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REVIEWS

Roger C. Aden. *Upon the Ruins of Liberty: Slavery, the President's House at Independence National Historical Park, and Public Memory*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015.

Harriet F. Senie. *Memorials to Shattered Myths: Vietnam to 9/11*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Dell Upton. *What Can and Can't Be Said: Race, Uplift, and Monument Building in the Contemporary South*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015.

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I write this review angry, an insufficient, overly reductive term for what is more accurately a shuttling through sinusoidal oscillations of sadness and fear and helplessness and frustration and rage. I write this in the days after what is now the worst mass shooting in contemporary United States history, the massacre of forty-nine people in an Orlando LGBTQ nightclub early Sunday morning on June 12, 2016, the second weekend of Pride month.[1] I write this review having spent the last days reading, nodding along with, and crying through online responses to the horrific violation of human life and the violation of a specific kind of queer space that, for many in my generation, myself included, was naively considered to be a safer space. We have taken for granted—I have taken for granted—the importance of such spaces in light of the significant legal protections granted of late, lulling us—me—into thinking that post-Ryan Murphy, post-Tyler Oakley, post-It Gets Better things got better. And things did.

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Incompletely. I write this grieving for those murdered, an intentional vocabulary choice rather than the too delicate and occluding "those who died." I write this outraged at the initial and in many cases ongoing erasure of the word "homophobia" from news coverage. I write this emboldened by those who call out these omissions and the hollowness of "thoughts and prayers" and instead demand legislation prohibiting sales of military-style semi-automatic assault weapons, full hate crime prevention laws for LGBTQ persons in every state, and the lifting of wrongheaded, fearmongering bans against blood donation by gay men.

I write this still angry.

I write this review of recent scholarship on contemporary monuments and memorials attuned to the problems inherent in fixing memory—freezing in time while repairing, rehabilitating, or bastardizing it. These public markers and the people responsible for bringing them to fruition often aspire to meet the impossible demand placed on them of translating into visual and tactile form the invisible and intangible affective responses of grief, fear, gratitude, shame, and, yes, anger, as Erika Doss divided her recent study of contemporary memorial culture.[2] I write this reminded of the importance of mandatory moratoria put forth by government agencies and public art programs before "official" permanent commemoration can take place, e.g. most notably, the 1986 Commemorative Works Act (and its subsequent amending in 1991, 1994, 2002, 2003, and 2009) limiting commemoration consideration along the National Mall to no less than 10 years after a major conflict and no less than 25 years after the death of an individual or a group. I write this also concerned about the risk of this recent event going unmarked, the site forgotten, demolished, or too quickly repurposed, turned into the kind of "innocent places" Kenneth E. Foote previously discussed.[3]

These necessary but difficult lags in visualizing historical memory link Roger C. Aden's *Upon the Ruins of Liberty: Slavery, the President's House at Independence National Historical Park, and Public Memory*, Harriet F. Senie's *Memorials to Shattered Myths: Vietnam to 9/11*, and Dell Upton's *What Can and Can't Be Said: Race, Uplift, and Monument Building in the Contemporary South*. Each author brings his or her well-established scholarly expertise in the fields of communication studies, art history, and architectural history and urban planning, respectively, to texts that demonstrate the transdisciplinary breadth of monuments and commemorative culture studies. Expertise, not only of the scholars evaluating completed memorials and monuments but also of the parties participating in the commission process, becomes a central theme of these texts.[4] Joining this practical problem of amateur versus professional involvement are issues of: the separation between heritage and history, the historical amnesia that comes with marginalization in and exclusion from the commemorative landscape, the recent motivation to make comprehensive memorials and the inevitable shortfall of such endeavors, whose voices carry the loudest and farthest and thus determine which stories are told, and appropriateness of certain formats to mediate historical trauma, whether that trauma is the local-made-national tragedies of a church bombing in the 1960s or a workplace shooting in the 1980s or the global terrors of the colonial-era slave trade or the attacks of September 11, 2001.

Aden's analysis of the President's House: Freedom and Slavery in the Making of a New Nation (2010), an "ungainly and unspecific name" providing little guidance to the public as to its identity as monument, memorial, or something else entirely, (82) uses the local scale to examine the commemorative landscape on a national scale. Located in Independence National Historical Park in Philadelphia, the contemporary marking of the executive mansion of Presidents George Washington and John Adams came about from community, city, and state pressure following historian Edward Lawler Jr.'s 2002 publication identifying the location of the building. The President's House, a multimedia architectural installation of brick walls, video screens, glass interpretative panels, and material culture artifacts unearthed in a 2007 excavation, also exposes contradictions between heritage ideals and historical practice. In examining the role places of public memory serve in affirming collective heritage, Aden explains how the President's House "offered an opportunity to make a place for African American history squarely in the middle of the story of America's founding" while advocates for the site "had the opportunity to make a place for African Americans in the heart of America's political and philosophical narrative." (6) If Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell serve as icons of an American civil religion, an American exceptionalism that yielded personal and national freedom, the revelation that Washington rotated slaves through the house in a manner both undermining state law and participating in a greater national institutionalization of slavery challenges these national myths.

Aden's approach is guided by the idea of "re-collection" and "persons-within-places," models respectively indebted to public memory scholars Carole Blair and Neil Michel's work on the Astronauts Memorial at the Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex and geographer Edward Casey's concept of "persons-in-places."[5] Aden shifts the onus of memory work from the physical installation to the visitors to such installations. Rather than stable, bounded containers of memory fixed in site, "places are permeable," penetrated by both local surrounding landscapes (in this case the park and Philadelphia's social, political, economic, and racial makeup) and the real and symbolic landscapes carried in the past experiences of visitors. (13) Thus, memory work is a process as much as a product: meaning is derived through a complex negotiation of our attachments to the past through the present.

Aden's investigation rests on how people describe a place, i.e. the "empirical evidence of individuals' affective investments." (90) He examines shifting policy among the National Park Service and the interpretive materials accompanying historical sites both used and not by tour guides. He qualitatively analyzes published evaluations by historians and architecture critics, online message board comments, and evaluation cards of the five semi-finalist proposals, visitor response cards to the completed project by the design firm Kelly/Maeillo, and his own interviews with visitors to the site to reveal how multiple meanings are generated by distinct publics. In addition, repetition of key phrases such as "excavating buried truth" and the fear of a "cover up" in all senses of the phrases are given weight as cuing passionate responses to fear of continued marginalization even during construction.

Despite being preceded by lengthy, dense reviews of literature from rhetoric, philosophy, and environmental psychology, Aden's argument that the President's House is ideologically detached from the rest of the park is compelling. Aden claims that the President's House is both heterotopic and utopic as a site that "has no sense of place…" (162) This lack of a circumscribed place, realized in the openness of the plan of the site, the absence of a dedicated area within the complex for contemplation or discussion, and the debates regarding appropriateness that the complex engenders, allows for a consideration of the mutable nature of public memory and public experience. While at various points in the text described as disorienting, overwhelming, and failing to engage, the President's House nonetheless leaves Aden hopeful. While imperfect or perhaps as a result of this imperfection, the President's House publicly acknowledges the harmful national legacies that continue to shape the present.

A willful refusal to confront troubling national legacies unites Senie's case studies of memorials made in response to the April 19,1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, the April 20, 1999 school shooting of Columbine High School in Littleton Colorado, and the September 11, 2001 bombing of the World Trade Center in New York. Senie selects moments in which, as guided by her title, the mythic safety of the American heartland, suburban high school, and economic might were shattered. She detects the legacy of the Vietnam War as strongly felt in these later tragedies, with these later events not only further fraying an already unraveled national belief system but also approaching Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial as a direct precedent for the kind of rosters of the dead, reflective surfaces, and participatory and experiential memorial complexes created in recent decades.

Senie credits Lin's wall not just with revitalizing memorial art but, along with the populist practice of temporary or immediate memorials, reviving the role of cemeteries in public life, i.e. allowing a public grieving in which private loss can be shared and acknowledged by others. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial brought about a paradigm change, directing attention away from the war dead and to national victimhood. She examines the memorial's continued influence on commemorative practices predicated on diversion and denial, the "highly problematic" conflation of heroes and victims, and the transformation of the memorial format from a place of tribute to a public forum in which grief and grievances can be publicized. (39)

Senie extends art historian Kirk Savage's labeling of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial as "the nation's first 'therapeutic memorial'," an object intended to heal a collective national psyche,[6] to demonstrate how the memorialization process itself and subsequent anniversary commemorations have also taken on therapeutic responsibilities. Also new is the linking of the rapid martyrdom of the deceased, a homogenizing tendency "that actually does little to honor them [the dead], as they blur in the aggregate", (172) with the intentional occlusion of the underlying causes of such tragedies. Through her element-by-element unpacking of these later memorial complexes, which including sculpture, landscaped elements, new buildings and architectural revisions, museum exhibitions, and even gift shop tokens, Senie reveals absences, obscured truths, decontextualizations, and missed opportunities to address

uncomfortable but necessary elements of contemporary culture. Downplayed, if not unexplored entirely, at these complexes are: accounts of the growth of a special militia movement of American citizens declaring war on the United States government from which they believed to be disenfranchised; systemic failures to address teen psychological problems, persistent ostracizing of those outside the sports-driven social hierarchy of high school, and the unchecked loopholes in gun control laws; and Middle Eastern politics across the twentieth century.

Even when discussing familiar works, Senie uncovers new details and proposes convincing historical precedents, e.g. Paul Landowski's Norman prince sarcophagus figure (1937) as a model for Frederick Hart's *The Three Servicemen* (1984) which the latter artist likely saw as a stone carver in the National Cathedral, or Karl Biederman's *The Abandoned Room* (1988-1996) as a conceptual model for the Field of Chairs in the Oklahoma City National Memorial based on period discussions of the former's novelty. Even with such links, Senie staunchly rejects the "absurd and obscene" ahistoricism and "righteous victimhood" linking local tragedies such as the Oklahoma City bombing or the Columbine High School shooting to the Holocaust and other international genocides. (77) This kind of no-pulled-punches approach makes for an invigorating read. The National September 11 Memorial is a "misguided commemoration" with "inexplicably inappropriate" inclusions privileging an institutionalized experience of visual and aural re-enactment of the bombings over meaningful reflection. (168, 162) She rejects bleeding-heart notions that listening to every voice makes up the ideal community memorial, noting instead, "The foundation of democracy... rests on the premise of an informed citizenry, not an emotionally wounded one." (93) She rebukes public history institutions that willfully abandon criticality and complexity in factor of digestible triumphal narratives as demonstrating "an abdication of professional responsibility of the most egregious kind..." (174).

The limitations of an inherited memorial vocabulary, i.e. a war memorial for civilians, appears in Upton's study of African American monument building over the last half century. In his text, which should become required reading for courses on public art, urban design, and Southern history, Upton also emphasizes process over product. Upton provides a sensitive accounting of negotiations over time and across constituencies before, during, and after the commemorative work's construction. He balances his rich archival research with a strident condemnation of the white supremacist political, legal, and economic influences that continue to stifle nuanced engagement with the history of black America, as demonstrated by the recent dedication of the Nathan Bedford Forrest monument (2000) in Selma, Alabama, the resistance to topple or supplement already extant works such as the Liberty Monument (1891) in New Orleans, Louisiana, and current readings of the African American History Monument (1998-2001) on the grounds of the South Carolina State House in Columbia. As Upton observes, "White supremacy is thus the white elephant in the room that civil rights memorial buildings must tread carefully around." (50) Race not only informs political power, urban economics, personal rivalries, and urban spatial divisions but also

constricts contemporary public discourse, delimiting what monuments can and cannot say and what can and cannot be said about such monuments.

Upton casts the contemporary South as fostering ideologies of dual heritage. When white Southern history and black Southern history claim to trace independent trajectories, unimpeachable by intra- and interracial critique and shielded by over-accommodations of multiculturalist silos, an impoverished commemorative landscape persists. Enduring is a literal landscape populated with monuments and memorials that cast the historical South in definitions of chivalry, military valor, and filiopietistic patriotism of white men, monuments and memorials that erase the existence of African Americans and African American history.

Rejecting black invisibility, the monuments of Upton's study reveal a secondary silencing. Similar to the works surveyed by Senie, these public objects erase the historical complexity in favor of essentialized and sanitized narratives of uplift, optimism, and teleological progress. This erasure takes place by the hands of a still-dominant white censuring of black narratives challenging dual heritage and by what Upton identifies as urban middle class African American generational privileging of overtly conciliatory works and rejecting of historically ambiguous ones (e.g. the African American Monument (2002) in Savannah, Georgia, which received pushback from a public objecting to the tempering of contemporary African American achievement with evocations of slavery such as representations of broken shackles and inscriptions of slave ship conditions). The result is a visual culture of the New South of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century that rings as false and constructed as claims of a Lost Cause-informed New South of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Statues of Martin Luther King, Jr., serve as both exception and rule, one of the few African American "great men" allowed to populate southern cities, although not uncomplicatedly. Upton traces how the figure of King participates in practices of contemporary icon veneration in which historical and even photographic accuracy is compromised to accommodate community expectations of physical and spiritual likeness. Upton examines the statues of King (e.g. those in Raleigh, North Carolina (1989-1991), Rocky Mount, North Carolina (2002), and Washington, D.C. (1998-2011)), revealing the replacement of an historical figure pointedly adversarial in his position to the United States government with a universalized depiction excised from racial history. Aden finds traces of this in the President's House, specifically in the interpretive text panels that link the biographies of slaves Hercules and Oney Judge to Richard Allen, Absolem Jones, and even Barack Obama. In both cases, the result is a filling-in of select figures agreed upon by both sides of the racial divide but only in a way that renders figures dehistoricized and, in some cases, ideologically deracinated.

Upton dedicates a full chapter to Birmingham, Alabama's Kelly Ingram Park, a site in which he argues "the tyranny of white sensitivities [is] challenged, if not entirely overcome" and which marks the "the outer limits of what can be said in the context of contemporary southern urban politics." (133, 170) Upton reads the park's redesign through the "myth of the new Birmingham." If Oklahoma City's downtown revitalization has been defined in terms of citizen recovery after the bombing,

Birmingham casts its population as saviors, but almost exclusively white saviors. A similar constructed victimhood of the kind Senie traces takes hold, one in which white people become as much victims of racial oppression as the black populations realistically depicted in Ronald Scott McDowell's *Dogs* (1995-1996) and James Drake's *Children's March* (1992), *Police Dog Attack* (1993), and *Firehosing of Demonstrators* (1992). The existence of these statues, arranged along a route emphasizing the metaphor of the anonymous foot soldier in the struggle for civil rights, is an active challenge to such historical revisionism. The aggressiveness of these works, figures that become "present realities as much as historical representations," (167) stands at odds with the message of conciliatory uplift suggested by much of the rest of the park programs, and signals a recognition of black achievement while offering a warning of the precariousness of this achievement.

Permanent memorials are for the living, not the dead who will never see the bronze statues, etched pavers, or landscaped plazas bearing their names or the name of the event to which their identity will forever be linked. Permanent memorials are also illusorily static. They bear the accretions of time, not only as patinated bronze or sugared marble but as public objects against which we measure our own changed and changing selves. Just as we see them, we demand of them to see us, to reflect our needs. Toward the middle of her text, Senie asks, "How can individuals overwhelmed by recent grief take on a responsibility that must a have a future-oriented perspective?" (92) The design of these memorials should not be up to those still grieving in the wake of tragedy. For them, there are the spontaneous or immediate memorials, i.e. the groupings of flowers, stuffed animals, written messages left along sidewalks and fences. These are the agglomerations of stuff that "briefly transform public spaces into sites of mourning" and "visually reflect the confusion that people feel as they try to assimilate the unthinkable." (8, 172) Along with interim memorials, relics of tragedy that outlive the immediate memorial displays, these informal commemorations provide places for collective gathering and collective grieving, urgent places in which we can come to terms with the very precariousness of our citizenship.

We stand before permanent memorials, perhaps quietly, allowed to consider the passage of time between then and now. There we construct, according to our own eccentric metrics, constellations of canonical and personal places, events, and people linked to the place, event, or person (or people) commemorated. Permanent memorials exist alongside the spectrum of other objects that fill our cities, towns, and rural communities. Even when set within specifically demarcated spaces or designed to form their own self-contained complexes, they nonetheless hover nearby the rest of the contemporary world. Their meaning is further informed by the even visual plane on which all other public objects simultaneously present themselves. They thus exist within the messiness of everyday life, filled with people chasing their dogs in a park on a Sunday afternoon or boarding the train back to work on a Monday morning or gossiping about the weekend during lunch in a coffee shop on a Tuesday, small events transpiring as others continue to violently but silently scream in their heads over the trauma of the same weekend. Permanent memorials exist for when the passage of time

has already tempered the raw grief and rage with something more bluntly dull, something less insistent. Something less angry.

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Notes

[1] This review was submitted for editorial review on June 16, 2016.

[2] Erika Doss, *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

[3] At Foote's innocent places, tragedy disappears from view through rectification and blame shifting. Sites ultimately publicly present themselves as "innocent" as they were before the causes of disaster struck. Kenneth E. Foote, *Shadowed Ground: America's Landscapes of Violence and Tragedy*, rev. ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 145-173.

[4] For a recent discussion of the practical issues related to asserting professional expertise in decisions about public sculpture, see Michele H. Bogart, "Expertise Matters: A New York Case Study on Protecting and Preserving Public Art," *Public Art Dialogue* 6, no. 1 (2016): 142-158.

[5] Carole Blair and Neil Michel, "Commemorating in the Theme Park Zone: Reading the Astronauts Memorial," *At the Intersection: Cultural Studies and Rhetorical Studies,* ed. Thomas Rosteck (New York: Guildford Press, 1999), 29-83 and Edward Casey, *Getting Back Into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

[6] Kirk Savage, *Monument Wars: Washington, D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2009), 261-279.