flow of life for public grief. Because counter-monuments resist traditional grieving practices, they are able to commemorate the deaths of those deemed "ungrievable" by society (Boudreaux, 2016 p. 410). Counter-monuments bring deaths that would otherwise not be publicly recognized or would be purposefully ignored into the public sphere. They allow ordinary citizens to bring the deaths of ordinary people to the same commemorative level as leaders and heroes. Truly, the power of counter-memorials lies in their ability to inject personal, private grief in the public sphere

(Santino, 2004). This layering of private and public grief makes the trauma associated with the death simultaneously private and public.

Furthermore, counter-monuments serve immense political goals (Santino, 2004; Ware, 2008, Stow, 2012). Because traditional memorials are often accepted as "historical", they are considered to be an accurate representation of whatever they are commemorating (Ware, 2008 p. 63). Therefore, counter-monuments have the unique ability to present counter-histories which can be manipulated by the artist and viewer to serve political means. Santino (2004) notes that counter-monuments directly reflect and showcase current public and social issues. As counter-monuments can be created by ordinary citizens, they also have the ability to showcase local political movements. They are not limited to national movements (Stow, 2012). Stevens & Ristic (2015) contend that counter-monuments are "tools of political action" that bring social issues to public attention (p. 288). Ware (2008) calls for further examination into how public memorials, and specifically counter-monuments, can function as a catalyst for social change.

Public Art

Works of public art are well poised to function as counter-monuments. Public art can be a vehicle for commemoration while still allowing questioning and resistance for traditional, dominant narratives (Krzyżanowska, 2016). Frances & Kimber (2008) contend that art has the ability to both provoke and repress memory. Public art gives the viewer access to something that they did not necessarily experience, which allows them to have an empathetic response (Gibson, 2011). Public art is intrinsically related to public action and advocacy (Doss, 1995). As Nguyen (2019) reminds, art facilitates a group empathetic response and allows the viewers to take on emotional commitments to the subject. Public art stimulates public conversation about important

topics. If the main goal of counter-monuments is to initiate public action and to present counter-arguments about a subject, public art is a strong fit.

Public artworks functioning as counter-monuments are often temporary memorials. Counter-monuments are often reactionary responses to trauma, so they are created and removed spontaneously (Gibson, 2011). Street art, graffiti, and temporary instillations affect the public viewer through unconventional methods of art (Halsey & Young, 2006). Both counter-monuments and temporary memorials have a strong connection to the location where they are erected (Doss, 2008 a; Ware, 2008; Gibson, 2011). By inserting themselves into everyday life, counter-monuments build a relationship between the dead, the location, and the viewer. For example, in the case of vehicular deaths, roadside shrines are set up at the exact location on the road where death occurred. Thereby making sure that all other motorists who travel that path see what had occurred there (Bednar, 2015). Counter-monuments breech the boundary between life and death, especially when the death occurs in a place of trusted safety: schools, homes, shopping malls (Gibson, 2011). Public art memorials force a potentially apathetic public to confront the commemorated death. (Ware, 2008).

The *Writing Names Project* is an example of public art memorials confronting an apathetic public. The creator of the project, Sorouja Moll, wrote the names of missing and murdered Indigenous women on public sidewalks in Canada. Moll's goal was to confront the public with the staggering statistic of thousands of Indigenous women (Moll, 2016 p. 94). The names affected passersby, forcing them to acknowledge the loss of these women (p. 69). Projects such as this one effectively use unconventional art techniques as a form of activism. This project exemplifies the roles of counter-monuments and public art within today's changing

grief practices. The project confronted the viewer with information about the missing women, caused a public, group response, and was politically charged.

This paper expands upon current scholarship by analyzing specifically the connection between the viewer and the dead. By focusing on this relationship, it is clear how counter-monuments have evolved into a multi-functional artifact that call for viewer action. The Harburg's monument against fascism calls for commitment to an ideology, whereas current examples of counter-monuments go further calling for action by invoking the memory of the dead.

Method

This essay uses a rhetorical framework of evoking the dead for action in order to analyze the affect of *The United States of Ammunition* as a counter-monument. Rood (2018) establishes the "warrant of the dead" framework as "an explicit or implicit claim that the dead place a demand on the living" (p. 48). Doss (2008 a) recognizes the obligation the living are required to fulfill; specifically, Doss notes that works of art—such as Cain's *The United States of Ammunition*—can fulfill this obligation (p. 32). Rood's model is applicable because it describes the rhetorical strategies used by President Barack Obama to utilize the memory of mass shooting victims to call for gun control. While Rood's analysis is primarily rooted in the examination of Obama's gun control rhetoric, the framework can be easily applied to any visual work that is using the three functions to call for viewer action (p. 49). This framework clearly illustrates how mourning and action can simultaneously exist.

As Rood (2018) explains, Obama used the warrant of the dead after the shooting at Sandy Hook by making the dead symbolically and imaginatively present (p. 55). According to Rood (2018), there are three rhetorical strategies that sustain concern for victims: extending memory,

expanding memory, and intensifying memory (p. 56). All of these functions aim to call the viewer into action.

First, extending memory allows the viewer to remember past mass shootings. Contextualizing a particular incident within the larger history of gun violence draws attention to mass shootings as a public issue. Rood (2018) focuses specifically on mass shootings in this rhetorical strategy because Obama's Sandy Hook remarks mark a change in his rhetoric to acknowledging the United States long history of mass shootings (p. 57). In his response to Sandy Hook, Obama (2012 b) said, "Whether it's an elementary school in Newton, or a shopping mall in Oregon—these neighborhoods are our neighborhoods…" Obama symbolically connected the shooting at Sandy Hook with previous mass shootings. Remembering the previous victims in conjunction with the most recent victims showcases the chronic issue of gun violence, removing the possibility of anomaly (Rood, 2018 p. 57). Extending memory's most important function is highlighting the living's failed obligation to the dead (p. 56).

Second, expanding memory recognizes other forms of gun violence beyond mass shootings. This recognition engages the broader discussion of gun violence as a whole. In his response after Sandy Hook, Obama (2012 b) referenced not only specific mass shootings, but also gun violence on the streets in Chicago. Including Chicago expands memory to include all victims. This allows the audience to more fully recognize the scope of gun violence through exposure to its many forms (Rood, 2018 p. 59). Through the expansion of memory, the artist or speaker is able to include all deaths, even those who have been unnoticed or deemed "ungrievable".

Third, intensifying memory allows us to view the dead as our own (p. 59). Intensifying memory humanizes victims. Obama's Sandy Hook rhetoric causes those who have not been

personally affected by gun violence to feel an obligation to all victims. In remarks at a prayer vigil after Sandy Hook, Obama (2012 a) said, "We come to realize that we bear a responsibility for every child because we're counting on everybody else to help look after ours; that we're all parents; that they're all our children." He thus creates responsibility by joining all members of the community as a single family. The fabricated familial link between the dead and the living forces an on-going obligation to act in prevention of further deaths (Rood, 2018 p. 60).

Analysis

Rood (2018) calls for the warrant of the dead and its functions to be analyzed (p. 65). *The United States of Ammunition* provides an opportunity to examine how the warrant of the dead simultaneously honors the dead while calling for action. This, in combination with scholarship on the function of counter-memorials, provides evidence for changing grief practices in the United States. Additionally, Rood's warrant of the dead is initially framed in the rhetoric of gun control, and *The United States of Ammunition*'s central theme is highlighting gun violence across the country; therefore, there are strong parallels for analysis. The three functions of the warrant of the dead: extending, expanding, and intensifying memory work together to create an obligation to act on behalf of the dead is further established because of the failure to protect the living (p. 60). These three functions are clearly present in *The United States of Ammunition* as it functions as a counter-memorial.

Extending Memory

First, The United States of Ammunition extends memory by connecting previous mass shootings. As of early 2021, Cain has published thirteen photos remembering mass shootings in the United States. These photos represent mass shootings spanning from 1800 to 2014. The photograph in Figure 1 symbolizes the 2014 shooting at Marysville Pilchuck High School in

Marysville, Washington. A 15 year old student shot five students, killing four, and then killed himself. The artist's website notes that this photo represents the more than 250 school shootings that have occurred since this one in 2014.

Figure 1. Marysville, Washington, by M. Cain. (2019). Retrieved from www.unitedstatesofammunition.com/?lightbox=dataItem-kcawul328

Cain also visited Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. Figure 2 represents the infamous shooting that killed fifteen students including the perpetrators. Including Columbine in the project is important because it acknowledges the long history of mass shootings occurring in schools. Columbine is often cited as the beginning of gun violence in schools (Newman & Hartman, 2019 p. 1529). Focusing on mass shootings in schools triggers a strong social response. Newman & Hartman (2019) report political favor of gun control and regulation spiking after high profile school shootings like Columbine. Columbine is the starting point for

many data sets tracking mass shootings and gun violence in schools (Kolbe, 2020 p. 250). Because of this, it is even more critical to include Columbine in this project.

Figure 2. Littleton, Colorado, by M. Cain. (2019). Retrieved from https://www.unitedstatesofammunition.com/?lightbox=dataItem-kcawul312

Both photographs feature the school campus in the background, with the colored casings in the foreground. In Figure 1 the casings are the visual focus of the piece. This places the emphasis on the deaths that occurred at this location. By contrast, in Figure 2, the school buildings are in focus, placing the school itself at the forefront of the viewer's mind. These parallel the function of each photograph within the series. Figure 1 acts to extend memory to

mass shootings in schools, and Figure 2 aims specifically to engage with Columbine and its infamy. The artist extends memory through these photos by contextualizing these incidents within the larger history of mass shootings. These photographs, and others within the project call upon the viewer to acknowledge the long past of mass shootings in the United States.

The extension of memory allows *The United States of Ammunition* to be categorized as a counter-memorial because this function is grounded in remembering where mass shootings occurred. The examples in Figure 1 and Figure 2 are connected to their locations. Counter-monument have strong connections to the locations where they appear. As Bednar (2015) and others illustrate, a counter-monument leverages the landscape where the deaths occurred, effectively transporting the viewer back in time to the event itself. While the viewer of Cain's photographs is not necessarily viewing them at the exact location itself, it does have the same transporting effect.

Expanding Memory

The art installation expands memory by acknowledging other facets of gun violence beyond mass shootings. Figure 3 features a tube of Mac lipstick amongst many blue-colored casings, acknowledging the death of a 19 year old woman who was shot and killed by her partner in Boise, Idaho. The artist's website claims, "on average 3 women are shot and killed every day in the US by their partner" (Cain, 2020). Cain says this photograph is the one that spurs the most interaction from viewers (M. Cain, personal communication, January 12, 2021). Because the threat of domestic violence is so prevalent, most viewers have a personal story that connects to the image. Either they or someone they know has been impacted by domestic violence.

Figure 3. Boise, Idaho, by M. Cain. (2019). Retrieved from www.unitedstatesofammunition.com/?lightbox=dataItem-kcawul314

Figure 4 shows a single copper-colored casing amidst a handful of blue casings. The artist's statement says this photograph was taken at the site of a suicide by car in 2017. This photograph further expands memory: viewers are challenged to acknowledge gun violence is not limited to mass shootings. Because we are constantly bombarded by information about mass shootings, it becomes almost easy to digest this news and to ignore the stark reality of gun violence. This photograph, and others in the series, force the viewer to engage with and acknowledge other deaths. By photographing casings at locations of other incidents of gun

violence beyond mass shootings, the artist expands the number of victims and in turn the magnitude of the issue.

Figure 4. Pendleton, Oregon, by M. Cain. (2019). Retrieved from https://www.unitedstatesofammunition.com/?lightbox=dataItem-kcawul327

Expanding memory also fulfills the functions of counter-monuments. It both acknowledges deaths that are forgotten and brings personal grief to the public sphere. By expanding memory, the art project acknowledges deaths that are forgotten or are deemed "ungrievable". The news cycle is often dominated by high profile mass shootings, but Cain's photographs give the same level of attention to mass shootings as to suicide and domestic violence. As Santino (2004) and others remind, counter-monuments are able to focus on deaths that are outside of the dominant narrative. By giving space for these deaths to be recognized at this level, Cain is facilitating personal grief to move into the public sphere. As evidenced by her interactions with people responding to Figure 3, these photographs are raising personal

connections to the general problem of gun violence. Personal connections to the dead are critical for the warrant of the dead to be effective according to Rood (2018).

Intensifying Memory

The art project intensifies memory by showcasing the vast scope of the issue. Cain accomplishes this merely through the name of the project: *The United States of Ammunition*. The name indicates that the problem is not limited to large cities or a certain section of the United States, but rather the whole nation. Additionally, the mere number of photos, each representing a different incident of gun violence showcase the scope of the issue. The artist's website showcases a map with only some of the states filled in, depicting the states the project has already visited. This acknowledges again, that the problem of gun violence is wide-spread.

Figure 5 includes 1,000 bullet casings representing the number of gun deaths in the U.S. every ten days. Through the sheer number of casings, the viewer acknowledges the scope of gun-related deaths. Additionally, displaying the casings in the shape of the United States makes the victims personally related to the viewer because it acknowledges that the deaths are occurring here, in the United States, or in other words, at home. As aforementioned, personal connections between the viewer and the dead are critical for calling the viewer to action.

Figure 5. Tucson, Arizona, by M. Cain. (2019). Retrieved from www.unitedstatesofammunition.com/?lightbox=dataItem-kcawul3212

Intensifying memory is focused on humanizing victims and viewing the dead as our own. Figure 6 accomplishes both of these tasks. It is titled "Anytown, USA", which elicits the idea that the problem of gun violence can—and does—affect any town in the United States. The

anonymity of the photograph, which depicts five different colored casings in a holder in the foreground, allows the viewer to put themselves in the environment of a gun show. The viewer is made to be a participant in the gun show, effectively putting the blame of countless deaths in the hands of the viewers.

Figure 6. Anytown, USA, by M. Cain. (2019). Retrieved from www.unitedstatesofammunition.com/?lightbox=dataItem-kcawul3212

By intensifying memory, Cain is able to perform perhaps the most critical role of a counter-monument; *The United States of Ammunition* serves a political purpose. As Ware (2008) and others describe, counter-monuments serve specific political goals of the artist. When one takes the warrant of the dead into account, they also call the viewer to some kind of political action. This does not always align with what the artist intends, but that is the nature of public art (Doss, 1995; Frances & Kimber, 2000). Regardless of intention, intensifying memory

undoubtedly removes boundaries between the living and the dead, allowing for a dialogic relationship between the artist, the dead, and the viewer.

Implications

As grieving practices continue to shift more personal grief into the public sphere, grief expression will continue to change. Counter-monuments such as *The United States of Ammunition* continue to be exemplars of this cultural shift. This analysis of counter-monuments invoking the warrant of the dead has two implications: the difference between responsibility and prevention and desensitization.

First, counter-monuments use the warrant of the dead to force the viewer to not only recognize the event that caused the death, but to accept responsibility for that death. Largely, the warrant of the dead is effective to this end. However, Rood (2018) acknowledges the limitations of this framework. Claiming responsibility for a death or deaths does not equate to embracing gun control (p. 64). This disconnect causes the counter-memorial to be ineffective at actualizing solutions. Claiming responsibility is chiefly a retroactive action. A terrible tragedy occurs, someone dies, and someone claims responsibility. However, this claim is rarely followed up with action to prevent future deaths of the same cause.

While the warrant of the dead alone does not have an enforcing agent to account for actionable solutions, the general formula for counter-monuments may solve this. Counter-monuments are essentially public art pieces that center the death a person or group of people. Art has pattern, color, and shape at its disposal. That is to say, art can continue to interact with the viewer with attractive or intriguing visual methods. Rood (2018) initially frames the warrant of the dead in respect to speeches delivered orally. It follows that Rood's framework would struggle with the issue of "fleeting engagement". Unless the audience as

access to transcripts or some other physical artifact of the speech, they are likely to forget details and even main themes. Counter-monuments could potentially sidestep this issue purely because they are visual artifacts. The viewer can interact with them for a longer time and can more easily reencounter the monument. Counter-monuments therefore have the potential to engage their viewers for more sustainable solutions. In the case of *The United States of Ammunition*, this is yet to be seen.

Second, bringing private grief into the public sphere via counter-monuments risks overexposure to trauma. As previously stated, the connectivity of the 21st Century already facilitates this risk, and commemorating these constant traumas only worsens it. Some psychiatrists worry the United States is becoming completely desensitized to traumatic deaths (Ducharme, 2018). Our brains are not hardwired to endure events like incidents of gun violence; these experiences often cause the brain to shut down emotional responses in order to shield from potentially damaging trauma (Ducharme, 2018). In injecting grief into the public, everyday life, grief becomes an everyday occurrence. Stubblefield (2011) uses the term "banalization" to discuss this normalization of trauma. It becomes easy to accept these traumatic deaths as normal since they happen frequently and are quickly at the forefront of minds. Despite their temporary nature, counter-monuments still have the potential to increase our over-exposure to trauma. As counter-monuments gain popularity, the shock of encountering one—or any remembrance of death—may lose all of its impact.

Conclusion

This essay examined the relationship between the viewer of public memorials and the deaths they commemorate. In this analysis, more questions arose. It is unknown to what extent private grief will become public. As counter-monuments increase in popularity, will traditional

grandiose marble statues completely fall out of use? Perhaps most crucially, if this study proves grieving practices are shifting from private to public, and counter-monuments force "ungrievable" and personal deaths into the public sphere, will counter-monuments prove to be an effective agent at increasing collective empathy towards events not impacting an individual personally? Further scholarship is required to continue examining the human experience of memorializing and remembering.

Counter-monuments will continue to evolve, and their public reception along with them. Currently their effectiveness at bridging the gap between viewer and the dead is debatable. Their foundation in public art allows for potential engagement, however, at the cost of desensitization. In the end, it comes down to viewer interpretation and commitment to their obligation to both the dead and the living.

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