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## Moving Past: Making Space for Memory after the Boston Marathon Bombing

Austin Thomas Jacobs

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**MOVING PAST: MAKING SPACE FOR MEMORY AFTER THE BOSTON  
MARATHON BOMBING**

A Masters Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of  
Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts, Religious Studies

By

Austin Jacobs

May 2015

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**MOVING PAST: MAKING SPACE FOR MEMORY AFTER THE BOSTON  
MARATHON BOMBING**

Religious Studies

Missouri State University, May 2015

Master of Arts

Austin Jacobs

**ABSTRACT**

In the aftermath of the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, visitors from across the US and the world descended on Boston to pay their respects to the three people who were killed and the more than 260 who were injured at the race's finish line. The public commemorated the tragedy in multiple and diffuse spaces, both physical and virtual. In recognition of this fact, I use the changing location of the spontaneous shrine as an organizing structure for this study, analyzing the memorialization in three "movements," each of which corresponds to a physical relocation of the shrine itself in the weeks following the tragedy. Conducting interviews with Springfield, Missouri, residents who were present for the 2013 Boston Marathon and analyzing stories and interviews from the digital archive, I argue that bodily movement is the defining characteristic of the Boston Marathon memorialization process. The reflexive process of sharing material things and personal stories related to the bombing enhances the significance of the Marathon's finish line in the public imagination, lending these artifacts the iconic power to shape attitudes toward the event. My conclusion is twofold: first, digital archives, while increasingly common, are inadequate for fully preserving memory. Second, the fact that the archivists when preserving do not distinguish between sacred and non-sacred implicitly deems all things worth saving. What is discarded, however, is the constellation of embodied interactions that led to their coexistence at a location characterized as sacred space

**KEYWORDS:** Boston Marathon, ritual studies, religion and the body, material culture studies, visual culture studies, spontaneous shrines, critical spatiality, digital archives, memorialization, American civil religion

This abstract is approved as to form and content

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John Schmalzbauer, PhD  
Chairperson, Advisory Committee  
Missouri State University

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May 2015

Approved:

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John Schmalzbauer, PhD

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Martha L. Finch, PhD

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Victor H. Matthews, PhD

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Thomas Tomasi, PhD: Associate Dean, Graduate College

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## **RELIGION OUT OF PLACE: STUDYING MATERIAL CULTURE AT THE BOSTON MARATHON FINISH LINE**

“Every story is a travel story—a spatial practice.” – Michel de Certeau<sup>1</sup>

Through an act of terrorism at the 117th Boston Marathon on April 15, 2013, the finish line of the world-renowned race was transformed from a place of joy and celebration to one of despair and disorientation. After the bombing, mourners gathered on Boylston Street to cross the finish line, depositing items nearby to form a memorial, or spontaneous shrine, in honor of the bombing victims.

The memorial was moved multiple times: after its formation at the Boston Public Garden on Boylston Street, mourners moved the items to the barricade that blocked off Boylston Street near the marathon finish line. When Boylston Street reopened, city officials ordered the memorial to be moved. A group of volunteers moved the collection to the Bank of America building on the corner of Boylston and Berkeley Street. As more visitors streamed to the site, city officials moved the materials across the street and down the block to Copley Square, allowing visitors to view the memorial without disrupting the flow of vehicle or foot traffic in downtown Boston. In June, six weeks after the blasts, the thousands of items that made up the Copley Square Memorial were moved inside to the Boston City Archives. On April 7, 2014, the items were displayed Boston Public Library as part of an exhibit called “Dear Boston: Messages from the Marathon Memorial.” Now, these items are accessible online as a digital archive through Northeastern University’s “Our Marathon” project.

The Boston Marathon memorial’s multiple moves in the weeks following the

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<sup>1</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 115.



bombing demonstrate the importance of public space in the maintenance and movement of such memorials. Mourners memorialized the bombings in multiple and diffuse spaces, both physical and virtual. In recognition of this fact, I will use the changing location of the spontaneous shrine as an organizing structure for this study, analyzing the Boston Bombing Memorial in three “movements,” each of which corresponds to a physical relocation of the memorial itself in the weeks following the tragedy.

In addition to the mobility of the Boston Marathon memorial as a unified whole, the materials that individuals brought to the site tell stories with spatial implications of their own. The array of items on display at the memorial implies a correspondingly wide range of responses to traumatic death, many of which have religious undertones. Some who worked closely with the objects could not help but feel the emotional weight of the “things” that had accumulated as part of the shrine. Boston city archivist John McColgan, for example, assigned the term “sacred” to the items “because they are expressions of people’s deep empathy and emotions.”<sup>2</sup> The objects moved more than emotions, however. Just as the location of the objects was and is not static, moving from street corners in Boston to a publically accessible online archive, so the objects themselves attest to the presence of moving bodies in lived space. The movement of the Boston Marathon Memorial and the mourners’ attempts to capture and preserve their own movements through photographing their crossings of the finish line in organized events following the marathon figure prominently in the memorial’s narrative.

In Chapter One, I will direct my focus to the marathon’s finish line as the first of three spaces in which the memorialization took shape. I treat the finish line as a “ritual

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<sup>2</sup> David Wade, “Work Underway to Preserve Boston Marathon Memorial,” *WBZ-TV* March 6, 2014. <http://boston.cbslocal.com/2014/03/06/work-underway-to-preserve-boston-marathon-memorial/>.

laboratory” where running bodies interact and where “meaning is literally exposed on the street.”<sup>3</sup> Recognizing that the attacks at the 2013 marathon caused many Americans to feel disoriented and isolated, runners chose the finish line as the place to counter violence and recover a sense of order and community. In the immediate aftermath of the bombing, runners and spectators gathered to participate in grassroots events designed to allow mourners to cross the finish line, commemorate the victims of the attacks, and re-frame the site of the bombings as a space for peaceful remembrance. One such event, called One Run for Boston, took the form of a cross-country relay in which runners from around the country received monetary pledges and committed to run portions of the distance from Los Angeles to Boston between June 7 and July 1, 2013. Through these events, running bodies formed their own “silent procession” as both a unified demonstration of support for victims and a definitive nonverbal call for an end to the violence.<sup>4</sup>

As part of my analysis, I interview runners who took part in the portion of the One Run for Boston relay that passed through Springfield, Missouri.<sup>5</sup> In addition to the practical reality that this leg of the route came within a few miles of my residence, I chose an ethnographic approach for this chapter in order to emphasize the trans-local swell of running-related responses that occurred soon after the bombings. The fact that the Ozarks was just one place among many in which runners took the time to train and fundraise attests to the widespread sense that bodily movement and physical exertion

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Post, et al. *Disaster Ritual: Explorations of an Emerging Ritual Repertoire* (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2003), 249.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 249. Post describes the “silent procession” as “a ritual linked with a specific location. It is in one way or another directly connected to . . . the site of the disaster. This can be included in the route taken, but it can also be the terminus of the progression.” The authors later refer to silent processions as “the places where . . . civil religion can be found” (261).

<sup>5</sup> Prior to these interviews, I received permission from the Missouri State University IRB (#14-403 Mar 27, 2014; see Appendix A).

served as appropriate responses to tragedy. Three of my four interviewees who were present for the 2013 Boston Marathon recount their experiences of the day as well as the role that running played in helping them regain a sense of normalcy after the chaos at the finish line. The chapter includes an exploration of running as a form of ritual. My respondents discuss the ways in which they integrate running into their daily lives, indicating that running serves as a stress reliever, a way of freeing the mind, and a transformational practice that enables them to re-appropriate pain even as they become accustomed to it. The fact that running gives rise to sensations that are difficult to articulate gives it a certain resonance with the way ritual often functions as embodied knowledge, more akin to “peripheral vision” than “studied contemplation, a knowledge that is imageric and sensate rather than ideational.”<sup>6</sup> I thus seek to situate their descriptions of running alongside theoretical perspectives of ritual that take into account its embodied nature, drawing upon Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Pierre Bourdieu, and Catherine Bell, each of whom considers the place of the body in ritual performance.

While running events like One Run for Boston were by no means the final method of commemorating the bombings, they provided an orienting framework for many whom the tragedy affected. As the site marked by trauma, the Boston Marathon finish line joins a number of other “secular sacred spaces” across America’s landscape that have been transformed in the minds of visitors.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to the running events that took place at the finish line, visitors chose the finish line as the appropriate place to deposit objects in remembrance of the victims.

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Taussig, *The Nervous System*, (London: Routledge, 1992), 141.

<sup>7</sup> Kenneth E. Foote, interview by Neal Conan. “Gettysburg, Ground Zero: Secular Sacred Spaces,” *Talk of the Nation*, August 31, 2010, aired on NPR.

In Chapter Two, I trace the development of the spontaneous shrine and its movement from the finish line on Boylston Street to nearby Copley Square. An interview from the WBUR Oral History Project, part of the Our Marathon Digital Archive, serves as the primary reference point for this section of analysis. Interviewee Kevin Brown organized and maintained the fledgling memorial, and his role as the memorial's caretaker in the weeks following its formation provides insight into the political implications of memorial practices that occur in public places. In keeping with the etymological roots of the word *geography*, or "earth writing," I will use Brown's responses to examine how mourners inscribed their grief upon the landscape of downtown Boston, thus highlighting the importance of lived space near the finish line as the memorial developed.<sup>8</sup> Brown's closeness to the memorial during its movement to Copley Square provides a helpful example of how competing claims of ownership regarding sacred space serve to further define the space as "off-limits" for some groups. The swarm of bodies vying to stake their claim upon sacred spaces becomes all the more evident—and their differences of opinion all the more clear-cut—when situated on what Edward Linenthal refers to as the "razor's edge of memorial processes."<sup>9</sup>

At the same time, I will draw attention to the ways that mourners and visitors to the memorial attempted to tell their own stories of the tragedy and mark their places at

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<sup>8</sup> In examining geography as "earth writing," I follow Kenneth E. Foote, who refers to landscape as a "communicational resource," claiming that its durability facilitates comparisons with writing, another visual medium that "carr[ies] meaning into the future"; see his *Shadowed Ground: America's Landscapes of Tragedy and Violence* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), 33.

<sup>9</sup> Edward T. Linenthal, "Postscript: A Grim Geography of Remembrance," in *Religion, Violence, Memory, and Place*, ed. Oren Baruch Stier and J. Shawn Landres (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 241. Linenthal uses this phrase to refer to "the uncomfortable truth that the work of religion both humanizes and dehumanizes," a truth especially evident when there are "clashing sensibilities of how to treat sacred places defiled by mass murder."

the site of the bombings.<sup>10</sup> While some of these stories were written down on banners, mourners engaged in alternative forms of inscription that attested to the presence of moving bodies in lived space. Runners' shoes, which figured prominently in the memorial's formation, serve as one such example. While some runners wrote messages about perseverance or support for the victims on their shoes' soles, others simply deposited their shoes at the site, considering the shoes themselves as harbingers of a sufficiently clear message. Perhaps in an effort to mark their place at the site of the tragedy alongside others who were present for the marathon and were unable to articulate their pain, these runners brought personal belongings that spoke without using verbal language. Material things became the most widely used medium through which runners memorialized the tragedy.

When Boylston Street re-opened on April 24, volunteers moved the objects to Copley Square.<sup>11</sup> There, the collection grew while it remained on public display. When the threat of weather led to concerns about the objects' preservation, Boston city officials decided to move the objects into the Boston City Archives on June 25.<sup>12</sup> To commemorate the anniversary of the attacks, the Boston Public Library displayed the makeshift memorial materials from April 7 to May 11, 2014, in an exhibit called "Dear

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<sup>10</sup> According to Vincent Berdoulay, "a geographic account of place is like a whole staging process whereby people, objects, and messages are coordinated. It is like telling a story. My point is that the study of place has a strong narrative component"; see his "Place, Meaning, and Discourse in French Language Geography," in *The Power of Place: Bringing Together Geographical and Sociological Imaginations*, ed. John A. Agnew and James S. Duncan (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 130.

<sup>11</sup> Associated Press, "Boston Marathon Finish Line Reopens," *The Berkshire Eagle*, April 24, 2013, accessed March 23, 2015, LexisNexis Academic.

<sup>12</sup> Associated Press, "Items from Boston Marathon memorial to be moved," *The Berkshire Eagle*, June 24, 2013, accessed March 23, 2015, LexisNexis Academic.

Boston: Messages from the Marathon Memorial.”<sup>13</sup> Following Thomas Tweed, who argues that “religions are active verbs linked with unsubstantial nouns by bridging prepositions” and therefore “designate where we are *from*, identify whom we are *with*, and prescribe how we move *across*,” Chapter Two shows how the memorialization of tragic death, like Tweed’s notion of religion in general, is kinesthetic in nature.<sup>14</sup> By drawing upon scholarly literature devoted to spontaneous shrines and “makeshift” or “temporary memorials” that form in the aftermath of traumatic events, I will argue that the Boston Bombing Memorial, while resembling other recent spontaneous shrines in important ways, set in motion an array of memorial practices focused on and expressed through bodily movement. As such, the Boston Bombing Memorial in its various forms effectively challenges the conception that the purpose of such shrines is to “reify experience” into an altogether static entity.<sup>15</sup> Through analysis of photographs of objects at the Boston Bombing Memorial and an interview with Brown, the shrine’s unofficial caretaker during its time at Copley Square, I hope to add to the growing literature on spontaneous shrines by exploring the ways that mourners use material objects to increase kinesthetic participation at public sites of mourning.<sup>16</sup>

In Chapter Three, I discuss the items’ transition from the Boston Public Library to a publically accessible online archive. While the materials themselves were sorted and

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<sup>13</sup> Associated Press, “Boston Library hosts Dear Boston exhibit,” *The Times & Transcript*, New Brunswick, April 5, 2014, accessed March 23, 2015, LexisNexis Academic.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 79.

<sup>15</sup> See Miles Richardson, “The Gift of Presence: Leaving Artifacts at Shrines, Memorials, and Other Tragedies,” in *Textures of Place: Exploring Humanist Geographies*, edited by Paul C. Adams, Steven Hoelscher, and Karen E. Till (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 263.

<sup>16</sup> The interview with Kevin Brown, along with photographs of the memorial’s objects, can be found online through *Our Marathon: The Boston Bombing Digital Archive & WBUR Oral History Project*. <http://marathon.neu.edu>.

placed in a temperature-controlled warehouse where they will remain indefinitely—a move that suggests an ironic correspondence between the objects’ fragility and the desire to preserve them permanently—they were also made available digitally. Images of runners and objects, along with electronic copies of thousands of written messages from around the world, attest to the enduring memories of the tragedy and the array of efforts to honor the victims of the bombings.

The archive communicates both the widespread use of digital media in the memorialization process and the shifting nature of Americans’ interaction with material things. Because material things generate intense feelings for many whom the bombing personally affected, the question of which things to keep and which to discard is bypassed in favor of preserving every scrap. Not only are the scraps saved, but they are also made available to the public as images, so that the narrative of the memorial as a whole takes a decidedly spectatorial turn. The objects themselves, after being meticulously catalogued and painstakingly preserved, maintain their materiality for the perceiving subject, in this case the general American public, only as images on a screen.

Memorialization processes involve negotiation, and as specific memorials develop, mourners invest the site of a given tragedy with an array of meanings, many of which conflict and threaten to create further division in places where separation and loss already prevail. The source of such conflict at memorials often centers on the extent to which the site should be modified to reflect the multiplicity of attitudes toward a tragic event. At Ground Zero in Lower Manhattan, for example, mourners expressed differing opinions about how to memorialize the space formerly occupied by the Twin Towers. At issue in this debate was the extent to which the site would be characterized by

remembrance, allowing people to pay tribute to those killed in the attacks, or replacement, enabling people to establish new rhythms in place of former ones that the attacks had so decisively interrupted. As one commentator remarked following the 9/11 attacks, the former approach too closely resembles creating “memorials to death and destruction” and therefore might serve to “monumentalize and privilege such death and destruction.” According to this view, placing a monument at the site would “become the terrorists’ victory monument,” effectively transmuting “our sorrow” into “their triumphal fist, thrust into the air.” Instead of preserving relics of the tragedy that would freeze the moment in time, he argued, “Our commemorations must . . . inspire life, regenerate it, and provide for it. We must animate and reinvigorate this site, not paralyze it, with memory.”<sup>17</sup> If paralysis was the inevitable result of mere remembrance, then Americans needed a form of commemoration that fostered life and facilitated movement.

Central to the disputes over how to memorialize sites of tragic death in general and Ground Zero in particular are the conflicting views about space and the boundaries of the sacred. Modern geographers introduce a tripartite theoretical framework for understanding the changes that spaces undergo through time, analyzing their Firstspace, Secondspace, and Thirdspace characteristics, which will be explored further in Chapter Three.<sup>18</sup> Firstspace refers to the physical features of a given landscape, including both

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<sup>17</sup> James E. Young, “The Stages of Memory at Ground Zero,” in *Religion, Violence, Memory, and Place*, ed. Oren Baruch Stier and J. Shawn Landres (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 215.

<sup>18</sup> Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 6. See also Victor H. Matthews, who posits a further division of “fourthspace,” which seeks to account for the ways that “the collective memory of the community tends to perpetuate” repeated conceptions of space to form a “mental map” of their living and working space; see his “Remembered Space in Biblical Narrative” in Mark George, ed. *Constructions of Space IV: Further Developments in Examining Social Space in Ancient Israel* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2013), 62. “Fourthspace” is a much clearer addendum to Soja’s framework than alternatives proposed by other scholars (see fn. 167 below).



natural and built environments. Secondspace, also known as “imagined space,” encompasses the space’s significance in people’s minds and can be expressed through the assignation of terms like “sacred” or “holy.” Thirdspace, or “lived space,” combines characteristics of real and imagined space, taking into account the ways that people interact with and use space in their everyday lives.<sup>19</sup>

In American memorial culture, these spatial characteristics often change depending on how people choose to memorialize a given location.<sup>20</sup> The modification of Ground Zero provides examples of Firstspace, Secondspace, and Thirdspace in practice. The collapse of the Twin Towers changed Manhattan’s physical makeup, or Firstspace characteristics, and the National September 11<sup>th</sup> Memorial highlights the towers’ conspicuous absence. Architect Michael Arad’s design for the memorial, entitled *Reflecting Absence*, incorporates the Twin Towers’ “footprints,” each measuring more than an acre in size, into the memorial’s landscape. Perhaps in an effort to address the concern that a monument at Ground Zero could be interpreted as terrorists’ upraised “triumphal fist,” Arad’s deconstructivist countermemorial descends into the ground, providing a marked contrast to the surrounding skyscrapers and offering an unobstructed view of the sixteen-acre, tree-lined memorial landscape. The site’s Secondspace

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<sup>19</sup> Emphasizing these three separate-but-overlapping characteristics of space builds upon the theory of ritual put forward by Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (University of Chicago Press, 1987). Commenting on Smith’s work, ritual studies scholar Ronald L. Grimes critiques Smith for not distinguishing between “geographical place, . . . mental schemes and social classification,” noting that Smith “slips between one usage and the other, making the shift without calling attention to it”; see his “Jonathan Z. Smith’s Theory of Ritual Space,” *Religion* 29, no. 3 (1999): 264.

<sup>20</sup> Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History,” *Representations* 26 (1989): 7, discusses the ways in which communities perform rituals so that memory “crystallizes and secretes itself” to become “sites of memory” (*lieux de mémoire*). These sites are increasingly important when the real environment (*milieux de mémoire*) is transformed or ceases to exist.

designation is a point of contention among the several constituencies who lay claim to the site; however, many who hold differing opinions about what should happen to Ground Zero share the view that the space is somehow sacred and, as a result, should be formally commemorated in some way.<sup>21</sup> As Thirdspace, the plot of land that the World Trade Center previously occupied has been transformed into a museum, making it a destination site for tourists. At the same time, Manhattan's identity as a bustling urban center dictates that the boundaries of Ground Zero's sacred space remain permeable enough to allow for the normal flow of commercial activity to carry on relatively unimpeded.<sup>22</sup>

This tripartite categorization of space also provides a helpful theoretical framework for analyzing the memorialization process after the Boston Marathon bombings. Efforts to commemorate the tragedy were still in their nascent stages when runners gathered to cross the finish line in May and June of 2013. One could observe the effect of the trauma on the space of the marathon's finish line as scaffolding stood in front of Boylston Street storefronts. The area had already been flooded with offerings of flowers and banners bearing the widely used slogan "Boston Strong." What one could not see, however, were the thousands of One Run for Boston participants who had carried the baton, one stride at a time, toward the finish line on Boylston Street, an already sacralized space that now held new significance in runners' imaginations. Regardless of the contestation over the meaning of the word "sacred," the finish line's place in the

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<sup>21</sup> See David Lê, who calls attention to the fact that the sacred is a "socially instituted category" and observes, "regardless of the plural and incompatible accounts of what the sacred is, a general consensus was reached that it was present at Ground Zero, and that this merited some special formalisation"; see his "Negativity and Sacred at Ground Zero," *Literature and Theology* 27 no. 4 (2013): 455.

<sup>22</sup> Foote notes that the difficulty with boundary-making at these sites often stems from "conflict over commercial uses," adding, "The more profane, the more commercial it is, the less likely it is for people to support its development close to one of these sites." Interview by Neal Conan, "Gettysburg, Ground Zero: Secular Sacred Spaces," *Talk of the Nation*, August 31, 2010, aired on NPR.

imagination of runners and mourners alike caused many to turn to bodily movement as a form of ritual response and natural next step after the bombings. Training one's eyes on the moving bodies at the finish line helps one to see beyond notions of the "sacred" as a metaphysical category and look instead upon what Thirdspace interactions suggest about how bodies experience and interact at sites of tragedy that are often designated as sacred.<sup>23</sup>

The fact that the physical space (Firstspace) near the finish line was covered with material offerings of city and national pride suggests that it held particular imagined (Secondspace) significance for mourners and visitors. The hundreds of memorial items carefully arranged on the pavement of Copley Square provides a marked contrast to the digital archive, which is located in a utopic cyberspace. The third chapter includes an analysis of both firsthand accounts that illustrate the place that the Boston Marathon holds in the imaginations of those who have contributed to the archive and photos of materials that appear in the online archive that show how mourners modified the physical space of Copley Square. Situating these two analytical nodes allows for an enriched understanding of how the Boston Marathon bombings function in the collective memory of those who contribute to the digital archive from around the world. Using a combined analysis of real and imagined space, I will challenge the assumption that photographs can serve as a stand-in for material things.<sup>24</sup> In addition, I will argue that even though the

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<sup>23</sup> As David Lê argues, "it is misguided and historically inaccurate to think that the sacred cannot be contested and reformed *despite* a disagreement about its metaphysical status or (what are taken to be) its essential indicators"; "Negativity and Sacred," 470, fn. 7.

<sup>24</sup> Insofar as it draws upon existing theoretical frameworks to interpret the influence of the Internet upon ritual performance, this project's third chapter could be characterized as a "third wave" approach according to the genealogy laid out by Morten Højgaard and Margit Warburg; see their "Introduction: Waves of Research," in *Religion and Cyberspace*, ed. Morten Højgaard and Margit Warburg, (London: Routledge, 2005), 1-11. Heidi A. Cambell offers a helpful synopsis of these waves and, perhaps suggesting

material things displayed at the finish line were there only temporarily, they maintain an unbreakable association with the sacred long after they depart from the emotionally charged location that imputed to them this designation. Paying attention to the digital display of these material things highlights the seemingly contradictory ways that spontaneous shrines and their virtual successors facilitate or prohibit certain ritual expressions and in so doing, raises provocative questions for the study of material culture in a highly computer literate, visually saturated age.<sup>25</sup>

### **Where's the Religion?**

One question that readers of this study in its various stages of progress have posed is, in so many words, "Where's the religion?" As I hope will become clear, religion figures into the memorial process of the Boston Marathon bombings in a few ways.

First, this study is an attempt to challenge the presumed antipathy between religion and things that has persisted in the field of religious studies since the Enlightenment. This hierarchical relationship that places the spiritual, immaterial, and transcendent above the concrete, situated, and tangible persists today. Restricting the definition of religion to terms associated with inward belief relegates the material things with which people interact to a decidedly subordinate status. In other words, if "real" religion is best conceived of as inward contemplation of a divine, otherworldly reality, then material things are valuable in lived religious practice only as signifiers of a

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that scholarship on digital religion mimic the rapid changes in the technology being studied, cites the possible formation of a "fourth wave" despite the fact that she refers to the study of religion and the Internet as a "new subfield"; see her *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*, ed. Heidi A. Campbell (London: Routledge, 2013), 8-10.

<sup>25</sup> Manuel Vasquez calls for a study of the ways that electronic communication creates a global environment characterized by "disembeddedness and disembodiment," noting, "The new metaphysics of cyberspace . . . has serious implications for the ways in which we experience our bodies and in which we sacralize space and time"; *More Than Belief*, 327.

transcendent signified. As this study demonstrates, when people incorporate religion into public commemorations of the dead, they do so by praying prayers *and* constructing crosses, citing scripture *and* running races. Even as public rituals in response to the Boston Marathon bombings stopped short of prescribing how one should think theologically about tragedy, death, and the afterlife, they opened the door for specific forms of bodily and material interactions that sacralized space (the finish line) and the actions that occurred there (e.g. moving across, depositing things). These interactions among bodies, materials, and environments illustrate that rituals are not static, but rather “emerge, change, deteriorate, and fall into disuse.”<sup>26</sup>

Scholars of the so-called “material turn” in religious studies have pointed to the Protestant Reformation’s emphasis on the radical Otherness of God as the foundation for the tendency to disregard material things.<sup>27</sup> It is unfair to saddle the Reformation with the full responsibility of making religion synonymous with world-renouncing inwardness. On the one hand, ambivalence toward—and even outright disregard for—the tangible world and the body preceded the Reformation. On the other hand, one cannot trace a straight, three-centuries-long line from Protestant ambivalence about the body to Cartesian mind-body dualism, which signaled a philosophical flight from the body, reducing the human being to a *res cogitas*.<sup>28</sup> However, each of these factors contributed

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<sup>26</sup> Ronald L. Grimes, “Ritual, Media, and Conflict: An Introduction,” in *Ritual, Media, and Conflict*, ed. Ronald L. Grimes, Ute Husken, Udo Simon, and Eric Venbrux (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 13.

<sup>27</sup> For a discussion of the Protestant legacy for the devaluation of material things to the status of mere “symbols,” see Birgit Meyer and Dick Houtman, *Things: Religion and the Question of Materiality* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 10-14.

<sup>28</sup> Charles Taylor effectively describes Protestantism’s flight from the body as “excarnation,” a term that is all the more shocking for its opposition to the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation; see his *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 603.

to the sentiment that material things are mere harbingers of a divine essence. With the material turn, then, has come a chorus of voices attempting to reassert the centrality of the body and materiality as “inextricable from, and not merely added to, religion.”<sup>29</sup>

One look at the Copley Square memorial alerts the observer that 1) people use their things to commemorate the dead and 2) these things create a narrative of their own that often invokes religion as a central feature. The fact that the memorial ceremonies, as well as the spontaneous shrine itself, occur in public allows one to examine the ways that the religious and the secular, rather than being two easily delineated categories, often commingle in lived reality. Because the Boston Marathon occurs on Patriot’s Day, a public holiday in Massachusetts and Maine, displays of civil religion infused commemoration of the bombings. The fact that tragic events force people to face their own mortality perhaps further reveals the extent to which the categories of sacred and secular, while separated in theory, become blurred in practice.<sup>30</sup> Second, in an effort to call attention to the inherent situatedness of religious practices, this study analyzes the sensory politics of the sacred. Tracing the memorial’s movement allows for an examination not only of how one conceives of the sacred, but also of how one perceives the sacred, whether through the bodily sensation of running (Chapter One), interacting with material things at a spontaneous shrine (Chapter Two), or viewing artifacts while seated in front of a computer screen (Chapter Three). While the Boston Marathon

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<sup>29</sup> Birgit Meyer, David Morgan, Crispin Paine, and S. Brent Plate, “The Origin and Mission of *Material Religion*,” *Religion* 40 (2010): 209. Manuel A. Vasquez posits that “the single most important site of contestation in the materialist turn is the body,” for “it has long been at the heart of ongoing relation between spirit and matter”; see his *More Than Belief*, 11.

<sup>30</sup> According to Vasquez, “For the scholar operating within the materialist framework, the primary task is to study the logics of religious ways of being in the world and to elucidate how these logics are inextricably connected with other (nonreligious) ways of being in the world.” *More Than Belief*, 8.

bombings radically disrupted the flow of life in Boston, the repeated calls for a return to normalcy suggest that people's everyday, profane, ordinary lives affect their responses when dramatic interruptions occur. David Morgan argues for the importance of scholarly attentiveness to the everyday, asserting that although "scholarship in history and religious studies has stressed great figures and revelatory moments as being the most formative," humans' values and identities are as much the product of "the prosaic rhythms of everyday life" as they are of "the rarefied events of catastrophes, epiphanies, and revolutions."<sup>31</sup> For many people, a return to normalcy meant a return to running the Boston Marathon, which, for the participants themselves, entailed hours of solitary training, a seemingly trivial ritual that nonetheless shaped how many people commemorated the tragedy.<sup>32</sup>

### **Where's the Researcher?**

In his treatment of material culture studies as a research method, Richard Carp identifies two fundamental methodological concerns: the first is the limited extent to which scholars can experience others' material worlds. The second, related concern deals with the inherent necessity of using material culture to study material culture. In other words, scholars who study rituals that involve bodily movements and gestures are themselves using their bodies in certain ways that condition their understanding of these

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<sup>31</sup> David Morgan, *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Religious Images* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 13.

<sup>32</sup> Simon Coleman examines the Latin etymology of the word "trivial" and suggests the word was used to indicate the meeting of three roads, "a place known if sometimes despised and/or ignored through its very commonplaceness." When used to describe ritual, however, Coleman asserts that "trivial" "suggests liturgical pathways and articulations that lead far from the shrine itself," inviting considerations "of the supposedly nonreligious as well as the overtly religious life"; see his "Pilgrimage as Trope for an Anthropology of Christianity," *Current Anthropology* 55, no. 10 (2014): 287.

rituals, whether or not they engage in the rituals themselves.<sup>33</sup> As an examination of material culture and religion in which past and present curiously overlap, this project confronts both of these methodological concerns. Therefore, it is perhaps especially important to discuss my own relationship to the subject matter.

In addition to analyzing photographs and conducting and combing through a series of recorded interviews, I qualified for and participated in the 2014 Boston Marathon. Following the 2013 bombings, I considered my participation as an opportunity to get as close as possible to the memorialization practices that accompanied the race in the year following the bombings. As an avid runner, I wanted to experience the race for myself and attempt to incorporate what AllOne Health Consultant Barry Beder calls “the feeling of the finish line.”<sup>34</sup> In addition to the training required to run the 2014 Boston Marathon, I ran a marathon to qualify before the deadline for entries in September of 2013. The result was almost a year of preparation that began shortly after the 2013 Boston Marathon. In the midst of taking classes to complete a master’s degree, I took regular breaks for training runs. These runs, I soon discovered, helped me to organize my thoughts about my research and made me wonder about possible overlaps between running and ritualization. Also during this time, news reports from Boston regularly focused on the rebuilding and memorialization efforts in the aftermath of the bombings. If the 2014 Boston Marathon were to be the place where runners would definitively answer the previous year’s attacks with a show of strength and endurance, the

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<sup>33</sup> Richard Carp, “Material Culture,” *Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*, ed. Michael Stausberg and Steven Engler (London: Routledge, 2014), 474.

<sup>34</sup> Barry Beder, “2014 Boston Marathon: Emotional Readiness and Peak Performance,” AllOne Health (MP4 Webinar), April 14 2014, accessed May 5, 2014. <http://www.allonehealth.com/media/24886/emotional-readiness-and-peak-performance.mp4>.



day-to-day training required to enable participation in the event seemed like an area of inquiry rich with possibility for studying bodily movement as a ritual response to tragedy. This project is the result of these considerations and is reflective of my own trajectory of study in the Department of Religious Studies at Missouri State University.

I soon found that running was helpful not only as a way to incorporate the body and ritualization into my research, but also as a way to clear blockages in my mind when I hit ruts in research or writing. In Frederic Gros's engaging meditation entitled *Marcher: Une Philosophie*, he invites the reader to imagine a piece of writing as "an expression of [the scribe's] physiology," lamenting the fact that "in all too many books the reader can sense the seated body, doubled up, stooped, shrivelled [*sic*] in on itself." The writing produced by such a body suffers from the body's inertia and rigidity. Gros contrasts the stultifying effect of such prose with the image of "the walking body," which "is unfolded and tensed like a bow: opened to wide spaces like a flower in the sun, exposed torso, tensed legs, lean arms."<sup>35</sup> The ways that scholars discipline their bodies has specific implications for how they engage (or do not engage) with what they study. This is not to suggest that all attempts to study lived religion must be conducted by participant-observers, but I would argue that a healthy dose of skepticism that is levied against the notion of historical objectivity should also be applied to the ways that scholarly practice shapes the scholar's body.

Richard Carp and Tim Ingold are among those who have acknowledged the difficulty of engaging responsibly in the study of material culture as a discipline in its preliminary phases. Articulating what has become a rallying cry for many contemporary

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<sup>35</sup> Frederic Gros, *Marcher: Une Philosophie*, transl. John Howe (London: Verso, 2014), 19.

theorists across the humanities, Carp argues, “Our willful unconsciousness of the academic body is literally senseless, and depicts a wishful fantasy of panoptical truth, of a *nowhere* where truth is not dependent on embodiment, situation, culture, or psychology.”<sup>36</sup> Anthropologist Tim Ingold notes that the technological advancement of the chair, which “enables sitters to think without moving their feet at all,” has the effect of leading inhabitants of modern post-industrial societies to behave as though “the world of their thoughts, their dreams, and their relations with others floats like a mirage above the road they tread in their actual material life.”<sup>37</sup> Elsewhere, Ingold offers other examples of technological advancements (i.e., footwear, paved roads, and motorized transportation) that have led Western thinkers to assume that “thinking and knowing are the achievements of a stationary mind.” Ingold contends, however, that “an account of the mind must be as much concerned with the work of the feet as with that of the head and hands.”<sup>38</sup> Thus, one goal of this study is to re-assess the place(ment) of the scholarly body as it is traditionally conceived and move toward an understanding that takes into account the inherent problem with “the view from nowhere” that the material turn in contemporary scholarship has sought to confront. Such a confrontation, I argue, is

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<sup>36</sup> Carp, “Integrative Praxes: Learning from Multiple Knowledge Formations,” in *Issues in Integrative Studies* 19 (2001): 99.

<sup>37</sup> Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge, and Description* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 39.

<sup>38</sup> Tim Ingold, “Movement, Knowledge, and Description,” in *Holistic Anthropology: Emergence and Convergence*, ed. David Parkin and Stanley Ulijaszek, 194-211 (New York: Berhahn Books, 2011), 195. Ingold goes on to argue that “beings originally open to the world are closed in on themselves, sealed by an outer boundary or shell that protects their inner constitution from the traffic of interaction with their surroundings.” Ingold refers to this phenomenon as “the logic of inversion” and seeks to provoke his audience to engage more deeply with their environments (200-01).

incomplete without recognizing the position of the scholarly body itself, hunched over a keyboard, staring at the pages of a book, or sifting through archives.<sup>39</sup>

Robert Orsi writes of his confrontation with a similar tension between research conducted in isolation among books and active interaction with his subject matter in his introduction to the second edition of *The Madonna of 115<sup>th</sup> Street*. According to Orsi, the prospect that his own birth might be included in the timeline of his analysis of Italian Catholics in East Harlem in the mid-twentieth century caused him to worry about the scholarly credibility of his work. Re-visiting what he calls a sense of “hot professional shame” that accompanied the realization that the bookend of his history came dangerously close to encroaching on his own existence, which he worried would call into question the authenticity of his historical research, Orsi recalls being haunted by the following thought: “Not only was I not using traditional archives, but I had transgressed onto the time of my own being.” Reflecting on the tension he felt, however, allowed him to articulate a truth about the situatedness of the scholar and the boundaries between “everyday life and academic protocols” that make the study of lived religion and material culture so difficult. Orsi writes,

The reality of such boundaries—which present themselves as matters of academic or professional limits or standards, but clearly involve much bigger existential dilemmas—is pressed not only into our professional consciousness but into our bodies, too. This is what it means to be trained in or acculturated to a particular intellectual discipline, to be disciplined by expectations, orientations, and limits, and fear of a field of inquiry, and to bear within oneself the history of the field’s becoming. Transgression, even imagined transgression, registers as shame in the body and as intellectual uncertainty.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Carp exhorts scholars to acknowledge that academic thought occurs as one stills, among other things, “the urge for movement and kinesthetic expression” and adopts the “slumberous physical stillness required for “reading, writing, and computer work”; see his “Integrative Praxes,” 99.

<sup>40</sup> Robert A. Orsi, “Introduction to the Second Edition,” in *The Madonna of 115<sup>th</sup> Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950*, 3rd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), xxx.

If, as Orsi acknowledges he worried, the boundaries between past and present are “threatened by scholarship that looks outside of archives,” how much more might these divisions be threatened when the archives themselves are located and analyzed outside of traditional archives? Such is the case in the second and third chapters of this study, which rely heavily upon the photos and interviews from the Our Marathon Digital Archive as primary data.

Historians who have looked skeptically upon the use of digital archives in particular and the relatively new discipline of digital humanities in general might constitute the present-day manifestation of those who have sought to uphold the “sacred” status of what Orsi refers to as the “archival moment”—a liminal undertaking in which the historian embarks on a mythical “hero’s quest” to obtain a tattered document made all the more valuable by its obscurity and inaccessibility.<sup>41</sup>

Even the archivists who curated the materials that formed part of the spontaneous shrine at Copley Square expressed unease about cataloguing a history that they had also experienced firsthand. Marta Crilly, an archivist who worked closely with the items, pointed out the “challenge [of] documenting history that you experience, which is not something that we typically do.”<sup>42</sup> Curating a history that was so noticeably *in medias*

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<sup>41</sup> Orsi, “Introduction to the Second Edition,” xxvii. Joshua Sternfeld counts historians and archival specialists among those who are skeptical of digital archives, noting that the former “question the integrity of inquiries based on digital or quantified evidence,” while the latter “point to the misappropriation of terms such as *finding aid*, *collection*, *record*, and *archives*.” However, the desire to preserve the content of deteriorating hard copy documents has led an increasing number of archivists toward digitization; see his “Archival Theory and Digital Historiography: Selection, Search, and Metadata as Archival Processes for Assessing Historical Contextualization,” *The American Archivist* 74, no. 2 (2011): 549.

<sup>42</sup> Brian MacQuarrie, “Marathon Memorials Enshrined: Makeshift Memorial to Victims Attains Permanence,” *Boston Globe*, March 28, 2014.

*res* not only created a conceptual shift for the archivists, but also led them to engage in new preservation practices, as they vacuumed shoes' grit-covered surfaces and plucked insects from stuffed animals' fur. Religion and remembrance take on a complex, interwoven texture at the site of the bombings. As the memorial moved from Boylston Street to Copley Square to a storage facility and later to the World Wide Web, mourners, like the memorial's archivists, found new and creative ways to commemorate that ranged from kinesthetic to stationary. This project constitutes one telling of the movements, a narrative that is also a reflexive view from somewhere.

## **WHERE WORDS FAIL: RUNNING AS A RITUAL AND MEMORIAL RESPONSE TO TRAGEDY**

“Before I run, I am a Cartesian. The body is simply a machine. I must take it for a run and tune it up. I must improve my body so that I can fulfill my real purpose, which is to think. It isn't until I get on the roads that I know again, as I have known for fifteen years, that I am my body and I am my soul, and I exist as a totality.” – George Sheehan<sup>43</sup>

On Saturday, May 25, 2013, just weeks after the Boston Marathon bombings, runners and spectators gathered again at the finish line for an event called “One Run.” The event, organized by local running clubs in conjunction with Boston area businesses, gave runners and spectators the chance to experience the final mile of the Boston Marathon course. Because the bombings stopped the progress of so many runners before they could reach the finish line, organizers considered it appropriate to re-open the finish line and photograph participants as they crossed the stripe.

While this event was intended to re-create the marathon finish and was not

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<sup>43</sup> George A. Sheehan, *Running and Being*, 2nd ed. (New York: Rodale, 2013), 252

explicitly referred to as a religious ceremony, the event parallels Thomas Tweed's definition of religion. According to Tweed, "Religions are confluences of organic-cultural flows that intensify joy and confront suffering by drawing on human and suprahuman forces to make homes and cross boundaries."<sup>44</sup> Because of the decidedly disorienting violence that characterized the 2013 marathon, runners gathered to "orient themselves in time and space," which is for Tweed a defining characteristic of religion.<sup>45</sup> After the debris from the explosions had been moved, runners re-occupied the site in order to experience firsthand the feeling of crossing the finish line. Those present at the finish line on April 15 had lost not only their sense of security, but also the sensation of achievement that accompanies finishing a grueling distance race.

#### **"Four hours, 50 minutes, and 31 days"**

South Boston resident Sharon Novick was among those who crossed the finish line in a separate event on May 15, announcing her finishing time of "four hours, 50 minutes, and 31 days" as she wiped a tear from her eye and received embraces from family members.<sup>46</sup> In order to confront the suffering that the bombings caused, participants like Novick not only gathered to move across a boundary, but also to have their movement documented alongside like-minded individuals. Local runners and city

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<sup>44</sup> Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 54.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 74, emphasis in original.

<sup>46</sup> Wesley Lowery, "Friends, Family, Victims Finish Marathon," *The Boston Globe*, May 16, 2013, accessed May 5, 2015, <http://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2013/05/15/runners-victims-supporters-return-boylston-finish-marathon/M7IQBk1YTtDFJYmsWU12TN/story.html>.

officials organized a larger gathering on May 25 for the same purpose.<sup>47</sup> Participants in these events sought to recover a sense of normalcy, moving their bodies in an effort to remove the blockage they previously had experienced at the finish line. Beyond an attempt to memorialize the victims, the act of crossing the finish line served as an opportunity for mourners to record their own movement. Accompanying the increasing popularity of public memorialization is mourners' own desire to capture and preserve the steps they go through in the mourning process, and as this example illustrates, the "steps" one takes while mourning are often literal footsteps. As Erika Doss observes, the contemporary trend to equate knowledge with "being there and touching something, with 'feeling' the pain and suffering of others," makes the kinesthetic dimensions of memorial practices especially meaningful for participants.<sup>48</sup>

In addition to being invited to "pin up their 2013 bib number," participants were given the opportunity to simulate the finish of the Boston Marathon. Alison Landsberg offers a particularly useful metaphor for describing the ways that kinesthetic memory functions in contemporary society. Adopting the term "prosthetic memory" to describe, among other things, the ways that "memories, like an artificial limb, are actually worn on the body," Landsberg calls attention to the "sensuous" and "experiential" nature of mass-mediated representations of memory. A major difference between Landsberg's theory and the memories created at the One Run finish line is that, unlike Landsberg's contention that prosthetic memories do not "derive from a person's lived experience,"

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<sup>47</sup> City of Boston, "Traffic Advisory, Boston Strong One Run and Run to Remember," May 23, 2013, accessed May 5, 2015, <http://www.cityofboston.gov/news/default.aspx?id=6146>.

<sup>48</sup> Erika Doss, *Memorial Mania Public Feeling in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 75. Doss also comments on the contemporary phenomenon of mourners' desires to preserve the act of mourning, saying, "If photos of the dead were common a century ago, photos and videos of the *mourners* are typical today" (emphasis in original).

many One Run participants had been present at the finish line on the day of the bombing. While their experience was a re-creation of the event that, like prosthetic memory, “mark[ed] a trauma,” participants’ bodies moved in real time and space, unmediated by video screen or museum space—media that Landsberg refers to as not “natural” or “organic.”<sup>49</sup> Rather than merely planting a tree at the site, runners’ bodies formed the foundation of the spontaneous shrine’s ecological makeup.<sup>50</sup> Instead of building a statue or constructing a permanent shrine to commemorate the event, mourners and organizers alike realized that the finish line was an appropriate memorial marker insofar as it facilitated rather than impeded physical movement.

In addition to the May 15 and May 25 events, three British runners organized an event called One Run for Boston, a cross-country relay to raise money for the One Fund, which was created to offer support to victims of the bombings. One Run for Boston began on June 7, 2013, in Los Angeles and, like the earlier One Run event, ended at the finish line of the Boston Marathon. On July 1 runners gathered to watch as the baton reached its destination, culminating its 3,300-mile journey and passing through the hands

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<sup>49</sup> Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 20.

<sup>50</sup> Consider, for example, Edward T. Linenthal’s discussion of the symbolic significance assigned to the Survivor Tree or the “army of fruit trees” planted in the aftermath of the Oklahoma City bombing in *The Unfinished Bombing: Oklahoma City in American Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 71-74, 218. In referring to shrines’ formations as “ecological,” I mean the way that shrines permanently alter the physical environment of a site. Chidester and Linenthal point to the difficulty of characterizing natural environments that humans have invested with sacred significance as unadulterated landscapes. Instead, natural environments that become invested with sacred significance are cultural products, the “nineteenth-century religious valorization of nature” often serving to occlude “political, social, and economic forces at work in the production of American space.” According to this interpretation, the difference in “packaging and presentation” of sacred spaces as “natural environments” or “built environments” is a matter of degree, the latter being the “more obviously constructed” form of sacred space; see *American Sacred Space* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 13. While the decision about altering the landscape with the construction of monument to commemorate the attacks is still being discussed at the time of this writing, mourners’ immediate commemorative impulses were notable for their transience. By gathering to cross the finish line and bringing materials to form a spontaneous shrine, mourners implicitly acknowledged the impermanence of presence at the site.



of more than 2,000 runners who completed relay stages in fourteen states. Participants ran in groups and individually, day and night, and raised more than \$90,000 for the bombing victims. The largest of the three post-marathon finish line crossings, One Run for Boston garnered national attention and drew thousands to the finish line, both in person and via television news reports.

Springfield, Missouri, was among the checkpoints on the relay route, and runners from the Ozarks region banded together to complete the stages in southwest Missouri. Firsthand accounts from these runners, two of whom participated in the 2013 Boston Marathon, form the basis of the following analysis, in which I explore a functional definition of religion that includes the embodied practice of running and its ritualistic functions. By devoting special attention to runners' methods of training and their efforts to cope with the tragedy that occurred at the finish line of the 2013 Boston Marathon, I argue that in the place where words fail, running bodies in rhythmic motion become the transitive sites for expressing mourning, solidarity, and transcendence.

While the practice of running has many points of comparison with other ritual practices that help participants process overwhelming emotion, Paul Post notes, "It must not be expected that rituals are a panacea."<sup>51</sup> Despite these limitations, my interviewees' descriptions of the role of running in their lives suggest that physical movement served as way for them to make sense of tragedy. Having run multiple marathons, each of my interviewees knows not only the sense of achievement that accompanies completing a

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<sup>51</sup> Paul Post, et al. *Disaster Ritual*, 268. However, Post does point out that ritual performance can be effective in psychological recovery in the aftermath of tragedy, stating, "Powerlessness is one of the essential points about trauma. When a ritual is performed deliberately, a certain degree of control is regained[.]"

marathon, but also the many hours of running required to complete the marathon distance. Training thus became a part of their everyday lives. Although changing from work attire to exercise clothing signaled a break between the two activities, running resembled these runners' jobs insofar as it was a scheduled activity that they performed daily. Runners pointed out that while their daily training provided an escape from the pressures of work, the act of getting outside and moving their bodies gave them an opportunity to re-appropriate mental stress even as they exerted themselves physically. Interestingly, these runners even looked forward to the physical exertion. More than simply a functional means to relieve mental stress, the rhythmic running motion performed daily over the course of several years became pleasurable for its own sake, so that even fatigue became something to invite and sustain.

Talking about the act of running proved difficult for my interviewees, in part because much of the mental activity taking place while on a run hums along unnoticed, below the level of conscious thought. Much of what happens on a run is utterly forgettable in its very routineness, and this characteristic, I suggest, is what lends running its efficacy as a ritual. In the aftermath of the bombings, returning to running—to that form of forgetting that “frees up attention for those experiences that are more demanding, absorbing, sensuously rewarding, or critical”<sup>52</sup>—meant a return to normalcy in spite of the lasting mental and emotional effects of the bombings. Seasoned runners from the Ozarks who were present for the 2013 marathon recounted their experiences of the bombings, mentioning that the finish line, that all-important liminal space for every runner and the object of the attention of the general public on race day, brought momentary relief that was suddenly eclipsed by confusion.

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<sup>52</sup> David Morgan, *Visual Piety*, 14.

## Silence and Chaos

Experienced distance runners recalled the ways in which the 2013 Boston Marathon differed from other races they had participated in. Melissa Adler, a Springfield resident and finisher in 2013, said, “I remembered hearing the silence that was so odd. You know, at the finish line there’s usually chatter and laughing and noise, but it was so quiet. But now I can remember people screaming and scattering, of course.” Melissa noted that while the finishing area usually brings comfort and a sense of camaraderie, the chaos at the Boston finish line in 2013 led to a sense of isolation. Reflecting on her experience, she added, “Usually after the race you’re in a strange city but it doesn’t matter because they tell you where to go, you follow the other runners . . . and everything’s just fine. But this race, everything just felt hard, and there was no—I felt very alone, and I felt like, ‘Okay, I have to figure this out on my own. There’s no one here, to help me.’” Melissa’s husband Paul, who accompanied her to Boston, remembers hearing the jarring explosions just minutes after he received word of his wife’s finish. After the bombs exploded, he recalls, “I felt fear, and I had a mantra in my head, ‘You’re going to find her, don’t give up. You’re going to find her, don’t give up.’”<sup>53</sup>

Amy Robbins, a longtime marathon runner who ran Boston for the first time in 2013, also mentioned the confusion and commotion around the finish line, recounting that many at the finish line mistook the explosions for celebratory cannon blasts.<sup>54</sup>

Melissa Adler remembered, “I had just received my finisher’s medal and the

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<sup>53</sup> Paul and Melissa Adler, interview by author, Springfield, MO, April 14, 2014.

<sup>54</sup> Amy Robbins, interview by author, Springfield, MO, May 5, 2014.

photographer from the marathon had just taken my picture, so my back was to the finish line, and I heard this huge sonic boom—you know the kind that rattles the ground and you can feel it in your chest—and I turned around and I saw a huge plume of whitish gray smoke rising from the finish line and everyone around me got quiet.” She described the silence as eerie, noting that after the second explosion, “I knew that it wasn’t an accident, it wasn’t power lines, it wasn’t cannons, you know, anything. I just knew something was terribly wrong, so that’s when I started running away from the finish line to try to get out.”

In the aftermath of traumatic experiences like these, Boston Marathon race director Dave McGillivray articulated what would become the rallying cry for both participants and spectators at the 2014 Boston Marathon: “We’re taking back the finish line.”<sup>55</sup> Framed in these terms, the finish line became a casualty of the violence of the 2013 bombings that could be reclaimed through a bodily encounter with the space itself. The finish line was thus established as a limit where individuals could not only test the limits of their endurance, but also consider their own mortality as they memorialized the bombing victims. McGillivray’s statement added significance to the finish line, portraying it as the site at which runners and spectators could enact a counter-narrative to the previous year’s violence. This counter-narrative served to both re-establish limit and to promote its crossing, paralleling Tweed’s functional definition of religion in which religions “constitute the limits they seek to cross” even as they “mediate encounters” with these “corporeal and natural limits.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Laura Crimaldi, et al., “With the 2014 Boston Marathon, Boston Moves Forward,” *Boston Globe*, April 21, 2014, accessed April 25, 2014.

<sup>56</sup> Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 138.

**Training the Body, Freeing the Mind.** The first intersection between running and ritual comes in the ways that athletes approach their training. According to my respondents, running functions as a release from the pressures of work and home, provides an escape from cyclical thought patterns and mental blocks, and allows them the opportunity to overcome pain by re-appropriating it.

First, respondents noted the importance of running as a stress reliever. Paul identified running as a release, stating, “It’s a way to clear the mind.” Likewise, Melissa observed, “Sometimes a run just clears your mind and you don’t even know what’s happening.” Respondents also noted that when their schedule prohibits them from running, their moods are affected. Paul observed, “It makes me happier if I run in a given day. If I haven’t run in a day I get cranky.” Melissa responded similarly, adding, “You feel very antsy when you can’t run. You feel very . . . bottled up or tense. It’s just what running does. It releases that.”

Second, along with the relief of tension, respondents reported that emptying the mind during running helped them to solve problems. For example, Paul said, “I’ve found that if I have a project I’m working on, and the sticking point, sometimes, on a run, will just pop into your head. You won’t actively be thinking, ‘How can I solve this problem,’ but sometimes when you’re running, the solution will just [come to you].” Melissa also noted the possibility for new thoughts to occur to her while training, observing, “Sometimes I can write an article in my head on a run.” These statements suggest that freedom of the body from the constraints of a chair and desk allow for a similar openness of mind.

Third, each of my interviewees has trained for more than two decades and has run as many as five to six times per week during that span. As a result, they are familiar with how to endure despite fatigue and soreness. Amy Robbins observed that for her, running serves as “a metaphor for life,” which in turn opens up the possibility for running to serve as a metaphor for grieving and memorialization. She specifically noted that hills represent challenges, both in running and in life, to be embraced instead of avoided. She referred to a saying called the “hill seeker,” which invites its hearers to “hit [the hills] head on because if you don’t, you’ll never know what it feels like to sail down the other side.” Having become accustomed to the physical toll that running takes on the body and appropriated its complex forms of movement to the point that the sensation of fatigue becomes something to be sought out—or at least ignored—rather than avoided, Paul, Melissa, and Amy demonstrate the tendency among experienced runners to incorporate and re-appropriate physical pain. When participants engage in strenuous forms of physical exercise, they “must temporarily suspend the usual habit of ceasing activity at the point at which it hurts or renders them short of breath, activating the acquired perceptual habit of experiencing the ‘burn’ positively.” As a result, “sensations that would in most contexts be experienced as uncomfortable or painful, and as such would tend to terminate activity must be (within a range) welcomed.”<sup>57</sup> Because of their habitual training, these runners transform an experience that non-runners or beginners consider unpleasant into what Paul referred to as “rolling therapy.”

When agents achieve mastery of a certain set of practices—in this case, running—an alignment develops between the “embodied structures and the objective structure” that

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<sup>57</sup> Nick Crossely, “The Circuit Trainer’s Habitus: Reflexive Body Techniques and the Sociality of the Workout,” *Body and Society* 10, no. 1 (2004): 53-54.

the agents act upon. According to Bourdieu, these agents develop “the feel for the game,” having “embodied a host of practical schemes of perception and appreciation functioning as instruments of reality construction.”<sup>58</sup> The development and mastery of a certain skill, then, changes in the ways agents see and interact with their environments. Instead of engaging in practices to achieve certain external ends, they are “absorbed in their affairs (one could say their ‘doing’): they are present at the coming moment, the doing, the deed . . . which is not posed as an object of thought . . . but which is inscribed in the present of the game.”<sup>59</sup> Bourdieu’s comments parallel what anthropologist Edward Shieffelin calls the “alternative epistemology” of participation. Shieffelin contends that languages, insofar as they “tend to objectify, categorize, and reflect upon experience,” are “inadequate to the task of articulating the kind of knowledge one ‘has’ by participation.”<sup>60</sup> For experienced runners, tired muscles and shortness of breath, which are normally experienced as painful states to be avoided, are willingly entered into and transformed into positive states through the very act of participation.

Along with the mutual recognition that running allows them to clear their minds, respondents described their preparation for engagement in running and the act of running itself as a kind of unconscious activity. When asked about the specific practices that

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<sup>58</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 80. See also Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 99, who posits that “space and time are redefined through the physical movements of bodies projecting organizing schemes on the space-time environment.”

<sup>59</sup> Bourdieu, *Practical Reason*, 80.

<sup>60</sup> Edward Shieffelin, *Theorizing Rituals: Issues, Topics, Approaches, Concepts*,” edited by Jens Kreinath, Jan Snoek, and Michael Stausberg (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 617. In the volume’s preceding essay, Michael Stausberg comments that the very boredom that ritual engenders can be a source for embodying a new understanding of the world. He contends, “In cases of ritual boredom, participants may not only start to reflect on rituals, but they also can develop a reflective understanding of their situation—see themselves as ‘others’, be turned back upon their own participation, performance, and commitment”; see “Reflexivity,” 637.

characterize their transition from the workday to their training, my respondents offered similar answers. According to Melissa, “There’s no transition. It’s as quick as I can, get out the door and get the run in.” Likewise, Paul noted that there is “not necessarily” a conscious transition, explaining, “It’s the change of clothes from the suit to running clothes” and an accompanying process of “getting into a different frame of mind.” Amy, who often spends two hours on the elliptical machine before meeting her training partner for their morning run, said, “I jump off [the elliptical machine], change my clothes into my running clothes, and go out and meet her.”

These responses suggest that changing clothes signals an accompanying change in the way runners identify themselves.<sup>61</sup> While the adoption of a new identity remained an unexpressed assumption among respondents, changing from work clothes to running apparel is nevertheless acknowledged as a necessary precursor to engaging in rigorous training. Running clothes allow the body an increased range of motion while simultaneously identifying the agent as a member of a particular social group. According to Hockey, “Particular identities are lodged in particular social worlds which are themselves founded upon particular orders of experience that are meaningful to participants.”<sup>62</sup> The transition from work to running, then, involves a noticeable change

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<sup>61</sup> John Hockey, “Mundane Ritual Practices and Distance Running Training,” *Journal of Ritual Studies* 23, no. 2 (2009): 81. In his autoethnographic study, Hockey notes that “when running apparel is pulled onto the body a particular kinaesthetic [*sic*] awareness is initiated, and as a result a particular sense of being central to our athletic identity was established by us.” Hockey’s account provides an example of what Erving Goffman terms “body symbolism,” or “an idiom of individual appearances and gestures that tends to call forth in the actor what it calls forth in others”; see his *Behavior in Public Places* (New York: MacMillan, 1963), 33.

<sup>62</sup> See John Hockey, “Injured Distance Runners: A Case of Identity Work as Self-Help,” *Sociology of Sport Journal* 21 (2005): 38, who observes, “Committed athletes, be they professionals or amateurs, form particular kinds of sporting identities via long-term immersion in their sport.”



in the way participants present themselves as part of the running community, even though the change occurs without being directly expressed.

**Embodying Ritual.** Because those who have developed “the feel for the game” are completely absorbed in the act itself, articulating the effects of the deed presents a particular challenge. Autoethnography, a form of self-reflective, autobiographical study in which the researcher catalogues his or her experience and applies it to the subject at hand, provides one way through this difficulty. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that autoethnography figures prominently in scholarly literature devoted to analyzing the intersection between physical exercise and ritual.<sup>63</sup> Physical exercise generates a range of ineffable sensations that often drive participants to record their experiences. For instance, Paul reported keeping a “running log,” or daily running journal, in which he records the details of his run, including time, pace, route, and general thoughts about the effort.<sup>64</sup> An expanded version of this approach includes Japanese novelist Haruki Murakami’s memoir about his experience as a runner entitled *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running*, in which he notes the difficulty of addressing the subject. When Murakami poses the question to himself, “What exactly *do* I think about when I’m running?” he retorts, “I don’t have a clue.”<sup>65</sup> Sociologist Margaret Carlisle Duncan is involved in a similar project in which she writes a series of “nonfictional vignettes,” or reflections upon participating in a range of physical activities. Her first-person descriptions point to the ritualistic feel that accompanies running: “Running makes me

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<sup>63</sup> See, for example, Crossley, “The Circuit Trainer’s Habitus,” 37-69 (esp. pp. 43-49).

<sup>64</sup> For an example of this approach, see John Hockey, “Injured Distance Runners: A Case of Identity Work as Self-Help,” *Sociology of Sport Journal* 21 (2005): 45.

<sup>65</sup> Haruki Murakami, *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running: A Memoir*, trans. Philip Gabriel (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2008), 14.

feel purged and holy. I like listening to my rhythmic breathing, feeling my legs piston around the track, every body part moving in perfect synchrony. I even like the sweat and the pleasant sense of fatigue afterwards. My runner's flush—bright pink cheeks—is a badge of virtue.”<sup>66</sup>

This autoethnographical method emphasizes the centrality of the body in ritual practice. By eliminating the distance between the author and the voice of the detached scholar, this approach supports Merleau-Ponty's argument that “the body is much more than an instrument or a means; it is our expression in the world, the visible form of our intentions.”<sup>67</sup> Catherine Bell also recognizes the body's communicative potential in a way that moves beyond treating it as a mere instrument of mental processes that can only be captured in language, instead suggesting that “the molding of the body within a highly structured environment . . . primarily acts to restructure bodies in the very doing of the acts themselves.”<sup>68</sup> Even changes in breathing patterns can communicate an alteration in an agent's subjective state.<sup>69</sup> According to Merleau-Ponty, “there is a world of silence,

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<sup>66</sup> Margaret Carlisle Duncan, “Reflex: Body as Memory,” *Sociology of Sport Journal* 17 (2000): 64.

<sup>67</sup> Ted Toadvine and Leonard Lawlor, eds., *The Merleau-Ponty Reader* (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 285.

<sup>68</sup> Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 100. Bell cites kneeling as an example of the interaction between body and structured environment, positing that “kneeling does not merely *communicate* subordination to the kneeler. For all intents and purposes, kneeling produces a subordinated kneeler through the act itself.”

<sup>69</sup> Margot L. Lyon. “The Material Body, Social Processes and Emotion: ‘Techniques of the Body’ Revisited” *Body & Society* 3, no. 1 (1997): 92: “The common association of subjective state and respiratory patterns may be experienced or recalled in any number of contexts, for example, the sense of breathlessness and fear, or the sense of paroxysmal inspirations associated with grief and sobbing.”

the perceived world, at least, is an order where there are non-language significations” resulting from the cultivation of embodied habits that often cannot be put into words.<sup>70</sup>

While the body plays an important role in ritual enactment and communication, runners do not necessarily make an explicit connection between training regimens and rituals. In fact, some runners bracket out physical activity, excising it from the conversation about religious ritual altogether. For example, Darleen Anderson, a past president of the Ozark Mountain Ridge Runners, began one issue of the organization’s monthly newsletter with a president’s address in which she observed, “For most of my years, I have thought of yoga, with its Indian origins, as a form of religion, *but no longer* since I’ve taken . . . yoga classes. *Hatha yoga concentrates on the physical side*, based on the achievement of physical and mental control and relaxation.”<sup>71</sup> Here, Anderson seems to suggest that precisely because yoga deals with “the physical side,” it occupies a place outside of what would normally be considered religion.

Anderson’s remarks, along with respondents’ hesitancy to ascribe the label “ritual” to their running, suggest that the boundaries between embodied practices and rituals are tenuous. However, Bell contends that the very ambiguity that renders ritual difficult to delineate “is linked to its distinctive efficacy.” Bell contends that while ritualization “see[s] itself as the natural or appropriate thing to do in the circumstances,”

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<sup>70</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 171.

<sup>71</sup> Darleen Anderson, “President’s Message,” *Running Briefs* 5, no. 2 (February 1982): n.p., emphasis mine.

it “does not see how its own actions reorder and reinterpret the circumstances so as to afford a sense of fit among . . . body, community, and cosmos.”<sup>72</sup>

One participant in the 2013 Boston Marathon writes about going on a run the morning after the race, saying that she ran “not because I was scheduled to, not because I really wanted to, and certainly not because my legs felt like running . . . but because I just did not know what else to do.” In this account, the act of running aligns with Bell’s notion of ritual in that it “seemed like the right thing to do” in response to the confusion the writer felt about returning to running so soon after the trauma of the bombings. The writer’s effort to reflect upon his or her reasons for running touches on the alignment among body, community, and cosmos that ritual enables, according to Bell. First, the writer mentions running “with blistered toes, aching knees, sore and cramping legs,” suggesting attentiveness to the effect that running has on the body. Second, the writer uses the second person plural to establish a position as part of a committed group of like-minded runners: “We will move on,” the writer contends; “we WILL run the marathon again.” Finally, the writer poses the question that has disrupted his or her world: “I still find myself asking why. Why did some selfish asshole have to go and bring violence into such a peaceful sport??” In the midst of serious questions that defy easy answers, the contributor considers running the appropriate response “in memory of those who lost their lives” because of its corporeal familiarity, a silent set of physical sensations to enact when one “d[oes] not know what else to do.”<sup>73</sup> Perhaps running’s efficacy as a form of

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<sup>72</sup> See Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 109, who observes, “Ritualization does not see how it . . . redefines or generates the circumstances to which it is responding.”

<sup>73</sup> gsoutiea, “Today I Ran,” *Our Marathon*, accessed October 1, 2014, <http://marathon.neu.edu/items/show/6629>.

ritual is attributable to the fact that it serves as a highly structured form of nonverbal self-expression, reflecting what Murakami refers to as “my cozy, homemade void, my own nostalgic silence.”<sup>74</sup>

**The Silent Procession.** Unlike Anderson’s separation of the material body from religious ritual, others acknowledged that wordless gestures assisted them in overcoming the emotional trauma in the aftermath of the 2013 Boston Marathon. In these accounts, physical touch and bodily movement constitute an indispensable form of meaningful expression. One example came in the lead-up to the 2014 marathon. The Boston Athletic Association sponsored a webinar to help runners and spectators prepare both mentally and emotionally for the race. As a part of the presentation, AllOne Health Senior Consultant Barry Beder outlined specific strategies for running to help re-direct the stress caused by the 2013 bombing. In addition to suggesting that runners develop verbal mantras, Beder offered an example of a physical mantra, in which “you might press your fingers together on one hand” to serve “as a reminder of all the positive things that you want to create in your mind.” Attempting to provide listeners with an alternative means of maintaining focus, Beder emphasized the importance of being attentive to “body sensations,” reinforcing that “what we try to bring ourselves back to at all those times is the feeling of the finish line.”<sup>75</sup>

Bodily movement, physical touch, and ritual performance also interacted to bring about emotional healing in the cross-country relay One Run for Boston. Danny Bent, a

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<sup>74</sup> Murakami, *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running*, 23.

<sup>75</sup> Barry Beder, “2014 Boston Marathon: Emotional Readiness and Peak Performance,” AllOne Health (MP4 Webinar), April 14 2014, accessed May 5, 2014. <http://www.allonehealth.com/media/24886/emotional-readiness-and-peak-performance.mp4>

relay organizer, recounted a structured performance at the inaugural relay's final stop—the Boston Marathon finish line—by one runner and her father, whose legs had been severely injured in the blast:

Nicole was also running the Boston Marathon [in 2013], so at that point when she took the baton from us guys [the relay's organizers] was that point where she had been stopped, you know, like I say, 53 days . . . earlier on April 15. So when Nicole took the baton with two miles to go, she really got to finish the marathon that she had started all that time ago, and within ten meters of the finish line—the yellow and blue finish line that's always painted on the ground at Boylston—she got her father, who was in a wheelchair, handed him the baton . . . and then pushed him over the line, kind of reclaiming the finish line that had been stolen from her and so many other runners. And the most amazing thing after that was John turning to us and saying that “Now I can begin to heal.”<sup>76</sup>

Running served as part of the healing process not only for Boston Marathon participants, but also for first responders. Aaron Baggish, a cardiologist at Massachusetts General Hospital and the marathon's Medical Director, described his preparation for the 2014 Boston Marathon, which included the “profound emotional experience” of running the 26.2-mile course from Hopkinton to Boylston two weeks prior to the marathon. Baggish indicated that he “didn't have any real sense of closure” until he completed the run and walked to the bomb site where he waited for his family to arrive. In his estimation, completing the course and crossing the finish line was significant because it “put a sense of closure, in a good way, to this whole experience.” Although he acknowledged that the tragedy “will never be an over and done with event,” running afforded him the opportunity “to be able to move on.”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Danny Bent, “One Run for Boston,” Runner Academy with Matt Johnson (MP3 Podcast), March 10, 2014, accessed April 7, 2014, <http://runneracademy.com/ra047-one-run-for-boston/>. Host Matt Johnson described One Run for Boston as “building an inspirational running community” and “becom[ing] a symbol of hope and positivity that's inspired a powerful movement that's continuing to unite the running community.”

<sup>77</sup> Aaron Baggish, interview by Joan Ilacqua, July 1, 2014, Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, MA, transcript, Strong Medicine Oral History Project and Center for the History of Medicine,

Like the physical mantra's emphasis on touch, these examples demonstrate that bodily movement provides agents with opportunities both to experience positive feelings and to process a range of emotions. These accounts suggest that the movement of the body serves 1) to reinforce the significance of certain spaces and 2) to subvert the notion that speech constitutes the only appropriate form of expression for processing tragedy.<sup>78</sup> Using Tweed's definition of religion, running can function as a religious ritual insofar as it allows sufferers to confront their pain through their movement across the physical boundary associated with the suffering, which in this case is the finish line (Figure 2). As one runner of the New York Marathon reflected,

I see [marathon running] as a deeply religious experience for a number of reasons: the unconditional discipline of training, the bonding with like-minded communities, the reflection and meditation of solitary runs, the practice of engaging with philanthropic causes, the ethical and mental fortitude—these are all aspects of distance running that have contributed significantly to my own religious formation.<sup>79</sup>

Each of the “religious” aspects of running mentioned above seems to provide both a literal and metaphorical way through mental and emotional gridlocks.

Dan Bohannon, an Ozarks area runner who participated in the One Run for Boston relay, explained that for him, running provides a sense of “communal solidarity” that resembles a church gathering, adding that he enjoys participating in local races with

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Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine (repository), “Oral history and transcript for an interview with Aaron Baggish, Strong Medicine Oral History Project,” *Our Marathon*, accessed January 21, 2015. <http://marathon.neu.edu/items/show/17113>.

<sup>78</sup> See Linda Ekstom and Richard Hecht, “Ritual Performance and Ritual Practice: Teaching the Multiple Forms and Dimensions of Ritual” in *Teaching Ritual*, edited by Catherine Bell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 246, who speak of the power of ritual “to position ideas *in a series of actions* which constitute or reconstitute a web of meanings that provide an orientation to the small and big questions of human existence” (246, emphasis mine).

<sup>79</sup> Simran Jeet Singh, “Reflecting On The Life of Guru Nanak While Running The NYC Marathon,” *Huffington Post Religion*, November 6, 2014, accessed December 3, 2014. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/simran-jeet-singh/guru-nanak\\_b\\_6112168.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/simran-jeet-singh/guru-nanak_b_6112168.html).

his grandson because it allows them to connect with other Ozarks runners. Bohannon was chosen for an interview with *Boston Globe* writer Eric Moskowitz and stressed that his role in the interview had nothing to do with his prowess as a runner. Instead,



GREG KENDALL-BALL FOR THE GLOBE

**Missourian Dan Bohannon, who had never been to Boston or run this late at night, trudged along with his escort.**

Figure 1. Photograph by Greg Kendall-Ball, *Boston Globe*, June 30, 2013.





Figure 2. “Untitled.” Photograph by Charles Krupa, April 15, 2014.

Bohannon said that Moskowitz was looking for an average runner who just wanted to participate in the run as a way of supporting the bombing victims.<sup>80</sup> Figure 1 shows the photo that appears alongside the article. It depicts Bohannon with his illuminated headlamp running down a quiet stretch of highway in the pre-dawn darkness.

In stark contrast to the fanfare that characterized the finish line of the 2014 Boston Marathon, the image of Bohannon “trudging” more closely resembles the solemnity of the memorial service that occurred on the event’s one-year anniversary (Figure 2).

Unlike Bohannon, whose commemoration during his portion of One Run for Boston involved physical exertion and miles of running in rural southern Missouri, the crowd shown below stands still and at attention in the heart of downtown Boston. In both photos, however, the subjects engage in a set of bodily postures that they consider

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<sup>80</sup> Dan Bohannon, interview by author, Springfield, MO, April 14, 2014.

appropriate for honoring the victims of the tragedy. Juxtaposing these images reinforces the idea that commemoration occurs in many forms. Indeed, commemorative rituals encompass a wide range of bodily postures that promote identification with a certain group.

My respondents discussed the importance of the Ozarks running community in the months following the 2013 Boston Marathon. Amy Robbins described the role of fellow Ozarks runners in helping her cope with the tragedy. Amy noted, “One of my running partners . . . took me on my first run afterwards. Just going out there, just getting that first run under your belt, you know, and not having to do it by myself, I think was huge.” In Amy’s communication with another running partner following the 2013 Boston Marathon, she attempted to convey the following message: “You never knew it, but you just waiting out there in my driveway every day for me to come out and to basically, you know, hold my hand—because she was just with me, matching me stride for stride, so that every hill I crested, just brought me that much closer to healing.” Even though she did not run alone, Amy noted the value of embodied expression—not necessarily the verbal communication that occurred during the run—as an important part of her healing process.

Others responded similarly, describing the act of running alongside other Ozarkians as therapeutic. Commenting on his participation in One Run for Boston in both 2013 and 2014, Paul said, “It was like that rolling group therapy for me to know that I’m not alone. Look, we’re an unbroken chain from L.A. to Boston of people who were saying, ‘You’re not alone. We all get this. We all understand how you’re feeling.’” Melissa added, “Runners are just a great group of people. . . . The one thing they have in

common is the love of running and sharing that love with other people.” Contrasting the positive sense of community among runners with the randomness and senselessness of the tragedy, Melissa noted that the question of “Why them? Why not us?” has no answer. While both Paul and Melissa emphasized that the outpouring of support they received extended well beyond the running community and included several well wishes from both friends and strangers in the Ozarks, they acknowledged the special role of participating in One Run for Boston, agreeing that the experience and the sense of community it engendered was “incredible.”

### **Conclusion: A Way Forward.**

Bodily movement constitutes an alternative epistemology and form of expression. The fact that some people turned to running as they dealt with their grief and frustration demonstrates that responses to tragedy occur on a wide spectrum and not a single point. Rather than offering words of consolation, running bodies relinquish attempts to understand. In this transitive realm, attempts to describe, quantify, and explain are repeatedly frustrated, jarred with every stride. Running bodies bob in rhythm, buoyed up with each breath, but just as every rise of inhalation ebbs into exhalation, so every attempt to ascribe meaning to movement retreats into the shadowy realm of the nonverbal. Maurice Bloch offers a fitting summary of the preceding exploration when, in his discussion of ritual deference, he notes that the mind of a speaker cannot be “read” to determine her intention. Neither does the body serve as a mere harbinger of precise

verbal and syntactical meaning. Rather than extinguishing ambiguity, bodies in motion subvert an interpreter's attempt to ascribe boundaries to an actor's intention. As Bloch contends, "There are moments when there are, not only limits to understanding, but limits to the appropriateness of attempting to understand. The ordinary continual deference of practical life does not simply involve delaying our search for intentionality, but often largely *abandoning* it."<sup>81</sup> As my respondents indicated, running serves as a release while also allowing them to think new thoughts; although they do not explicitly acknowledge that they assume new identities or engage in easily categorized rituals, they speak highly of the community with which they identify—one that, in the face of disorienting tragedy, helps them feel that they, even when isolated, are not alone.

Bodies in motion are, it seems, paradoxes of meaning-making and intention-abandonment. As my respondents indicated, the act of running is difficult to talk about, and attempts to ascribe meaning to the act inevitably fall short. Even though the effect of running or crossing the finish line is not easily articulated, the fact that so many participated in running events after the bombing suggests that returning to their bodily habits, developed during hours of training, was not only the natural thing for them to do, but also helpful in the mourning process. For my respondents, a return to running was efficacious as a response to the tragedy insofar as it constituted a return to the everyday and to the familiar. Running serves not as an object of reflective thought, but as a sensuous engagement with the world. As Merleau-Ponty asserts, "Experience of one's own body runs counter to the reflective procedure which detaches subject and object

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<sup>81</sup> Maurice Bloch, "Ritual and Deference," *Ritual and Memory: Toward Comparative Anthropology of Religion*, ed. Harvey Whitehouse and James Laidlaw (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2004), 70.

from each other, and which gives us only the thought about the body, or the body as an idea, and not the experience of the body or the body in reality.”<sup>82</sup> Having developed what Bourdieu refers to as “the feel for the game” runners are concerned not with the functional effect or external end of the act of running—indeed they are not “concerned” at all. Rather, they have let go of intellectual concerns, taken up with the act of running itself, spellbound by the rhythm of their footfalls, completely absorbed in the moment, experiencing the feeling of moving through space that defies explanation or description.

On the morning of the 2014 Boston Marathon, a camera was trained on the finish line, a field of vision dotted, and later clogged, with runners crossing a now doubly significant threshold.<sup>83</sup> While the roar of the crowd seemed to preclude the co-existence of a “silent procession,” spectators directed their collective gaze upon bodies in motion who were themselves silent, re-appropriating pain, re-ordering existence, and reflecting the new, forward-looking image that they were helping to create with each soundless stride.

Because they are never fixed in space, living bodies in motion are also paradoxes of presence and absence, for one is not possible without the other. As running bodies move toward and away, they are, at intervals, both *here* and *not here*. The bombings that took the lives of three living bodies transformed the finish line into space characterized by physical absence. In response, hundreds of visitors, both runners and non-runners, flocked to the site of the bombings to pay their respects and leave physical reminders of

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<sup>82</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), 198-99.

<sup>83</sup> According to Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 245, even televised events themselves adopt “some of the strategies and functions of ritual . . . transposing reality into a spectacle.”

bodily presence where violence had left a void. These visitors brought objects and written messages to the site, perhaps in an effort to “join their absence with the larger absence that drew [them] here in the first place” only to depart again, leaving future visitors “in the presence of a double absence” from both those who have died and those who have left signs of their visit.<sup>84</sup>

The memorial that developed in the aftermath of the bombings provides more evidence of the importance of marking one’s place, of asserting one’s presence as a body, “not as an object but as the self made flesh, equipped with the seeing hand, the comprehending ear, the beseeching mouth, and the empathetic skin.”<sup>85</sup> As the memorial took shape, people re-populated the finish line and sought to leave concrete reminders that strengthened the sense of presence even after their departure. Through the memorial’s formation, visitors attempted to provide a place for the paradoxical coexistence of presence and absence to be experienced anew.

The memorial site, however, was not without controversy. Because memorialization practices are public acts, they are subject to competing interests of ownership and to differences of opinion with regard to what form the memorial should take. At the Boston Marathon Memorial, people use objects not only to memorialize, but also to mark their place in an attempt to occupy multiple spaces at once. As the following movement from the finish line to Copley Square demonstrates, this conflation of spaces has the potential to transform a place into a site of contention.

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<sup>84</sup> See Miles Richardson, “The Gift of Presence,” 266.

<sup>85</sup> Richardson, “The Gift of Presence,” 264.

## MOBILIZING MEMORIALS: MATERIAL AND SPATIAL POLITICS AT THE SITE OF THE BOSTON MARATHON BOMBING

“The material culture of grief . . . embodies the faith that Americans place in *things* to negotiate complex moments and events, such as traumatic death. . . . Things, especially public things, map political cultures and shape political bodies.” – Erika Doss<sup>86</sup>

Although Massachusetts native Kevin Brown had never participated in the Boston marathon, he felt a special connection to the race because of his love for the city. Along with his daughter and grandchildren, Brown attended the interfaith memorial service at Boston’s Cathedral of the Holy Cross where President Obama addressed the crowd of mourners on April 18, three days after the marathon bombing. “When they had the [memorial service],” Brown said, “that’s when I had to get there, that day.”<sup>87</sup>

Later that day, Brown visited the memorial that had already started to form on at the Boston Fire Department on Boylston Street. Brown described the memorial as “very

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<sup>86</sup> Erika Doss, *Memorial Mania*, 71.

<sup>87</sup> Kevin Brown, interview by Jayne Guberman, *WBUR Oral History Project*, October 29, 2013, Boston, MA, accessed December 1, 2014. [http://marathon.neu.edu/wburoralhistoryproject/kevin\\_brown](http://marathon.neu.edu/wburoralhistoryproject/kevin_brown).

small,” adding, “Nobody was taking care of it.” After talking to other visitors to the site, Brown learned that a larger memorial had formed at the other end of the street at the Boston Public Garden. “A friend of mine, Ed Starbuck, started it with three American flags, and then it got moved three times,” Brown explained, “which was quite a thing after it got big.” This memorial would survive its multiple movements and, at each of its locations, become the site of power struggles and poignant displays of remembrance.

Through an examination of the intersection between public and private space at the Boston Marathon Memorial, I will argue that the memorial’s movement provided mourners with an opportunity to reflect on the tragedy from multiple angles even as its significance shifted in their minds. In addition to the movement of the memorial as a whole, the mobility expressed through the clothing and footwear deposited at the memorial suggests that bodily movement formed an integral part of the memorialization process as a whole. Mobility served as a kind of motif that characterized the memorial’s existence. Instead of concluding that visitors to the site engaged in a set of prescribed commemorative practices, I hope to draw attention to the multiplicity of practices people performed in the lived space of the memorial as they deposited flowers and footwear, argued and assembled, sang and stood in line.

### **Sacred Space, Disputed Territory**

The memorial’s movement in the weeks after its formation attests to the validity of anthropologist Sylvia Grider’s observation that “mourners choose where to put their grief offerings without consulting first with authorities—they just do it.”<sup>88</sup> Such was the

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<sup>88</sup> Sylvia Grider, “Spontaneous Shrines and Public Memorialization,” in *Death and Religion in a Changing World*, ed. Kathleen Garces-Foley (New York: M.E. Sharp, 2006), 247.



case in Boston. According to Brown, “People just started bringing flowers and pictures.” As mourners congregated and deposited items at the Boston Public Garden in the hours after the bombings, the fledgling spontaneous shrine began to take shape.<sup>89</sup>

After enlisting help from volunteers, Brown and his friend oversaw the memorial’s transition from its place at the Public Garden to the corner of Boylston and Berkeley Streets nearer to the marathon’s finish line where police had set up a barricade.<sup>90</sup> The group of volunteers placed the objects against the barricade, which blocked off the street’s damaged storefronts and the area where the bombs exploded.<sup>91</sup> The fact that mourners set up a memorial as close as possible to the site of the bombings again reinforces Grider’s observation that spontaneous shrines “draw attention to the previously ordinary place where some violent event occurred.”<sup>92</sup> In this case, while the shrine did take shape at the site of the violent event, the location was anything but ordinary even before the blasts.<sup>93</sup> One contributor to the Our Marathon Digital Archive poignantly articulated the irony that the bombings occurred at a place designated to

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<sup>89</sup> For the origin of the term “spontaneous shrine,” see Jack Santino, “Not An Unimportant Failure: Rituals of Death and Politics in Northern Ireland,” in *Displayed in Mortal Light*, ed. Michael McCaughan (Antrim, Northern Ireland: Antrim Arts Council, 1992), n.p.

<sup>90</sup> Jack Minch, *Fitchburg Sentinel & Enterprise*, “Runners Organize Vigils and Memorials for Boston Marathon Victims,” April 17, 2013.

<sup>91</sup> Visitors to the site brought their memorial offerings as close as possible to the spot, adorning the entrances of office buildings a few yards from the finish line. Mike Kelly, “Grief Fades, But Strong Memories Remain,” *The Bergen County Record*, April 15, 2014.

<sup>92</sup> Grider, “Spontaneous Shrines,” 247.

<sup>93</sup> According to Hilda Kuper, “A site can be defined as a particular piece of social space, a place socially and ideologically demarcated and separated from other places. As such it becomes a symbol within the total and complex system of communication in the total social universe. Social relations are articulated through particular sites, associated with different messages and ranges of communication”; see “The Language of Sites in the Politics of Space,” in *The Anthropology of Space and Place: Locating Culture*, ed. Setha M. Low and Denise Lawrence-Zuniga (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 258.

celebrate achievement:

I try to understand why some of us are protected by guardian angels, while others are called to become angels. I question endlessly how an even[t] to celebrate running could leave spectators without limbs. How an event to celebrate the human spirit could be a target for violence, hatred, and death. I wonder how the historic Boston Marathon is now followed by the words ‘Bombing,’ ‘Massacre’ and ‘Tragedy.’<sup>94</sup>

Likewise, Peter Payack, a Cambridge resident who has run the Boston Marathon twelve times and coached the wrestling team of one of the bombing suspects, considered the bombings an attack not only on a running event, but also on “a symbol of American freedom,” saying that they “shook the bedrock of Cambridge and Boston. You know, just the freedom to run in a marathon, just the freedom to run down the street—you have somebody trying to stop that. So it shook that bedrock of what your belief in America is all about.”<sup>95</sup>

Indeed, the development of a spontaneous shrine at the finish line only added significance to an already widely recognizable location, further demarcating the site as sacred space in the midst of the rubble and damage in the surrounding area.<sup>96</sup> The finish line, which is painted bright blue to set it apart from the rest of the pavement, occupies a place of prominence in the minds of runners and spectators of the Boston Marathon. While visitors thronged to the site after the tragedy, its altered significance kept others who had previously attended the marathon from returning. One runner’s hesitation to

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<sup>94</sup> bethogrady, “I Was There,” *Our Marathon*, accessed October 1, 2014, <http://marathon.neu.edu/items/show/8509>.

<sup>95</sup> Peter Payack, interview by Jayne Guberman, March 13, 2014, Cambridge, MA.

<sup>96</sup> Grider comments on the designation of spontaneous shrines as sacred space in the following terms: “Spontaneous shrines, while not necessarily religious, are treated as sacred space for the duration of time that they are in place.” Grider continues, defining sacred spaces as “sites that are set apart and distinguished from the surrounding area in such a way as to focus the attention of visitors on their very separateness”; “Spontaneous Shrines,” 247.

return to the site stemmed directly from the traumatic memories that she now associated with the location, which caused both emotional and physical stagnation: “I didn’t save the newspapers about the event. I didn’t attend the remembrance, memorial service, or group run I was invited to . . . because I’m trying the best I can to be here, not there.”<sup>97</sup> Because of the contrasting messages of triumph and tragedy on display at the Boylston Street stripe, the finish line was the natural choice for the development of the memorial.

Although the memorial began near the finish line, it did not remain there. As objects and written messages poured in, Ed Starbuck, Brown’s friend who had started the memorial with his three American flags, asked Brown to help curate the collection of memorial items after the 57-year-old retiree decided not to continue making the four-and-a-half hour bus ride from his home in Hyannis on Cape Cod.<sup>98</sup> Brown agreed, and every day for the next month, he commuted from his home in Brockton to downtown Boston, calculating that he spent an estimated \$400 on public transportation during that time span.<sup>99</sup>

As the memorial’s unofficial caretakers, Brown and Starbuck organized and oversaw the objects at the Boylston Street barricade for more than a week before the street reopened on April 24 volunteers moved the materials to the perimeter surrounding the Bank of America branch on the corner of Boylston and Berkeley Street near where the barricade had been. A group of visitors to the site helped move the items, and the

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<sup>97</sup> bethogrady, “I Was There,” *Our Marathon*, accessed October 1, 2014, <http://marathon.neu.edu/items/show/8509>.

<sup>98</sup> Allen G. Breed, “Makeshift memorial honors Boston Marathon’s dead, injured,” *Daily Hampshire Gazette*, April 19, 2013.

<sup>99</sup> Kevin Brown, interview by Jayne Guberman, *WBUR Oral History Project*, October 29, 2013, Boston, MA, accessed December 1, 2014. [http://marathon.neu.edu/wburoralhistoryproject/kevin\\_brown](http://marathon.neu.edu/wburoralhistoryproject/kevin_brown).

group moved the memorial to its new location in a matter of minutes. Brown noted that the new site allowed the memorial to flourish because he and others could hang pictures and banners on the bank's many windows. However, the increased visibility of the memorial again created problems for the traffic flowing into and out of the bank. As a result, the police set up barricades at the new location that prevented people from entering while allowing them to view the memorial from a well-defined perimeter.

By April 19, as the memorial had begun to encroach upon Berkeley Street, conflict developed regarding its placement, the types of people and things allowed inside its perimeter, and the ownership of the materials themselves. The contention centered on questions of authority and was made manifest in the memorial's changing location, demonstrating the importance of lived space in the construction and maintenance of spontaneous shrines. In densely populated urban areas like Boston, the mass of accumulating objects at spontaneous shrines has the potential to disrupt the flow of traffic and leads to government involvement. As Grider notes, such intervention "generally occurs only when a municipal or government agency determines that it is necessary to remove the shrine, usually because it interferes with vehicular or foot traffic."<sup>100</sup> Margry and Sánchez echo this perspective, observing a trend in America and Europe in which memorial sites "are not sanctioned by any institution, hence they are unofficial and non-institutionalized and not easily subject to control by authorities."<sup>101</sup> Government decisions to remove interferences from public sidewalks or streets are based on judicial

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<sup>100</sup> Grider, "Spontaneous Shrines," 250. The spatial arrangement of such bodies, as well as non-human objects, is a recurrent concern," for "judges concern themselves over precise questions of placement, proportion, and mass"; see his *Rights of Passage: Sidewalks and the Regulation of Public Flow* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 89.

<sup>101</sup> Peter Jan Margry and Cristina Sánchez-Carretero, "Memorializing Tragic Death," *Anthropology Today* 23, no. 3 (2007): 1.

decisions about pedestrianism, and these decisions treat “people not as human subjects engaged in speech”—in this case memorial speech-acts—“but as bodies, that may impede and obstruct other bodies.”<sup>102</sup> Especially in situations in which public congregation is emotionally charged, the detached objectivity required to make decisions about where pedestrians are allowed to gather creates tension. Even as officials demonstrated sympathy for the array of emotional responses that accompany public acts of mourning, they also had to consider the logistical implications of the crowds of bodies and the growing collection of things they deposited at a busy street corner (Figure 3). Another implication of citizens’ decision to create the memorial without first consulting city authorities is that the objects themselves lacked any officially defined ownership. As a result, decisions about their placement and the throngs of visitors who came to see the memorial created controversy.

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<sup>102</sup> Nicholas Blomley, *Rights of Passage: Sidewalks and the Regulation of Public Flow* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 89. Blomley continues, “The spatial arrangement of such bodies, as well as non-human objects, is a recurrent concern,” for “judges concern themselves over precise questions of placement, proportion, and mass.”



Figure 3. “Memorial Location 2.” Photograph by Rainey Tisdale, April 22, accessed March 25, 2015. <https://raineytisdale.wordpress.com/tag/boston/>

In addition, the memorial became the site of conflict because its caretakers placed restrictions on who was allowed in at certain times. In their introduction to *American Sacred Space*, David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal call attention to the political characteristics that contribute to the formation of sacred space. First, the authors note that spaces derive their sacrality when those in control of the space deny access to those they consider “outsiders.” As a result, boundary maintenance becomes a defining feature of sacred space, and the extent to which these certain individuals or groups are barred from accessing a space contributes to the public’s perception of the space as sacred.<sup>103</sup> When the makeshift memorial moved to its location in the bank parking lot, Brown

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<sup>103</sup> David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal. *American Sacred Space*, 8. Drawing upon the work of Gerardus Van der Leeuw, the authors refer to “sanctity of the inside,” which is “certified by maintaining and reinforcing boundaries that kept certain persons outside the sacred space.”

oversaw the development of the growing memorial, making decisions about who and what were allowed inside the barricade. As he recounted, “We would let certain people come in—little kids come in, people that knew the runners or the people that got killed.” By barring access to the site, Brown not only shaped the ways that visitors perceived the space, but also dictated how they were allowed to view the objects themselves. Serving as the gatekeeper, Brown determined who could view the objects up close or touch them and where visitors could deposit certain offerings.<sup>104</sup>

Brown’s decision to set up clear physical boundaries that separated insiders from outsiders also had the effect of blurring the line between public space of the street corner and what increasingly came to resemble private property. Performing the role of the memorial’s guardian, Brown selected some who were allowed to enter while turning others away. In so doing, he mimicked the police’s action of setting up a barricade around the memorial, attempting to impose his own hierarchy of spectatorship and participation upon the space. According to Chidester and Linenthal, agents make claims of ownership upon highly contested sites in order to assert their authority over these spaces. The authors suggest that space is sacred in part because agents vie for authority and negotiate power relationships so that the sacrality of a given space is subject to “a politics of property.”<sup>105</sup> In the aftermath of the Boston bombings, the ownership of the

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<sup>104</sup> Kevin Brown, interview by Jayne Guberman, *WBUR Oral History Project*, October 29, 2013, Boston, MA, accessed December 1, 2014. [http://marathon.neu.edu/wburoralhistoryproject/kevin\\_brown](http://marathon.neu.edu/wburoralhistoryproject/kevin_brown).

<sup>105</sup> Chidester and Linenthal, *American Sacred Space*, 8. According to this interpretation a space’s designation as “sacred” does not hinge upon an Eliadean framework that locates sacred space at a pre-existent center or *axis mundi*. Instead, along with Jonathan Z. Smith, Chidester and Linenthal call attention to the contingent, context-dependent quality of spatial designations. See Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). Recently, scholars attempting to build upon the “spatial turn” in the social sciences and humanities have advocated for increased attentiveness to the work of geographers. See, for example, the separate essays of John Corrigan and Bret E. Carroll, “Space and Place,” (papers presented at the Third Biennial Conference on Religion and American Culture,

memorial became the object of negotiation between the city government and the citizens of Boston in general and Brown in particular.<sup>106</sup>

As Linenthal notes elsewhere, this politics of property is at play not only in the construction of the literal boundaries that mark the physical limits of a sacred space, but also applies to abstract boundaries that people construct when they deem objects either suitable or unsuitable for placement inside a given space. In Linenthal's estimation, there exists a theoretical "commemorative membrane" that serves to "segregate fields of remembrance," relegating the more vitriolic responses to a place outside of what is considered acceptable remembrance. Linenthal notes an example of this "commemorative membrane," citing one particularly brazen response written on a piece of paper that archivists elected not to place alongside the other artifacts inside the Oklahoma City National Memorial. The scrap of paper, which read, "Way to go McVeigh," did not penetrate the membrane because archivists considered such a sentiment outside the bounds of "proper" memorialization.<sup>107</sup>

As the Boston Marathon Bombing memorial took shape, the bank served as a temporary resting place for its contents. On April 24, the makeshift memorial was moved to Copley Square when it reopened. The transport of the objects to their new location occurred abruptly. According to Brown, the city government said, "'It's ours now,'"

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June 2013) <http://raac.iupui.edu/meetings-conferences/biennial-conference-religion-and-american-culture/third-biennial-conference-religion-and-american-culture/> (accessed November 4, 2014). This paper, especially in its third chapter, is an effort to explore the ways that those who were present for the Boston bombings used the Internet to map their experiences and tell their stories.

<sup>106</sup> Another implication of citizens' decision to create the memorial without first consulting city authorities is that the objects themselves lacked any officially defined ownership. The placement of objects inside the shrine was not the only source of contention. Indeed, the objects' very definition under the law was at issue. Because visitors made anonymous contributions to the shrine, the questions of copyright protection and legal ownership remain. See Kimberly B. Herman, "Commentary: In Wake of Tragedy, Tricky Questions for IP Lawyers," *Rhode Island Lawyers Weekly*, December 19, 2013.

<sup>107</sup> Linenthal, Edward T. "Postscript: A Grim Geography of Remembrance," 237.



brought in trucks to move the memorial, and set it up in Copley Square. In order to avoid disrupting the steady flow of visitors to the site, city government employees relocated the memorial in the early morning hours. “They took trucks and early in the morning before I got there, it was gone,” Brown remembered, frustrated that the memorial that he had spent so much time caring for could be moved without his knowledge. “I couldn’t believe it.” Starbuck, Brown’s companion, was questioned by police after he removed the tattered flags he owned from the memorial in an attempt to repair them. A confrontation with the police ensued. According to Brown, “We had to let the cops know who we were so they wouldn’t bother us.” When he informed the officers of his role as caretaker, the officers countered by asserting the city’s ownership of the shrine, to which Brown responded, “We started it, so nobody can stop me from coming here, and I’m taking care of it.” The way Brown concludes his account of the confrontation reveals his mixture of frustration about the bureaucracy and sense of pride for his role in watching over the memorial materials: “I’m not too happy the city took it over, but if it can stay here, then—that’s why I stayed and took care of it, and that’s why it stayed so long.” Despite their frustration, Brown and his friend elected not to protest the government’s intervention. “Ed got more mad at it than I did,” Brown remembers, “but you can’t stop them because [the memorial] is part of the city, so you know, if we fight it, they’re going to take it down, so we just gotta let them do what they want to do.”<sup>108</sup>

Meanwhile, the memorial attracted more visitors, including Vice President Joe Biden and his wife, an avid runner, who deposited her sneakers at the memorial. The influx of visitors from around the world—Japan, Russia, and Sweden were among the

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<sup>108</sup> Kevin Brown, interview by Jayne Guberman, *WBUR Oral History Project*, October 29, 2013, Boston, MA, accessed December 1, 2014. [http://marathon.neu.edu/wburoralhistoryproject/kevin\\_brown](http://marathon.neu.edu/wburoralhistoryproject/kevin_brown).

countries represented at the site—and the ubiquity of news media added significance to the memorial and to Brown’s perception of the importance of his role as caretaker. As Copley Square attracted more attention, Brown took more responsibility for its contents to ensure that it remained there for as long as possible. When visitors lit the dozens of candles, police again intervened, outlawing the practice because it created a fire hazard. Brown, however, volunteered to light each of the candles and blow them out. During evening hours when the candles were lit, visitors would stand or kneel, alternating between silent prayer and singing patriotic songs and hymns. The memorial became a suitable environment for religious expression, attracting the attention of public figures and visitors from around the world.

By the time the mayor ordered that the memorial be moved from the bank parking lot, Brown had developed an orderly system for arranging the items, which were still arriving daily. Having become familiar with the memorial’s objects, Brown re-arranged the memorial after city officials set it up in Copley Square. As Brown remembered, “It took me probably two weeks to get it the way I liked it.” Brown treated his work like a job. Arriving at the site at 10 am and staying until well after sunset, he spent his time supervising the shrine and re-arranging its contents.<sup>109</sup>

Brown put a special amount of effort into preserving and displaying the homemade objects, paying special attention to the children’s drawings, which he would hang on trees, a task that kept him constantly up and moving. “I don’t think I sat down more than twice that month,” Brown says. In the long hours Brown spent at the site, he spent his time focusing on the memorial’s aesthetics, devoting special attention to

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<sup>109</sup> Kevin Brown, interview by Jayne Guberman, *WBUR Oral History Project*, October 29, 2013, Boston, MA, accessed December 1, 2014. [http://marathon.neu.edu/wburoralhistoryproject/kevin\\_brown](http://marathon.neu.edu/wburoralhistoryproject/kevin_brown).

homemade memorialization objects and children's contributions, while also collating the large sheets of paper and cardboard that visitors signed. "Everything got signed," he remembers. "It was packed, and people would wait for . . . a half hour just to write." In order provide space for people to sign their names and write messages, the city purchased large pieces of cardboard to mount on 4x8 sheets of plywood. Eventually, however, the demand for writing surfaces led Brown and the other volunteers to buy smaller pieces of cardboard that they taped together, hung, and dismantled, being careful to preserve each section of cardboard, each of which was placed in the archive. Through his attentiveness to the memorial's objects, Brown formed a special attachment to the shrine that city officials implicitly challenged when they moved the memorial without consulting him.<sup>110</sup>

In addition to Brown's attachment to the objects, his particularity about their placement problematizes scholars' characterization of these shrines as "spontaneous." Erika Doss opines that "the term 'spontaneous' is a misnomer; however impromptu they may seem, temporary memorials are actually highly orchestrated and self-conscious acts of mourning aimed at expressing, codifying, and ultimately managing grief."<sup>111</sup> Because the placement of objects appears to be less than spontaneous, Grider echoes Doss's sentiments and decries the mainstream media's use of the adjective "makeshift" to describe these memorials. She argues that the word introduces a similar confusion, for although mourners often visit shrines without planning to leave behind evidence of their visit and thus make spur-of-the-moment decisions about what to deposit, they carefully

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Doss, *Memorial Mania*, 68.

arrange their objects into organized assemblages.<sup>112</sup>

At the Copley Square Memorial, visitors displayed explicitly Christian objects and symbols. While these materials filled the memorial, clergy members were notably absent from the site in the immediate aftermath of the tragedy. Officials denied priests' access to the bombing site because of the risk involved in admitting more people into the crime scene. The decision to keep clergy from administering last rites is a relatively recent development. According to Reverend John Wykes, director of St. Francis Chapel at Boston's Prudential Center, "In the Bing Crosby era—the '40s, '50s, '60s—a priest with a collar could go anywhere. That's changed. Priests are no longer considered to be emergency responders."<sup>113</sup> Despite their absence among the first responders who provided care to the injured, clergy members of churches in the immediate vicinity of the finish line held interfaith services as a way to support the grieving community. Nancy Taylor, senior minister at Boston's Old South Church, called for solidarity leading up to one such service to commemorate the one year anniversary of the bombings. The gathering included prayer for victims, runners, and first responders, as well as an address from Imam Suhaib Webb of the Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center.<sup>114</sup>

In addition to arranging the hats, candles, and flowers in rows, Brown devoted

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<sup>112</sup> Grider, "Spontaneous Shrines," 247.

<sup>113</sup> Jennifer Graham, "Faith at the Finish Line in Boston," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 25, 2013. While priests retreated to their parishes to set up hospitality tables for runners leaving the scene, other groups of onlookers provided a striking juxtaposition by sending a decidedly different message. Christie Coombs, a spectator at the finish line, recalled an encounter she had with a group of "radical fundamentalist Christians" after the bombs exploded: "These guys were holding up signs that said 'Boston will burn in hell,' 'Repent your sins,' . . . and people are running all over the place screaming, crying, and this was going on behind us and I said to these guys, 'In light of what's just happened, it's a bit inappropriate for you to be standing here with these signs. Why don't you get the heck out of here?'" Christie Coombs, Interview by Joanna Shea O'Brien, *WBUR Oral History Project*, Abington, MA, January 28, 2014, accessed December 5, 2014.

<sup>114</sup> Nancy Taylor, "Unity of Faith Marks Marathon Anniversary," *USA Today*, April 13, 2014.

special attention to the three large crosses that honored the three people killed by the bombs. These crosses, which a man from Illinois named Greg Zanis constructed before making the nearly 1,000-mile drive to Boston to deliver them, became the most widely recognizable objects at the Copley Square memorial.<sup>115</sup> When MIT security guard Sean Collier was killed in the manhunt for the bombing suspects, Brown constructed a fourth cross in his memory because, as he remembered, “Everybody just kept on asking me, ‘Where’s Sean’s cross?’” A self-employed carpenter, Brown downplayed the effort required to make the cross. “I can make anything out of wood,” Brown said, “so I just took the measurements and made it.”<sup>116</sup> Despite Brown’s modesty, however, his time- and labor-intensive self-sacrifice on behalf of the memorial became the stuff gospel narratives are made of. Resembling a modern-day Joseph of Arimathea, here was Brown, clad in his signature American flag jacket, eagle lapel, and Red Sox cap, lugging a cross from the train station to Copley Square, where he dedicated it in remembrance of a man he had never met.

Like the rest of the memorial, which reflected Brown’s attention to detail and personal preference, the homemade cross resembled the three that already stood at the site. Painted white, the finished cross had a red heart and a picture of Sean to match the photos hanging from the other crosses dedicated to the victims. Far from spontaneous or impromptu, Brown’s recreation of the existing crosses in Collier’s honor demonstrates that the formation of the Boston Marathon memorial was carefully thought out, even

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<sup>115</sup> <http://marathon.neu.edu/bca/copley>. Brown incorrectly identifies the Zanis as from Indiana in the interview.

<sup>116</sup> Kevin Brown, interview by Jayne Guberman, *WBUR Oral History Project*, October 29, 2013, Boston, MA, accessed December 1, 2014. [http://marathon.neu.edu/wburoralhistoryproject/kevin\\_brown](http://marathon.neu.edu/wburoralhistoryproject/kevin_brown).

scripted.<sup>117</sup> The crosses show evidence of mourners' painstaking deliberation in the decisions they made about both the objects' appearance and their configuration alongside other items, all of which were carefully preserved (Figure 4).

In addition to the physical labor required to create the crosses, their arrangement at Copley Square guided the ways that visitors to the site would experience them. Unlike Figure 5, which shows the crosses standing side-by-side indoors, they were originally displayed in public, serving as homemade monuments to the deceased. Volunteers moved the objects and cleared the dead flowers to create a path for visitors to walk around the crosses, touch them, and kneel down to look more closely at the photos of the



Figure 4. “Marathon memorial taken down as Boston looks ‘to the future.’”  
Photograph by C.J. Gunther, June 25, 2013, accessed March 24, 2013.  
[http://usnews.nbcnews.com/\\_news/2013/06/25/19134968-marathon-memorial-taken-down-as-boston-looks-to-the-future?lite](http://usnews.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/06/25/19134968-marathon-memorial-taken-down-as-boston-looks-to-the-future?lite)

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<sup>117</sup> Ericka Doss comments on the characteristically scripted nature of memorials in “Spontaneous Memorials and Contemporary Modes of Mourning in America,” *Material Religion* 2, no. 3 (2006): 298.



Figure 5. “Memorial Crosses for Krystle Campbell, Lu Lingzi, Sean Collier, and Martin Richard at Copley Square Memorial,” *Our Marathon*, n.d., accessed May 5, 2015. <http://marathon.neu.edu/items/show/8733>.

victims or the items attached to the tops of their three-and-a-half-foot tall frames.<sup>118</sup> The types of movements that the memorial prescribed differed markedly from those described in Chapter One. Instead of vigorous exercise in an open space, mourners who visited the shrine moved deliberately and reverently. The panoply of physical responses to memorialize the bombing victims demonstrates that although there is no prescribed bodily practice for responding to a tragedy, the spaces in which living bodies move dictate the appropriateness or inappropriateness of certain movements.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> In addition to asserting that memorial sites are “destinations” that “demand physical labor” and “require mobility,” Carole Blair calls attention to the way memorial structures both “summon” observers because they “transgress the path of the pedestrian” and “prescribe” pathways by prohibiting walking in certain areas; see “Contemporary U.S. Memorial Sites as Exemplars of Rhetoric’s Materiality,” in *Rhetorical Bodies*, ed. Jack Selzer and Sharon Crowley (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 46-7.

<sup>119</sup> For a discussion of the centrality of the body in the production of sacred space, see Chidester and Linenthal, *American Sacred Space*, 10.

## Closure in a Place of Open Wounds

Brown brought in the cross on what he remembers as “one of the greatest days” at the memorial. While Brown was putting the finishing touches on the red heart, Sean’s father approached him, tapped him on the shoulder, and instructed Brown not to reveal his identity to anyone. As Brown remembers,

It helped [Sean’s father] out so much because he told me, ‘Every day we get up, go to the grave,’ and he’d be crying all day, go home, cry, and he didn’t know what to do until he saw the memorial, and he came in that day and it was just luck that I was working on his son’s cross. He even helped, I let him help finish it. He helped paint the heart red. He was there for almost four hours after, just watching people put stuff on his son’s cross, and it didn’t take long to be covered . . . with crosses. They’d bring four pennies or four stones, flowers, t-shirts, crosses on chains and they would hang them.

Brown contended that the site was important as a space not only of remembrance, but also of healing. “It made [Sean’s father] so much better,” Brown remembers. “He would show up, never say much, but he would be back.”<sup>120</sup> Some who came to the memorial were marathon participants who experienced emotional and physical scars from the day.

Also among the memorial’s visitors were three nurses, one of whom had run the 2013 marathon. However, like nearly 10,000 other runners, her progress was stopped before she could reach the finish line because of the explosions on Boylston Street. She eventually reached the finish line not as a runner, but as a nurse, joining her two colleagues in the medic tent where they treated the wounded following the blasts. Because of the traumatic memories associated with the day, the three waited a month before returning to the site. “It was too much for them,” Brown remembers. However,

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<sup>120</sup> Kevin Brown, interview by Jayne Guberman, *WBUR Oral History Project*, October 29, 2013, Boston, MA, accessed December 1, 2014. [http://marathon.neu.edu/wburoralhistoryproject/kevin\\_brown](http://marathon.neu.edu/wburoralhistoryproject/kevin_brown).



when they did return, they brought a sign, which they asked Brown to hang. “It made them feel so much better that they could come back to this spot,” Brown says. “It was like a shrine. That’s what it became.”

What makes a collection of objects a shrine? For Brown, at least, the term is suitable for the space he oversaw inside Copley Square because both because visitors made pilgrimage-like journeys to see and experience it and because it served as a place where they could begin a healing process. Another of the great ironies on display at the Boston Bombing Memorial is that the space served the dual purpose of providing closure for some visitors despite—or, perhaps, by way of—exposing the emotional wounds of the bereaved.

Along with first responders, injured runners frequented the memorial, returning nearly every day to read notes and see the hats, t-shirts, flowers, candles, and crosses. For Brown, seeing injured runners browse the objects was sufficient evidence to support his claim that “[The memorial] was a spot that had to be there for Boston to heal.” Brown himself saw the shrine as a helpful place for him to cope with the death of his mother, who had passed away three weeks prior to the bombings. In response to his family’s questions about why he spent so much time at the shrine, Brown told them, “I had to be there. It . . . helped me because I was depressed.”<sup>121</sup>

Despite the fact that Brown repeatedly referred to the memorial as a site where healing could take place, some are skeptical about the therapeutic narratives that have come to characterize sites of public remembrance. For example, Linenthal offers a pointed critique of such classifications:

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<sup>121</sup> Kevin Brown, interview by Jayne Guberman, *WBUR Oral History Project*, October 29, 2013, Boston, MA, accessed December 1, 2014. [http://marathon.neu.edu/wburoralhistoryproject/kevin\\_brown](http://marathon.neu.edu/wburoralhistoryproject/kevin_brown).

Memorialization processes both bring communities together and tear them apart at the same time; acts of remembrance are not by definition ‘healing,’ and the dominant narrative in the struggle to interpret sites of violence is the often insidious therapeutic narrative—that speaks of trauma, healing process, closure—a narrative that too often transforms those seared by violence into patients suffering from a disease, passive selves whose experiences need to be interpreted by our new ‘high priests,’ mental health professionals.<sup>122</sup>

One can almost hear the exasperation in Linenthal’s tone, which he matches elsewhere in his attempts to express the inadequacy of silence as a response to tragedy, arguing that if one were to remain silent, “the interpretive field would be left open for murders of memory, all too eager to fill the void with comforting expressions of sanitization, domestication, trivialization, and other insidious forms of forgetfulness.”<sup>123</sup>

The Boston Bombing Memorial shares a number of characteristics with recent memorials that commemorate tragic events in Europe and America.<sup>124</sup> Chief among these shared characteristics is the way that the objects at the Boston Marathon finish line, and later at Copley Square, were displayed publically. Jack Santino notes that spontaneous shrines’ efficacy stems from their metaphorical placement at the intersection of personal mourning and public exposure.<sup>125</sup> According to Santino, the objects that make up shrines not only commemorate, but also resemble “performative utterances,” or “illocutionary speech acts,” terms used by linguist J. L. Austin to refer to statements that

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<sup>122</sup> Edward T. Linenthal, “Belonging and Participation,” (paper presented at the Third Biennial Conference on Religion and American Culture, June 2013) <http://raac.iupui.edu/meetings-conferences/biennial-conference-religion-and-american-culture/third-biennial-conference-religion-and-american-culture/> (accessed November 4, 2014).

<sup>123</sup> Edward T. Linenthal, “Grim Geography,” 235.

<sup>124</sup> For a list of these characteristics, see Peter Jan Margry and Cristina Sánchez-Carretero, “Memorializing Tragic Death.” *Anthropology Today* 23, no. 3 (2007): 1.

<sup>125</sup> Jack Santino, “Performative Commemorative, the Personal, and the Public: Spontaneous Shrines, Emergent Ritual, and the Field of Folklore,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 117, no. 466 (2004): 363.

“cause the effect they pronounce.”<sup>126</sup> As such, these shrines not only commemorate the victims of violent acts, but also “insist” and “communicate,” “translating social issues and political actions into personal terms.”<sup>127</sup> Unlike the privacy and intimacy of the mourning that occurs in a cemetery, spontaneous shrines “invite the participation of a community” and often “attract pilgrims from afar,” blurring the lines between private mourning and public grief.<sup>128</sup>

A banner on display at the Copley Square Memorial and provides a striking example of how private messages can be re-appropriated for public display. The banner shown in figure 6 reads “Run Jane Run!” and was originally created by a spectator whose wife ran the 100<sup>th</sup> Boston Marathon in 1996. However, after the bombing, the creator recycled the banner and addressed its message to seven-year-old Jane Richard, whose eight-year-old brother Martin was killed in the blast. In the top left corner, the banner’s creator describes his intention in depositing it:

I believe one day Jane Richard who lost her brother and her leg will one day run the Boston Marathon in his honor and in memory of all those affected by a senseless act. I hope Jane and all those affected will see this banner and when you run Boston you will see the second banner just like it and know that those who signed it will never forget the events of 4-15-2013 and we will always support you.<sup>129</sup>

Although the banner had originally been used as a way to motivate a marathon runner

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 366. See also Peter Jan Margry, “Performative Memorials: Arenas on Political Resentment in Dutch Society,” in *Reforming Dutch Culture*, ed. Peter Jan Margry and H. Roodenburg (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2008): 109-133.

<sup>127</sup> Santino, “Performative Commemorative,” 370.

<sup>128</sup> Harriet H. Senie, “Mourning in Protest: Spontaneous Memorials and the Sacralization of Public Space,” in *Spontaneous Shrines and the Public Memorialization of Death*, 41-57, ed. Jack Santino (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 44.

<sup>129</sup> James Schmidt, “‘Run Jane Run!’ Copley Square memorial,” *Our Marathon*, April 24, 2013, accessed November 26, 2014, <http://marathon.neu.edu/items/show/4227>.

and had been sitting inside the creator’s studio for eighteen years, the creator felt that the message, originally addressed to a “Jane” from another time and place, resonated with the contemporary situation. The creator even introduces his own narrative, envisioning Jane, who lost a leg in the explosion, completing a future rendition of the marathon in honor of her brother.

Running shoes were among the most frequently deposited objects at the Copley Square Memorial. Likewise, runners were among the most frequent visitors to the memorial site, arriving at the shrine on foot and removing their running shoes when they reached this newly appropriated hallowed ground, depositing them among the growing collection of worn out sneakers, and departing barefoot.



Figure 6. “Run Jane Run!’ Copley Square memorial.” Photograph by James Schmidt, April 24, 2013. *Our Marathon*, accessed December 3, 2014.

When the shrine-like assemblages were moved into the Boston City Archives on

June 25, Boston Mayor Tom Menino called for the creation of a Remembrance Committee who will provide oversight for future memorializations at the site.<sup>130</sup> Unlike the movement of the fledgling memorial which occurred abruptly and without warning, city officials announced that the objects would be moved indoors a week prior to their removal from Copley Square. Menino sent a letter to victims' families to accompany the announcement, saying, "It is my hope that the respectful closing of the temporary memorial will help us all look to the future."<sup>131</sup> Months after the objects arrived at the Boston City Archives, archivists again reorganized the shoes for an exhibition at the Boston Public Library from April 7 until May 11, 2014, entitled "Dear Boston: Messages from the Marathon Memorial." Rainey Tisdale, a curator of the materials who prepared them for the exhibit, sorted through 134 shoeboxes and organized 150 running shoes for display.

Running shoes were significant markers for a number of reasons. First, runners wrote messages and names on their shoes to convey their motivation for training for and competing in the 2013 Boston Marathon. Tisdale noted that while in some archived collections "the emotion and the story" can be difficult to detect, the Marathon archive functioned differently because, as she notes, "The emotion is right there at the surface."

Tisdale's metaphor is especially appropriate when one considers the ways that runners

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<sup>130</sup> Associated Press, "Items from the Boston Marathon Memorial to be Moved," *The Berkshire Eagle*, June 2014, 2013. While the entire memorial was dismantled on June 25, staff members from Menino's office periodically removed paper and other fragile items to protect them from the threat of rain. According to <http://marathon.neu.edu/bca/copley>, the four crosses were the final items to be removed from the site.

<sup>131</sup> Richard Valdmanis, "Boston Dismantles Bomb Memorial in Bid to 'Look to the future,'" *San Jose Mercury News*, June 25, 2013. Menino's use of the word "temporary" suggests that the terms people use to describe these memorials differs with regard to their view of the space it occupies. Referring to the memorial in this way serves Menino's political purpose, for the term reminds the public—both those who grieve and those who want downtown to resume its normal rhythms—of the inevitability of the memorial's movement.

altered the surfaces of their shoes in their preparation for the marathon. While written messages on shoes may be indecipherable to a race spectator as the runner passes, they become stationary texts while on display in the exhibit. Figure 7 shows the shoes arranged in rows. Those closer to the corner catch the viewer's eye, then "recede back into the group—the way a runner sometimes does as part of a pack."<sup>132</sup> In the exhibit, observers could read and reflect upon the Bible verses, names of people or charities, and mantra-like sayings inscribed on the shoes. Tisdale comments on the specific ways that runners modified their shoes, saying, "[The shoes] have messages about the people they're running for—maybe they're running for a cancer survivor—they have the little tags from their charity team."<sup>133</sup> The shoes themselves are familiar objects with which runners have a special connection, and the specific ways that they modified their shoes suggest a desire on the part of many runners to make manifest their internal motivation. Running shoes are also appropriate memorial markers because they serve as place markers of bodily presence.

Pens are not the only objects to have left a mark on the shoes for, as Tisdale observes, the shoes also have "all sorts of wear marks on the soles from each runner's tread." As an alternative mode of "inscription," these marks represent, as Tisdale says, "all the ways those runners adapted the shoes so that they would get them through all those miles." The shoes' soles attest to the presence of running bodies in motion despite their physical absence. Considering that deaths are often conceptualized as

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<sup>132</sup> Andrea Shea, "Running Shoes are Potent Symbols In Marathon Memorial Exhibit," *WBUR*, April 7, 2014.

<sup>133</sup> Shea, "Running Shoes," n.p. David Storto, President of the Spaulding Rehabilitation Center in Boston, describes his involvement with Spaulding's charity team, which grew from twenty-five to thirty in previous years to more than ninety in 2014. David Storto, interview by Jayne Guberman. February 3, 2014. *WBUR Oral History Project*, Spaulding Rehabilitation Center, Boston, MA.

“displacements that create distance, either spatial or temporal,” material objects become important insofar as they conjure memories and serve as “mediators that connect accessible with what threaten to be inaccessible domains.”<sup>134</sup>



Figure 7. “‘Dear Boston’ Exhibit.” Photo courtesy of Boston Public Library, n.d. accessed December 9, 2014. <http://artery.wbur.org/2014/04/07/dear-boston-bombing-memorial-exhibit>.

While none of these shoes belong to those who died at the bombings, footwear, like clothing, nevertheless serves as “a point of material contact with the body of a once-living person” and “provide[s] a means by which memories of that living body can be

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<sup>134</sup> Grider, “Spontaneous Shrines,” 247.

generated.”<sup>135</sup> One contributor to the online archive writes movingly of her daughter-in-law’s courageous preparation for the 2014 Boston Marathon after being present for the bombing in 2013, exemplified by her commitment “to lace up her shoes and keep running—even when it hurts mentally and when it hurts physically.”<sup>136</sup> Examples such as this one demonstrate that mourners’ physical interaction with objects can conjure memories of tragic events. As a result, the objects themselves become invested with new meaning, and an action that previously may have been performed without consideration, such as tying one’s shoes, can give rise to reflection.

By virtue of the stories they tell, the wear patterns on shoes’ surfaces convey information in much the same way as photographs and other images. David Morgan joins other scholars in calling attention to “the unique capacity of images to make real what they depict.” Echoing the work of Roland Barthes, Morgan recognizes “the power of the photographic image as its apparent ability to root a cultural message in the ‘natural’ world.” Drawing on Barthes’s idea that a photograph serves as “certificate of presence,” Morgan expands photographs’ power of “naturalization” to include not just religious images, but “*any image* whose reception involves the magical sense of making the absent present.”<sup>137</sup> In addition to the written messages on the shoes’ surfaces, which convey runners’ diverse motivations for competing, the physical textures of the shoes’

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<sup>135</sup> Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey, *Death, Memory, and Material Culture* (New York: Berg, 2001), 115.

<sup>136</sup> Anonymous, “My daughter-in-law inspires me,” *Our Marathon*, accessed October 1, 2014, <http://marathon.neu.edu/items/show/8517>.

<sup>137</sup> David Morgan, *Visual Piety*, 8 (emphasis mine).



surfaces transmit information about the dedication and perseverance of each runner.<sup>138</sup>

Written and visual messages are inseparable in analyzing the ways humans make meaning; as Morgan suggests, “Language and vision, word and image, text and picture are in fact deeply enmeshed and collaborate powerfully in assembling our sense of the real.”<sup>139</sup> Morgan’s theory can be applied not only to “any image,” but also to artifacts.

Although the shoes themselves appear above in a photograph, their surfaces of rubber, cloth, and mesh serve as harbingers of memory by virtue of their familiar physicality.<sup>140</sup>

The shoes’ messages, both written on and embedded in the soles, serve as mourners’ and fellow runners’ “certificates of presence” alongside the bombing victims despite their geographical distance from one another.

The interaction between material objects and human bodies provides a fruitful nexus for understanding the relationships between life and death, presence and absence.<sup>141</sup> One can draw conclusions not only about a runner’s motivation, but also

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<sup>138</sup> For another example of how physical objects can serve as appropriate place markers, see Santino’s discussion of the “rag well” in Northern Ireland in his “Performative Commemorative,” 365-66. At this site visitors tie pieces of cloth to a thicket surrounding the well near the ruins of a medieval priory, an act that Santino refers to as leaving “a token of presence.”

<sup>139</sup> Morgan, *Visual Piety*, 9.

<sup>140</sup> An important contribution of material culture studies of religion is the reversal of traditional conceptions of the relationship between signifier and signified. Attentiveness to material things in their historically situated contexts confronts the Enlightenment tendency to treat material signifiers as important only insofar as they point to an immaterial, transcendent signified. Dick Houtman and Birgit Meyer argue that such an understanding “reduces material culture . . . to the status of ‘mere’ signs”; see their “Introduction: Material Religion—How Things Matter,” in *Things: Religion and the Question of Materiality*, 6. Carole Blair, Greg Dickinson, and Brian L. Ott echo this perspective on the relatively recent re-materialization in the social science and humanities, noting that “the materiality of the signification itself, as a mode of mediation, has taken an increased importance in contemporary times, clear in an intensified focus on material rhetoric; see their “Introduction: Rhetoric, Memory, Place,” in *Places of Public Memory: The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorials*, ed. Brian L. Ott, Carole Blair and Greg Dickinson (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2010), 3.

<sup>141</sup> For a helpful discussion of the placement of clothing at memorials, see Cristina Sánchez-Carretero, “Madrid Train Bombings: Enacting the Emotional Body at Grassroots Memorials,” in

about a runner's gait by looking at the wear pattern on the bottom of a pair of running shoes—one might even distinguish between a heel- and a forefoot-striking stride without actually watching a runner in motion. Perhaps because such an intimate connection exists between the shoes and the bodies that stepped, strained, and sweat in them, Tisdale posits that the archive's collection of shoes incited the "most intense" and "overwhelming" emotion. Tisdale concludes, "There's a way that [the shoes] symbolize running. They really do speak to this identity of runners, and then on top of that, you've got this other layer, which is about after the bombing, and these runners needing to leave their own message at the memorial—the message of a runner."<sup>142</sup> Through her adept observations, Tisdale implies that despite the diversity of written messages inscribed upon many of the pairs of shoes, a distinct and unified narrative emerges when one takes into account the communicative power of bodily movement and its effects on material objects. Similarly, as the items at the marathon memorial demonstrate, things can have a profound effect upon visitors to the memorial, even though they have never met the person responsible for depositing a given item.

The runners who prepared for the marathon spent months training, slipping on the same pair of shoes multiple times each week, developing an intimate familiarity with the way the shoes felt on their feet. However, contact not only occurs between a runner's feet and her shoes, but also between the shoes and the running surface. Many of these runners' training runs, including the marathon itself, took place on pavement, a surface

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*Grassroots Memorials: The Politics of Memorializing Traumatic Death*, ed. Peter Jan Margry and Cristina Sánchez Carretero (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 255-57.

<sup>142</sup> Andrea Shea, "Running Shoes Are Potent Symbols," *WBUR*, April 7, 2014. <http://artery.wbur.org/2014/04/07/dear-boston-bombing-memorial-exhibit>.

upon which pedestrians leave no visual record of their having moved from place to place on foot. Tim Ingold comments on an often-overlooked truth about bodies in motion in an era of paved roads and sidewalks:

People, as they walk the streets, leave no trace of their movements, no record of their having passed by. It is as if they had never been. There is, here, the same detachment of persons from the ground that runs, as I have shown, like a leitmotif through the recent history of western societies. It appears that people, in their daily lives, merely skim the surface of a world that has been previously mapped out and constructed for them to occupy, rather than contributing through their movements to its ongoing formation.<sup>143</sup>

Ingold argues that unlike either commuters from centuries past or present-day nomadic populations who traverse deserts or wear paths in the dirt, city-dwellers in contemporary western societies move from place to place mostly on paved roads, effectively hiding evidence of their movement. As a result, the record of their presence is rendered absent.

Material objects, however, “are brought into play as a means to recall persons, relationships and events that are no longer present.”<sup>144</sup> Runners who left shoes at the memorial sought not only to commemorate those who were killed in the bombing, but also to mark their own place at the site as fellow partakers in the grieving and recovery process despite their physical distance from Boston. As a part of their pilgrimage to the spontaneous shrine, runners sought to mark their place in a manner consonant with what theorists have recognized as prototypical behavior among pilgrims. One such theorist is Zygmunt Bauman, who offers an intriguing characterization of “the world of pilgrims.” “Above all,” he writes, “it must be a kind of world in which footprints are engraved for

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<sup>143</sup> Tim Ingold, *Being Alive*, 44. See also Jo-Lee Vergunst, “Taking a Trip and taking Care in Everyday Life,” in *Ways of Walking: Ethnography and Practice on Foot*, ed. Tim Ingold and Jo-Lee Vergunst (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 106. Vergunst attempts “to conceptualize the environmental relations of the walker in a way that brings out the mobile and mutually-embedding relations of walking.” See also Michel de Certeau, *Practices of Everyday Life*, on walking a city.

<sup>144</sup> Hallam and Hockey, *Death, Memory and Material Culture*, 25.

good, so that the trace and record of past travels is kept and preserved.”<sup>145</sup> Like the photos taken of those who participated in the One Run event, the shoes became an alternate means by which mourners rendered present not only the absence of those killed in the bombings, but also their own absences from the memorial after their departure.

In addition to the Boston Marathon Memorial, other spaces have been denoted as “sacred ground” in the aftermath of tragedies. As in Boston, these other sites are not only highly contested, but also demonstrate the importance of maintaining a physical place marker at the site to commemorate a notable absence. For example, in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, the most sacred portion of Ground Zero was the foundation where the twin towers stood. Referred to as the towers’ “footprints,” these foundations led people to “imagine that the towers *left an imprint* on the ground.” Unlike the Boston Marathon course, which is designed and policed in order to facilitate movement, the plaza on which the towers stood was “neither conducive to public gathering nor even, for most people, the primary entry point to the towers,” thus introducing a further irony into the usage of the term “footprints” to refer to their foundations. The towers’ absence left a considerable void that perhaps only increased onlookers’ desire for an anthropomorphic “stand-in” for those who died in the buildings’ collapse.<sup>146</sup> The importance of leaving a mark upon sacred ground, specifically in the form of a footprint, suggests that bodily

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<sup>145</sup> Bauman also notes that the pilgrims, as walkers, had a stake in the solidity of the world they walked” that enabled them to “tell life as a continuous story, a ‘sense-making’ story”; see his “From Pilgrim to Tourist; or, A Short History of Identity,” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. S. Hall and P. du Gay (London: Sage, 1996), 23. In a similar fashion, Tim Ingold posits that the separation that exists between “the activity of a mind at rest and a body in transit” is largely an imagined one, challenging the notion that the kind of “destination-oriented travel” promoted by eighteenth-century European elites is necessarily superior to “walking as an inherently virtuous and rewarding activity”; see his “Culture on the Ground: The World Perceived Through the Feet,” *Journal of Material Culture* 9, no. 3 (2004): 322.

<sup>146</sup> Marita Sturken, “Tourism and ‘Sacred Ground’: The Space of Ground Zero,” in *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff (New York: Routledge, 2013), 420 (emphasis in original).

movement and visceral interaction at the site of a tragedy forms an integral part of public memorialization.

Given that runners completed the course without leaving a lasting trace, marking their presence with material objects became an especially significant strategy for expressing support for the bombing victims, as well as for providing a way to navigate the complex of emotions that accompanied the tragedy. For participants in the 2013 Boston Marathon, worn out shoes became “place markers” to denote runners’ physical presence at an emotionally charged site. The importance of leaving a trace at a site associated with physical and emotional trauma aligns with Harriet Senie’s argument that “the ground we walk on holds the content of its history—offers us direct access to what has occurred there.”<sup>147</sup> In a particularly fitting remark that captures both the reverence that pervades sites of traumatic death and mourners’ obsession with experiencing these sites viscerally, Senie observes, “We do not tread lightly on the remains of the dead.”<sup>148</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The Boston Marathon Bombing Memorial became a contested space while maintaining its integrity as a meaningful tribute to those affected by the tragedy. Thanks in large part to the efforts of Kevin Brown during the memorial’s development, Copley Square became a place where visitors could travel to pay tribute to the dead and offer messages of support to the survivors and first responders. A tension-laden story lies beneath the narrative of healing, and it would perhaps be misguided to suggest that one

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<sup>147</sup> Senie, “Mourning in Protest,” 45.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*,” 44.

was possible without the other. Without the efforts of the Boston Police officers, for example, the memorial likely would have undergone damage or looting during the twelve hours that Brown was not present. In addition, without the city government's ability to make difficult decisions about where to place the memorial in the aftermath of the tragedy, the memorial may have been dismantled much earlier, prohibiting thousands of visitors from experiencing it in its raw, albeit semi-organized state, near where the bombings occurred.

While some visitors experienced a form of healing at the memorial, others undoubtedly felt helpless as they deposited and surveyed the heartfelt offerings, feeling the weighty double absence of those who died and fellow mourners scattered around the world. Brown's contention that the memorial resembled "a big family when everybody was there" implicitly attests to the reality that there were and are times when everybody would be elsewhere, separated by geographical distance and subject to the passage of time that, at intervals, blunts and accentuates the sharpness of the pain of the bereaved—a pain rendered continually, cruelly present through the absence of lost lives and limbs. Accompanying this irony is the fact that the memorial's placement at the intersection of Boylston and Clarendon Street also served as the intersection between private mourning and public grief. The objects that survived the threat of thieves and inclement weather are now safely housed in a temperature-controlled warehouse, their images displayed online for an ever-growing Internet-savvy public. It is to the spatial implications of this movement into cyberspace that we now turn.

**BODIES IN MOTION, OBJECTS AT REST: FROM PILGRIMAGE SITE TO  
WEBSITE**

“All that once was directly lived has become mere representation.”  
– Guy Debord<sup>149</sup>

Several days later Murray asked me about a tourist attraction known as the most photographed barn in America. We drove twenty-two miles into the country around Farmington. There were meadows and apple orchards. White fences trailed through the rolling fields. Soon the signs started appearing. THE MOST PHOTOGRAPHED BARN IN AMERICA. We counted five signs before we reached the site. . . . We walked along a cow-path to the slightly elevated spot set aside for viewing and photographing. All the people had cameras; some had tripods, telephoto lenses, filter kits. A man in a booth sold postcards and slides - pictures of the barn taken from the elevated spot. We stood near a grove of trees and watched the photographers. Murray maintained a prolonged silence, occasionally scrawling some notes in a little book.

‘No one sees the barn,’ he said finally.

A long silence followed.

‘Once you've seen the signs about the barn, it becomes impossible to see the barn.’  
– Don DeLillo<sup>150</sup>

On Thursday, May 16, 2013, just 31 days after the Boston Marathon bombing, the *Our Marathon* online digital archive went live. While images of the objects and letters that made up the temporary memorial would eventually be scanned and posted online to supplement the archive’s online contents, members of Northeastern University’s NULab for Texts, Maps, and Networks put out a call for stories of a different kind. Culling the

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<sup>149</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994), 1.

<sup>150</sup> Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (New York: Viking, 1985), 72.

social media landscape for snippets of text related to the Boston Marathon bombings, these digital archivists invited the public to contribute to the fledgling online repository with their own stories of the day's events.

Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, a professor of English at Northeastern University and co-director of NULab, expressed an immediate interest in providing a place for those affected by the bombings to share stories that “d[id]n’t show up in the news.”<sup>151</sup> One contributor to the *Our Marathon* digital archive who watched the runners pass from the corner of Beacon and Harvard Street expressed frustration at what she perceived as a one-sided, predominantly negative portrayal of the day's events by the news media, noting, “So many important stories of courage and camaraderie were lost in the media’s fear-mongering and obsession with the violence and perpetrators.”<sup>152</sup> Recognizing the importance of cataloguing onlookers’ immediate reactions—especially those that mainstream media overlooked—organizers of the digital archive rushed to prepare the *Our Marathon* site and alert the public to its availability.

Immediately following the bombing, mourners commemorated the victims of the Boston Marathon bombings at the finish line, either by crossing the finish line themselves in organized events like One Run for Boston, or by visiting the nearby spontaneous shrine and bringing items to display. From running shoes to finishers’ medals, the

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<sup>151</sup> Jennifer Howard, “For Comfort and Posterity, Digital Archives Gather Crowds,” *The Chronicle for Higher Education*, November 18, 2013, accessed January 6, 2015, LexisNexis Academic. See also Emmilie Buchanan, “Tragedy in the Time of Twitter,” *Deseret Morning News* (Salt Lake City), May 28, 2013, accessed January 6, 2015, LexisNexis Academic. Buchanan cites Pamela Rutledge, director of the media psychology program at the Massachusetts School of Professional Psychology, who points out the unprecedented role of social media in the aftermath of the Boston Marathon bombings resulted from the fact that “Twitter allows people who are [at the scene] but not part of a primary news organization to share impressions.”

<sup>152</sup> Harriet Jerusha Korim (Arnoldi) BMI, “Running Home (My Story),” *Our Marathon*, accessed February 17, 2015, <http://marathon.neu.edu/items/show/8504>.



materials at the shrine attested to the presence of moving bodies in public space. However, with the dismantling of the shrine, the items eventually came to rest in an archival warehouse. Now, visitors who wish to peruse the objects can do so while seated in front of their computer screens.<sup>153</sup> As the Boston Bombing Digital Archive demonstrates, public participation can take many forms even after material things are no longer on display in public space. A map on the archive's website that charts the location from which more than 2,600 items were received is a testament to the worldwide support for the marathon victims. Maps also accompany each of the stories submitted to the archive, and many of these maps pinpoint the contributors' location at the time of the blast. The fact that information is mediated through computer screens reduces the lived space of these accounts to an imaginary, two-dimensional representation. The digital archive simultaneously increases the array of possibilities for contributing to the collection even as it transforms the real space of downtown Boston into the imaginary space of the digitized map.

The digital archive thus contributes to the formation of memory in two ways: first, the role of place in the memorialization process becomes democratized; anyone with a computer and an Internet connection can contribute. While contributions can come from anywhere, the nature of the offerings changed when city workers disassembled the spontaneous shrine at Copley Square and archivists placed photos of the materials online. Letters and photos replaced shoes and flowers. Second, the virtual archive restricts the range of embodied interactions with the physical objects themselves. The most obvious

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<sup>153</sup> As Ronald Grimes notes, "Virtual ritual is not completely disembodied: someone sits at a keyboard; someone else stares at a monitor"; see his *Deeply Into the Bone: Re-inventing Rites of Passage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 275.

example of this cessation of kinesthetic participation is that while visitors originally brought contributions to the spontaneous shrine in person, thousands of subsequent messages have poured in with the click of a mouse.

Archivists went to great lengths to preserve not only the social media posts downloaded onto hard drives, but also the items mourners delivered by hand to Copley Square. Those who oversaw the movement of the Copley Square artifacts indoors devoted more than 350 hours to collecting, sorting, and photographing the materials before placing them in a temperature-controlled warehouse where they will remain indefinitely. While the kinesthetic dimension of these memorials typically halts after archivists store the materials on shelves and in computer files, the annual running of the Boston Marathon enables highly participatory forms of remembrance. Runners and spectators can revisit the site of the tragedy not only to reflect on the horror of the bombings but also to celebrate new achievements. The fact that participants can actively create new memories at the finish line presents a striking contrast to monumentalized “sites of violent death” that remain “largely frozen in emotional catharsis” or “fixated on certain religious tenets.”<sup>154</sup> When memorial curators display memorial objects online, their shifting symbolism remains in play because they are subject to public interpretation. Following the same line of reasoning, Ronald Grimes insists, “The question is not *whether* cyber ritual is real, but *how* it is real.” His follow-up question serves as a jumping-off point for this chapter’s analysis: “How does [cyber ritual] work, and what does it do that is different from ‘normal,’ embodied ritual?”<sup>155</sup> Implicit here are the dual

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<sup>154</sup> Doss, “Spontaneous Memorials,” 315. Doss cites school shootings as examples of tragedies in which the grieving public remains disengaged from seeking social and political solutions to the violence.

<sup>155</sup> Grimes, *Deeply Into the Bone*, 275.

assumptions that 1) “normal” ritual is embodied ritual, and that 2) cyber ritual’s “embodied” features are not readily apparent.

### **Ceci N’est Pas une Croix**

Because spontaneous shrines and their virtual successors occur in public spaces and contain representations of material objects associated with individuals’ beliefs, they become sites where the taken-for-granted religious views of a community are given symbolic expression. While the act of displaying crosses at memorials is prevalent, especially in the Catholic tradition, crosses often appear at sites of tragedy as a way of demarcating a particular space for ceremonial, rather than explicitly Christian, purposes. Edward T. Linenthal observes that objects like crosses are “often shorn of theological content” when displayed at spontaneous shrines, instead marking “sites of public commemorative ceremonies.” The fence surrounding the charred remains of Oklahoma City’s Murrah building served as one such site; the multiple objects deposited there, from condolence cards to crocheted crosses, alert the careful observer to the fence’s “variety of purposes, which we can begin to understand by thinking about the things people carried to the fence.”<sup>156</sup>

Whether or not the theological content of the materials placed at these sites is operative, the ubiquity of Christian symbolism suggests that religion occupies more than just a benign place at such sites. The presence of symbols traditionally associated with Christian funerary rites belies an inherent hierarchy of religious expression in American memorial culture. This power relationship was given concrete expression, for example,

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<sup>156</sup> Edward T. Linenthal, *The Unfinished Bombing*, 166.

at Ground Zero, where mourners attached symbolic significance to a cross-shaped I-beam that remained standing after the collapse of the Twin Towers (Figure 8).



Figure 8. “[Untitled].” Photograph by Jim Safley, January 30, 2002. *September 11 Digital Archive*, accessed February 22, 2015, <http://911digitalarchive.org/items/show/93329>.

Elevated above the wreckage, the cross became the place where emergency responders

left messages and mourners attended memorial services.<sup>157</sup> While one cannot understand the significance of the I-beam cross apart from the Christian tradition, the narrative of the I-beam cross suggests that its materiality—and not just the theological meaning behind it—contributed to its importance in the eyes of mourners.

The movement of the cross itself provides further evidence that things possess inherent value for many people; even the location of things matters. As workers cleared the debris, they moved the I-beam cross from Ground Zero to nearby St. Peter's Catholic Church. When the cross was removed from the church's edifice to be placed on exhibit at the National September 11<sup>th</sup> Memorial and Museum when it opened, sculptor Jon Krawczyk created another cross with metal from the World Trade Center to replace the original that had been at St. Peter's.

In addition to illustrating the prevalence of Christian symbols at sites of tragic death and the inherent conflict between the dual values of personal freedom and religious tolerance that characterize American civil religion, the cross's movement shows that mourners considered it important as a material artifact and visual point of reference in a certain location. Viewers imbued the prominently displayed cross with a constellation of meanings based on its location. The I-beam cross was important not only because of where it came from, but also because of where it came to rest. Its presence became so closely associated with the edifice of St. Peter's that its absence led to the creation of a replica. Far from losing significance or being relegated to the periphery, the cross garnered attention as it moved and was replicated, occupying a place of prominence in New York's collective field of visual memory. Material things with strong ties to tragic

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<sup>157</sup> See Mark Dilonno, "Ground Zero Cross on the Move Again," *Christian Century* 128, no. 9 (May 3, 2011): 20.

events do not merely disappear. Rather, they must be preserved and made accessible. However, the fact that they are stripped of their three-dimensionality when mediated through screens raises intriguing questions about their efficacy as harbingers of memory and sources of new rituals.

The I-beam cross does not stand alone among material things that have taken on different meanings through time. Peter Gardella considers the shifting significance of the Liberty Bell, tracing seven distinct phases of its interpretation alongside the development of American civil religion. During the seventh phase, which he calls American civil religion's "multicultural era," the Liberty Bell was housed in a separate building across from Independence Hall near a recently constructed slave memorial. The construction of the memorial and its series of exhibits "highlight the role of the bell in promoting rights for all Americans, for ethnic minorities, and for women."<sup>158</sup> Although the bell was designed during the slave-era, its placement now exemplifies the reflexive symbolism and changing meaning that results from monuments' movements from place to place through time.

The religious meanings associated with material things, such as the I-beam cross or the Liberty Bell, suggest that they carry significant emotional weight. As Kendra Nordin observes regarding the Boston Marathon bombings, the increasing tendency to leave "substantial and lasting" offerings at the site of a tragedy "present[s] something of a curatorial problem: What should happen to all the stuff?"<sup>159</sup> For many whom the tragedy

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<sup>158</sup> Peter Gardella, *American Civil Religion: What Americans Hold Sacred* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 4-5.

<sup>159</sup> Kendra Nordin, "The Art of Public Mourning," *The Christian Science Monitor*, May 20, 2014, accessed December 12, 2015, LexisNexis Academic.

deeply affected, the items, from wooden crosses and sermonic inscriptions to t-shirts and baseball hats, should not simply be thrown away, even though many of them are worn out and some have no explicit connection to the bombings other than their placement at the shrine during its formation. If the theological significance of material things is indeed stripped away at these memorials, what drives the impulse to preserve? Or, as one contributor to the conversation about the Boston Marathon memorial succinctly put it, “Why would anyone be moved to tears by an old pair of Nikes?”<sup>160</sup>

As “virtual shrines” like the *Our Marathon* digital archive have become more prominent in the twenty-first century, the task of collecting and cataloguing memorial items has shifted from an individual to an organizational undertaking, requiring hundreds of hours of scanning, indexing, and Web design.<sup>161</sup> Far from being much ado about nothing, saving an old pair of Nikes is tantamount to preserving a memory of the tragedy itself.

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<sup>160</sup> D. Quentin Miller, “Sometimes The Most Eloquent Memorials Are The Least Permanent Ones,” *Cognoscenti: A WBUR Ideas and Opinion Page*, April 9, 2014, accessed October 9, 2014, <http://cognoscenti.wbur.org/2014/04/09/marathon-memorial-bpl-quentin-miller>. Another example of the shifting of meanings associated with materials that would otherwise be considered detritus at best and a nuisance at worst occurred in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. As Marita Sturken contends, the massive amounts of dust that floated through lower Manhattan, in addition to being “understood as a substance that had to be cleaned away so that life could continue . . . was also quickly experienced as a form of contamination, clogging people’s lungs.” However, when it was discovered that more than half of the dead were never discovered among the debris, the dust came to be associated with the unidentified bodies of victims. Portions were later collected to be blessed and placed in urns; see her “Tourism and ‘Sacred Ground’: The Space of Ground Zero,” in *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff (New York: Routledge, 2013), 415-16. In a similar move, Statesboro, Georgia’s International Agile Manufacturing purchased recycled steel from a New Jersey salvage yard to cast medallions formed partially from World Trade Center debris; see the Associated Press photo caption, “9-11 Medallions,” *The Toledo Blade*, January 31, 2002. Commenting on the “dynamic process” of ritualization and deritualization, Ronald L. Grimes muses, “It is not difficult to imagine a day in the distant future when a child finds a grandparent’s dusty medallion and tosses it nonchalantly into a garage sale bin”; see his “Ritual, Media, and Conflict,” 14.

<sup>161</sup> Sylvia Grider and Kenneth E. Foote use the term “virtual shrine” in their “Vernacular Memorials and Spontaneous Shrines,” in *Sacred Places in Modern Western Cultures*, ed. Paul Post, Arie L. Molendijk, and Justin E.A. Koesen (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 286. Foote also uses the term “virtual memorials” to describe this phenomenon before it became widespread; see his “Memorials,” in *Violence in America: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Ronald Gottesman and Richard Maxwell Brown, vol. 2 (New York: Scribner’s, 1999), 356.

In addition to providing a (cyber)space where memories can be preserved, digital archives offer a practical solution to the problem of preserving mountains of materials in finite archival space. With the ever-expanding desire to memorialize tragic events, the creation of publically accessible digital archives offers at least a partial answer to Doss's question, "Can we realistically expect already underfunded and overburdened public institutions to process and house the vast stuff of temporary memorials?"<sup>162</sup> Digital archives, it seems, have the potential to curtail the necessity of finding storage space in specialized facilities for the "stuff" that mourners deposit at spontaneous shrines. Some consider the possibility that virtual shrines "may, in the long term, prove just as dynamic as spontaneous shrines as a source of new rituals."<sup>163</sup> According to this view, digital archives not only serve a pragmatic purpose, but also function as a representational replacement for the material things themselves.

This statement, however, gives rise to an important question: Can an online archive really serve as a digitized equivalent of Oklahoma City's fence or Boston's barricade? Insistence that a digitized image of a cross—whether the I-beam at Ground Zero or a wooden cross at Copley Square—can serve as a stand-in for the cross itself exposes the unmistakably modern conception of both the primacy of the visual and the corresponding devaluation of a thing's materiality.<sup>164</sup> This assumption has received

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<sup>162</sup> Doss, *Memorial Mania*, 74.

<sup>163</sup> Grider and Foote, "Vernacular Memorials," 286.

<sup>164</sup> Marga Altena, Carien Notermans, and Thomas Widlok echo this notion, arguing, "The notion that by going to a Web site one can participate in the rite is only possible if one embraces the late-modern assumption that one can hop from one ritual event to another in virtual space as if the physical movement has no effect on oneself and the way in which one understands the world; see their "Place, Action, and Community in Internet Rituals," in *Ritual, Media, and Conflict*, ed. Ronald L. Grimes, Ute Husken, Udo Simon, and Eric Venbrux (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 141. William Robert characterizes the survivor of a tragedy in terms of her visual capacity, referring to this person as one "who remains to



substantial treatment in recent years from scholars across disciplines.<sup>165</sup> Mourners' unwillingness to part with the I-beam cross, as well as their attachment to the objects displayed at Copley Square, throws into sharper relief the inherent difficulties with the view that an image of an object is equivalent to the object itself.<sup>166</sup> While digital archives can indeed serve as meaningful and effective sites for commemoration and community formation, the Web enables a mode of experience that is ultimately more voyeuristic than participatory. In tracing the final movement to commemorate the Boston bombings, I argue that the Boston Marathon digital archive follows the precedent set by the 9/11 digital archive and further asserts the hegemony of the visual sense above touch or smell in the twenty-first-century memorialization processes. With the creation of these digital archives comes a de-emphasis on emplacement and embodiment, a change that is all the more striking considering the Secondspace significance of the finish line and the movement in Thirdspace that characterizes the Boston Marathon.<sup>167</sup>

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bear witness. The witness, like the archive, remains, as that remnant, that trace capable of—and responsible for—this gift of memory, this offering in mourning;” see his “Witnessing the Archive: In Mourning,” in *Religion, Violence, Memory, and Place*, ed. Oren Baruch Stier and J. Shawn Landres (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 48.

<sup>165</sup> See, for example, Jon L. Berquist, who cautions against the tendency among scholars in the “era of GPS-space” to designate places with numbers that correspond to coordinates on digital maps, insisting that this inherently political move reduces a place to a point, arguing instead that “space is the interrelatedness between a point and its context”; see his “Critical Spatiality and the Construction of the Ancient World,” in *Imagining Biblical Worlds: Studies in Spatial, Social, and Historical Constructs in Honor of James W. Flanagan*, ed. Paula M. McNutt, D. M. Gunn, and James W. Flanagan (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 26.

<sup>166</sup> See, for example, Edward Soja, who draws upon the work of Jean Baudrillard to point out how the lines between “real” and “imagined” are weakening in the digital age; see his *Thirdspace*, 239-40.

<sup>167</sup> In this chapter, I follow Soja in his use of the terms “Secondspace” as “imagined” or “conceptual space” and “Thirdspace” as “lived space.” The recent burgeoning in theorization about digital religion has led some scholars to recycle and re-apply these terms (perhaps unnecessarily) to describe digital space. See, for example, Stewart Hoover and Nabil Echchaibi’s strained attempts to disentangle their notion of the digital realm as “third space” or “imagined space” from Edward Soja’s Thirdspace and Ray Oldenberg’s “third place.” Hoover’s and Echchaibi’s choice to re-deploy the term “third space” is doubly confusing considering the fact that, in addition to distancing their “third space” from Soja’s Thirdspace,

## The Finish Line as Secondspace

While the Boston Marathon memorial undoubtedly shares characteristics with other temporary memorials, reproducing a number of well-developed conventions at sites of tragic death, the memorial is different for two main reasons, each of which has to do with the way Boston functioned in the public imagination prior to the attacks. First, the bombing occurred during a nationally televised annual event with thousands of participants. Unlike other instances of tragic death in which chaos radically disrupts the rhythms of a “normal day,” such as the Columbine High School shootings or the 9/11 attacks, the Boston bombing disrupted a yearly celebration of physical fitness and the triumph of the human spirit.<sup>168</sup> As one longtime spectator of the Boston Marathon remembers, “I proudly told everyone that Marathon Monday in Boston is my favorite day of the year.”<sup>169</sup>

Sentiments like these abound. In addition to the running of the Boston Marathon and the Red Sox annual day-night doubleheader, the third Monday in April is also Patriot’s Day, a public holiday for residents of Massachusetts and Maine commemorating the battles of Lexington and Concord that began with “the shot heard ’round the world”

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they acknowledge affinities between their notion of “third space” and Soja’s “Secondspace”; see “The ‘Third Spaces’ of Digital Religion,” discussion paper, Boulder, CO: Center for Media, Religion, and Culture, University of Colorado Boulder, 2012, 5-7, accessed March 9, 2015, <http://cmrc.colorado.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Third-Spaces-Essay-Draft-Final.pdf>.

<sup>168</sup> In an address to the interfaith gathering on April 18, 2013, three days after the bombings, President Obama referred to the Marathon as “a 26.2-mile test of dedication and grit and the human spirit, citing E. B. White’s characterization of Boston in the poem, “Boston Is Like No Other Place in the World Only More So,” *The New Yorker*, October 1, 1949, 32. Barack Obama, “We Will Finish This Race,” <http://nation.foxnews.com/boston-marathon-bombing/2013/04/18/obama-we-will-finish-race-video-and-transcript>. White’s poem includes the lines, “For Boston’s not a capital, / And Boston’s not a place; / Rather I feel that Boston is / The perfect state of grace.” White’s poem appears in *The New Yorker*, October 1, 1949, 32.

<sup>169</sup> famiglietti.m, “Marathon Monday will never be the same,” *Our Marathon*, accessed February 17, 2015, <http://marathon.neu.edu/items/show/7546>.

on April 19, 1776.<sup>170</sup> President Obama called attention to the double-significance of the day in his statement after the attacks, linking Patriot's Day's celebration of Boston's "free and fiercely independent spirit" with the Marathon's "spirit of friendly competition."<sup>171</sup> Calls for a return to the American civil religious virtues of tolerance and personal freedom shaped the way mourners responded to the bombings. According to one *Our Marathon* contributor, "There is absolutely no hatred here, on this course, on this day; no matter the color of your skin, where you're from, or what God/Gods you do or don't worship."<sup>172</sup> Marathon participant Danny Walsh refers to the Boston Marathon as "a day that has become for me less of an annual challenge of my own personal limits and more of a day to celebrate the transcending power of the human spirit to conquer the seemingly impossible."<sup>173</sup> Statements like these, along with the hundreds of American flags that were displayed at the Copley Square memorial, suggest that mourners considered the assault on American civil religious values all the more heinous because of the day on which they occurred.

Whereas other movement-related events have developed recently, such as the Oklahoma City Memorial Marathon that commemorates the 1995 bombing of the Murrah

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<sup>170</sup> In an editorial appearing online in *The Washington Post*, Georgetown University Professor E.J. Dionne writes, "there is something particularly disturbing that the bombings happened on Patriot's Day." E.J. Dionne, "Patriot's Day Defiled," *The Washington Post*, April 15, 2013, accessed March 10, 2015, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/wp/2013/04/15/boston-marathon-bombings-patriots-day-defiled/>.

<sup>171</sup> Megan Slack, "President Obama Speaks on the Explosions in Boston," *The White House Blog*, April 15, 2013, accessed March 10, 2015, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2013/04/15/president-obama-speaks-explosions-boston>.

<sup>172</sup> gsoutiea, "Today I Ran," *Our Marathon*, accessed March 10, 2015, <http://marathon.neu.edu/items/show/6629>.

<sup>173</sup> dannytwalsh10, "BM 2013: A Day of Human Spirit?," *Our Marathon*, accessed February 19, 2015, <http://marathon.neu.edu/items/show/6563>.

Federal Building, the Boston bombing occupies part of an already existing history. In other words, movement is not just a byproduct of the Boston Marathon memorialization process; rather, it is an inherent, ongoing characteristic of the Boston Marathon itself. One runner who contributed her story to the *Our Marathon* archive concludes her otherwise somber account of the 2013 race with the declaration, “I have already signed up for the 2014 Boston Marathon and can not wait to run again!”<sup>174</sup> In addition to the organized memorial running events that occurred weeks after the bombing, enabling 2013 marathon participants to cross the finish line and orient themselves in the aftermath of the tragedy, runners were out in full force the following April to further memorialize the previous year’s events and to complete the 118<sup>th</sup> edition of the Boston Marathon.

Second, the bombing occurred at an already emotionally charged site. Before the finish line became associated with tragedy as the location where two bombs exploded, its primary importance stemmed from its more than 100-year existence and the thousands of individual triumphs that accompany its crossing each April, which, as the first chapter demonstrated, serves as a literal example of Tweed’s functional definition of religion. The Boston Marathon finish line is a pilgrimage site for many runners, and the sense of community it engenders among visitors parallels that of other storied sporting venues in America, such as Boston’s Fenway Park or Chicago’s Wrigley Field.<sup>175</sup> Both the Boston

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<sup>174</sup> megan.e, “The Aftermath,” *Our Marathon*, accessed February 19, 2015, <http://marathon.neu.edu/items/show/6553>.

<sup>175</sup> Michael Ian Borer refers to Fenway Park as “sacred ground” and “one of American culture’s most cherished shrines,” a place to which people “make pilgrimage” and “pay homage”; see his *Faithful to Fenway: Believing in Boston, Baseball, and America’s Most Beloved Ballpark* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 14. Likewise, Holly Swyers points out that Wrigley Field is often referred to as a “cathedral,” claiming, “Wrigley has a life in the imagination of regulars . . . that goes beyond the simple physicality of its existence”; see her *Wrigley Regulars: Finding Community in the Bleachers* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 13.

Marathon and its participants hold a special place in the imagination of Owen Kindall, a participant in the 2013 marathon, who observes, “The running community and the Boston Marathon are two of the most inclusive things the world has to offer.”<sup>176</sup> Jennifer Dranoff, who ran her first Boston Marathon in 2013, describes the city in glowing terms as “the most resilient and incredible city I am proud to call mine.” Reflecting on the tenor of the day, she notes, “Every runner has a different story and a different ritual. Every runner, however, has the same goal: to cross the finish line of the Boston Marathon.”<sup>177</sup> These views attest to the Secondspace significance of Boston in general and of the finish line in particular. The stories of resilience that people share as a part of the *Our Marathon* digital archive enhance a narrative about Boston and its marathon fraught with positive feeling.

### **Speeding the Healing Process**

The Boston Marathon bombings differ from other events of tragic death on American soil because of the Marathon’s pre-existing significance as a temporal event and a spatial location. As I argue in previous chapters, the presence of moving bodies in lived space unites these two nodes of spatial-temporal distinction. It is perhaps surprising, then, given these differences between the Boston Marathon bombings and other recent tragedies, that the memorialization process has not deviated from what has become the twenty-first-century norm in commemorating instances of traumatic public

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<sup>176</sup> owen.kendall, “Marathon Monday 2013: Running is For All,” *Our Marathon*, accessed February 17, 2015, <http://marathon.neu.edu/items/show/7156>.

<sup>177</sup> adranoff, “Boston Marathon,” *Our Marathon*, accessed February 18, 2015, <http://marathon.neu.edu/items/show/6538>.

loss. The *Our Marathon* project is part of a digitization phenomenon that has proliferated in the Internet age.<sup>178</sup> The preservation of stories from the public that emphasize storytellers' physical location when the bombs exploded adds to the finish line's iconic status. In other words, the plethora of commemorative artifacts that make up the digital archive augment the finish line's Secondspace characteristics. The telling and re-telling of stories and sharing of photographs enhances the significance of the Marathon's finish line in the public imagination, lending these artifacts the iconic power to shape attitudes toward an event.<sup>179</sup>

Northeastern University's collaborative effort to make available online the thousands of photographs of memorial items is not the first effort of its kind; the American Social History Project at the City University of New York Graduate School created a similar digital archive after the 9/11 attacks when artifacts flooded the Internet in the form of websites, discussion boards, and personal blogs.<sup>180</sup> Eventually, the

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<sup>178</sup> An article in the *London Times* five days after the marathon bombings provided an ironic example of the ubiquity of efforts to collect and display memorial artifacts online. The article announced the launch event for the Digital Public Library of America, a project designed to make accessible online the archives from research libraries across the U.S. The event, which was scheduled to take place at the Boston Public Library on April 18, was postponed because of the bombings; see Erica Wagner "We've had bad news from Boston this week [. . .]," *The London Times*, April 20, 2013, accessed December 15, 2014, LexisNexis Academic.

<sup>179</sup> See Ronald L. Grimes, "Ritual, Media, and Conflict," 16. The truth of Grimes's assertion that iconic photos have the power to determine political decisions is being borne out at the time of this writing. A young man who lost his legs in the blast testified at the trial of Boston Marathon bombing suspect Dzhokhar Tsarnaev and was the subject of a widely circulated photo showing a man in a cowboy hat pushing the young man in a wheelchair in the immediate aftermath of the bombings; David Boeri and Kevin Cullen, hosts, "Icons Of The Bombing Take The Stand," *Finish Line* (MP3 Podcast), WBUR Boston, March 5, 2013, accessed March 12, 2015. <http://www.wbur.org/series/marathon-bombing-trial-podcast>.

<sup>180</sup> Other sites combine real and imagined space in an effort to foster memory of shared experiences that are not characterized by tragedy. The Japanese island of Shikoku is home to a pilgrimage known as the *henro*, a fourteen-hundred-kilometer route upon which pilgrims travel to more than eighty temples. A recently renewed interest in walking the pilgrimage route has followed on the heels of the late twentieth-century preference to make the pilgrimage as a bus tour. Ian Reader notes that the increase in popularity of walking the route has led to a similar uptick in the creation of online forums in which fellow

American Social History Project at the City University of New York took on the challenge of organizing a fully digital online archive to display everything from images of objects found in the rubble to personal accounts of the day. After Hurricanes Rita and Katrina in 2005, archivists undertook a similar project called the Hurricane Digital Memory Bank, created through a partnership between the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media at George Mason University, the University of New Orleans, and donors from the Gulf Coast.

According to NULab co-director Jim McGrath, the Our Marathon project was modeled after the 9/11 Digital Archive. Interestingly, while conceptual similarities exist between the two crowd-sourced archives, McGrath identifies the attacks that led to both archives' development as the predominant link between the two. In his estimation, the 9/11 Digital Archive served as an influence for the *Our Marathon* project "because the marathon bombings are the worst terrorist attacks on our nation's soil since [9/11]."<sup>181</sup> Another similarity between the two is their open invitation to users to contribute their stories. Like the 9/11 Digital Archive before it, which invites users to "Tell us what you did, saw, or heard on September 11<sup>th</sup>," the Our Marathon site contains user-generated content, allowing visitors to the site to contribute text, audio, and video in an effort to "speed the healing process." This phrase, which appears on the Website's homepage,

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pilgrims seek to catalogue their journey alongside the communities they forged on an excursion that lasted several weeks, instead of the standard ten-day trip by bus or car; see his *Making Pilgrimages: Meaning and Practice in Shikoku* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i press, 2005), 185-86.

<sup>181</sup> Matt Ingersoll, "University Program to Collect Marathon Memories," *Lowell Sun* (Massachusetts), March 30, 2014, accessed November 24, 2014. The Our Marathon project uses a similar phrase to invite public participation, encouraging visitors, "No story is too small for Our Marathon." <http://marathon.neu.edu/browse-topic>.

acquires new meaning given the frenzied rush to collect and preserve digital data.<sup>182</sup>

Despite how fast the archive was created, gathering information about the bombings constituted an effort to slow down time and enable the preservation of immediate reactions to the bombings a matter of seconds after people near the finish line experienced them. Many of the first reports from the finish line following the blasts came from social media, especially Twitter.<sup>183</sup> These snippets of information catalogued in “real-time” provide an interesting point of contact with Walter J. Ong’s argument in his seminal study *Orality and Literacy*. Ong posits that technological development in human history produced a corresponding change in the way that people experienced reality. In his estimation, the invention of the Gutenberg printing press heralded a new age in which the visual came to supplant the aural sense as the primary mode by which humans received information. While the residual effects of oral culture gradually decreased in the decades following the advent of movable type, the vision-centered act of writing gave way to the even more visually oriented medium of mechanized print, which allowed for words to be presented legibly and uniformly on the page to facilitate silent reading.<sup>184</sup>

According to Ong, this shift in privileging the visual over the oral signaled an

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<sup>182</sup> Marathon.neu.edu, accessed January 30, 2015.

<sup>183</sup> In the hours following the bombings, erroneous reports from social media that the suspects had been captured led Boston Police to tweet to local residents requesting that they stop sharing information that could impede the search for the suspects.

<sup>184</sup> Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, (New York: Routledge, 1991), 117-21. Stephen D. O’Leary provides commentary on Ong’s ideas, pointing to the power of electronic media to “change our senses of time and community.” While electronic media privilege “the immediacy of real time,” written texts nevertheless serve as the source for diverse forms of communication from political speeches to entertainment; see his “Cyberspace as Sacred Space: Communicating Religion on Computer Networks,” in *Religion Online: Finding Faith on the Internet*, ed. Lorne L. Dawson and Douglas E. Cowan (New York: Routledge, 2004), 40.



accompanying change in the way people remembered. Whereas reading allows one to glance back at material if he or she becomes distracted, this act, which Ong refers to as “backlooping,” was not possible in oral cultures. Auditors thus cultivated attentiveness to the ephemeral oral utterance, and speakers incorporated repetition into their speech patterns to aid their listeners’ efforts to remember.<sup>185</sup> In other words, whereas speech has a primarily temporal orientation (one cannot “listen back”), writing surfaces are spatial (allowing one to look back). As Jon L. Berquist notes, “Through writing, persons of different cities and cultures communicate across space; thus writing is a practice that creates social-spatial connections.” Combining this analysis with modern geographers’ three-tiered categorization of space in terms of its geophysical (Firstspace), imagined (Secondspace), and lived (Thirdspace) characteristics yields fruitful results, for just as writing facilitates connectedness across distances, it also collapses the perceived distance between writer and reader.<sup>186</sup>

As a virtual point of reference that catalogues and preserves memory as digitized text and photographs, the Boston Marathon digital archive further asserts the hegemony of the visual over the other senses. According to Ekaterina Haskins, “When technology offers the ability of instant recall, individual impulse to remember withers away. If archival presentation and retrieval are not balanced by mechanisms that stimulate participatory engagement, electronic memory may lead to self-congratulatory amnesia.”<sup>187</sup> According to this perspective, by uploading stories and photos to the site,

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<sup>185</sup> Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 40.

<sup>186</sup> Berquist continues, asserting that “those who write often combine Firstspace and Secondspace in an attempt to repress (alternate) Thirdspaces”; “‘Imagining’ Biblical Worlds,” 28.

<sup>187</sup> Haskins, “Archive and Participation,” 407.

contributors engage in an ironic erasure of the very words and objects they seek to preserve. The ease of contributing to the site creates a further irony, for although the archive is meant to function as a storehouse of artifacts for posterity, the archive's perpetually open invitation, "No story is too small for *Our Marathon*," creates a corresponding de-emphasis upon situating events in history. In stark contrast to the ephemerality of the early stages of memory performance, the effort to save every scrap re-formulated the spatiality and temporality of the tragedy.<sup>188</sup> The proliferation of images causes memory to be both everywhere and nowhere. Erika Doss comments on this phenomenon with regard to the 9/11 digital archive, noting,

Historical veracity . . . is not a huge concern, because whether real or imagined, the ways in which individuals experienced, or felt, 9/11 are automatically assumed to be important. While admirably inclusive, this curatorial approach is also critically vacuous: by refusing the risk of interpretation it fails to interrogate how and why (and which) experiences and feelings constitute self and national identity.<sup>189</sup>

Twenty-first-century digital archives designed to "speed the healing process" re-situate the site of a given tragedy in public imagination while also presenting the geographical location two-dimensionally. One could conclude that through the creation of virtual shrines, imagined space (Secondspace) supplants the sensory-rich characteristics of spontaneous shrines in lived space (Thirdspace).

Kevin Brown, the spontaneous shrine's self-designated caretaker after its formation, articulates this point of view in his interview for the *Our Marathon* oral history project. Recalling the surprise that visitors experienced upon visiting the

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<sup>188</sup> Thomas Stubblefield argues that transformations in visual mediatization create a "confusion of historical referents" that cause event to "spread . . . beyond its historical moment" and "migrate into the present"; see his *9/11 and the Visual Culture of Disaster* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 186.

<sup>189</sup> Doss, *Memorial Mania*, 73-74.

memorial collection at Copley Square after having seen it on TV, Brown remembers, “People would come every day . . . just to see what was new, how big it was growing. They’d see it on the news and they had to come. It was different [in person]. [News broadcasts] didn’t show how big it was, certain things they showed, but when people came and saw it in person, they would say, ‘This feels better.’”

While Brown is presumably offering an account of the emotional transformation and catharsis that visitors experienced upon seeing the memorial in person, his use of the intransitive verb “feels” in the phrase, “This feels better,” could also be used as a transitive verb to describe visitors’ bodily interactions with the memorial materials.<sup>190</sup> Indeed, visiting the memorial in person afforded mourners the opportunity not only to “feel better” emotionally, but also to feel the objects’ physicality as they ran their fingers over the wooden crosses or held their hands over a candle’s flame. Electronic mediatization of material things undoubtedly affects how these things matter, even changing the way people choose to experience the objects (Figure 9).<sup>191</sup> Even those who kneel to experience the objects at the shrine do so through screens, suggesting that the digitization of memorial materials, combined with the digital archives themselves that provide a platform for sharing images, works to shape how material things are experienced.

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<sup>190</sup> This playful linguistic slippage between the verb “feels” as both transitive and intransitive resembles material culture studies scholars’ creative usage of the word “matter” as both a substantive and verb; see Meyer and Houtman, “Material Religion—How Things Matter,” 4.

<sup>191</sup> Following Ronald Grimes, I use the term “mediatization” instead of “mediation” to describe the process of communicating via a medium in order to avoid the latter term’s connotations of “peacemaking”; see Grimes, “Ritual, Media, and Conflict,” 21.

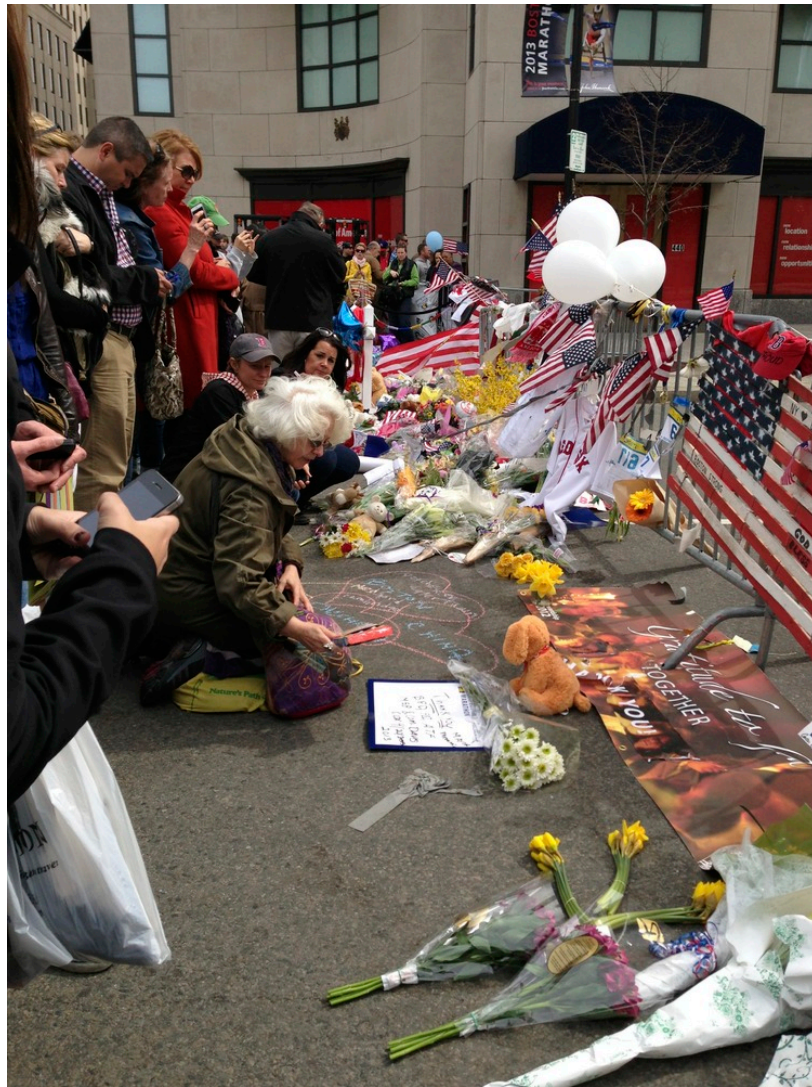


Figure 9. “Visitors look at items left at the Copley Square Marathon Memorial.” Photograph by Ellen Meyers, April 20, 2013. *Our Marathon*, accessed May 5, 2015, <http://marathon.neu.edu/items/show/9790>.

### **Things in Thirdspace**

Before the 9/11 Digital Archive changed the way that memorials were mediated virtually, the Vietnam Memorial instituted a paradigm shift in the way visitors to memorials experienced them physically. John R. Gillis refers to the Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial wall as “a turning point in the history of public memory, a decisive departure from the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and a growing acknowledgment that everyone

now deserves equal recognition at all times and at wholly accessible places.”<sup>192</sup> Like the Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial, where visitors frequently press pieces of paper over sections of the wall and rub the imprints of the names, the objects on display at Copley Square invited mourners to move about, kneel down, or extend a hand to touch an item. These forms of interaction call to mind what Doss refers to as the “kinesthetic paradigm” that characterizes memorialization practices in the West. As she contends, “Physical acts and performative rituals sustain the meaning of these memorials: their sensory imprint shapes and directs understandings of their histories.”<sup>193</sup> Stripped of its kinesthetic dimension after being displayed online, the virtual shrine re-shapes visitors’ commemorative practices, restricting the range of material participatory possibilities even as it opens up new avenues for them to contribute to the virtual construction of memory. Although it is a far cry from crossing the finish line or running in a charity race, the digital archive nevertheless allows more people to shape the way the tragedy is commemorated.

The movement of the objects into the Boston Public Library to prevent weather-related damage signaled a corresponding movement away from the site of the tragedy. While the objects themselves are decidedly less accessible than they were when they were on display, photos of the objects and written testaments remain accessible to the public through an online archive. Keeping track of memorial objects after their departure

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<sup>192</sup> John R. Gillis, “Memory and Identity: A History of a Relationship,” in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 13.

<sup>193</sup> Doss offers a number of examples of “performative rituals,” including “Greek mourners ritually circling the bodies of the dead,” Christians touching crucifixes or statues of the Virgin, or visitors to the Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial rubbing imprints of the names of the dead on pieces of paper”; see her “Spontaneous Memorials,” 300. See also Ekaterina Haskins, “Archive and Participation: Public Memory in a Digital Age,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (2007): 404.

from the physical location of the bombing highlights an often-overlooked characteristic of such shrines, namely, that the places they come to rest are often far from where they were originally deposited.

Scholars draw attention to the importance of memorials' proximity to the tragedies they commemorate by using spatial cues to differentiate between the terms they employ to refer to the sites themselves. For example, Grider prefers the term "shrine" instead of "memorial" when discussing a specific assemblage. As she explains, her decision has to do with location, for one of "the most distinguishing characteristics" of spontaneous shrines is "their proximity to the precipitating event."<sup>194</sup> Location is also the defining characteristic of what Grider calls the "vernacular" quality of spontaneous shrines, by which she means "the lack of any official sanction or direction regarding *where the shrines develop*."<sup>195</sup> Likewise, Santino draws attention to the fact that these assemblages "insist on the personal nature of the individuals involved" in a given tragedy. In support of his point, Santino uses embedded dialogue to mimic the voice of a mourner and draw attention to the power of a particular place to humanize what would otherwise be a depersonalized "issue": "You don't think drunk driving is a problem? My daughter was killed—*here, at this spot*—because of it. Teenage drinking? Responsible for the deaths of a carload of kids—*right here*."<sup>196</sup> According to these views, tragedies that occur in public places become transparent sites in which visitors are granted

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<sup>194</sup> Grider, "Spontaneous Shrines," 249. Unlike shrines, memorials are not always "linked to a particular place." Instead, memorials often honor "events, heroes, and even abstract concepts such as peace and war."

<sup>195</sup> Grider, "Spontaneous Shrines," 250 (emphasis mine). Doss categorizes the "vernacular" in terms of their various "individual, handmade, localized, and grassroots" configurations; see her *Memorial Mania*, 67.

<sup>196</sup> Santino, "Performative Commemorative," 370 (emphasis mine).

participatory access to the mourning process.<sup>197</sup> With their emphasis on the location of a given tragedy, these scholars echo Jonathan Z. Smith's claim that "the specificity of place is what is remembered, is what gives rise to and is perpetuated in memorial."<sup>198</sup> With the transfer of materials from physical sites to storage facilities comes the increasing trend toward making their images available virtually, divorced from static locations while allowing more people to participate in the mourning process.

If the term "shrine" implies an inherent link between the assemblage of material things and the location of their accrual, then it is an especially apt descriptor for the assortment of items at Copley Square and, later, the Boston Public Library, both of which are within walking distance from the finish line. According to this line of reasoning, the term "virtual shrine" is somewhat problematic because visitors to the website view materials in what Brenda Brasher refers to as the "nonenvironment" of cyberspace, "a fantasy universe that stimulates the imagination but ignores the rest of the body."<sup>199</sup> Placing pictures of materials and moving bodies online "allows, even encourages, the self itself to be seen as a textual construction."<sup>200</sup> In other words, even though one might look at a photograph and imagine bodily movement, the observer is confronted not with a

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<sup>197</sup> Harriet H. Senie suggests that because "public experience in our culture has been rendered private by 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. This connection, through feet that stand on hallowed ground or hands that touch a sacred wall, is experienced viscerally"; see "Mourning in Protest," 45. As Doss points out, regardless of the nomenclature one chooses to adopt to describe these assemblages, they vary from place to place despite their ubiquity in the aftermath of tragedies; see *The Emotional Life of Contemporary Public Memorials: Towards a Theory of Temporary Memorials* (Kok Korpershoek, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008), 8-9.

<sup>198</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place*, 22.

<sup>199</sup> Brenda Brasher, *Give Me That Online Religion* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001), 42.

<sup>200</sup> O'Leary, "Cyberspace as Sacred Space," 56.

body, but with a textual representation of a body. Nevertheless, visitors to the site find its contents helpful even though the site is embedded in a textual nonenvironment and therefore “faced with the evidence of its own quality as constructed, as arbitrary, and as artificial, a game played with no material stakes or consequences.” As visitors peruse and contribute to the site, its efficacy as a space for memorialization is “affirmed, time and time again, even in the face of a full, self-conscious awareness of its artificiality.”<sup>201</sup> This reflexive process, while a far cry from being present at the finish line and interacting with the materials in lived space, remains for many a viable method of commemoration.<sup>202</sup> The fact that the digitization of materials enables visitors to contribute to the archive without traveling to Boston provides evidence for Lorne L. Dawson’s assertion that through Internet mediatization, “the character of what constitutes an ‘authentic’ experience has changed.”<sup>203</sup> Unlike broadcast media, the Internet makes possible two-way interaction and provides the public with an opportunity to determine the shape and trajectory of remembrance. Thus, the creation of virtual shrines allows for “varying degrees of institutional sponsorship and public spontaneity.”<sup>204</sup>

### **Losing Sight of Bodies**

The spontaneous shrine created in the aftermath of the Boston Marathon bombing

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<sup>201</sup> Stephen D. O’Leary, “Cyberspace as Sacred Space: Communicating Religion on Computer Networks,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64, no. 4 (1996): 804. Here, O’Leary is commenting on “ritual action in cyberspace,” but his point holds true, I argue, for the creation of virtual shrines.

<sup>202</sup> As Grider suggests, “the grief of mourners seated at their computers can be just as heartfelt as that of mourners who visit spontaneous shrines in person”; see her “Spontaneous Shrines,” 258.

<sup>203</sup> Lorne L. Dawson, “The Mediation of Religious Experience in Cyberspace,” in *Religion and Cyberspace*, ed. Morten T. Hojsgaard and Margit Warburg (London: Routledge, 2005), 34.

<sup>204</sup> Grider, “Spontaneous Shrines,” 259.



shares characteristics with other American memorials because of the sheer volume of materials that visitors deposited at the site. According to estimates, fifteen thousand tons of materials made up the temporary memorials devoted to Princess Diana. More than two hundred thousand objects comprised Columbine's memorial, while nearly a million items were left around the perimeter of Oklahoma City's Murrah Federal Building.<sup>205</sup> Likewise, Boston city archivists who sorted through the thousands of memorial items, including 1,800 letters from across the world, expressed their surprise at the size of the collection as it grew.<sup>206</sup> Rainey Tisdale cites the large volume of objects in the Boston archives as evidence of Americans' attempts to forge connections after a tragic event, observing, "We often work things out that we are feeling through our stuff. . . . [People] can't just track down [victims'] families and give them a hug . . . so instead they take stuff to a public place."<sup>207</sup> Echoing this view, Doss notes that the diversity of objects that make up spontaneous shrines suggests that things play an important role in cultural efforts to respond to and cope with tragic death because they "resonate with beliefs in the symbolic and emotional power of material culture."<sup>208</sup> The array of items on display suggests an accompanying diversity of motives among those who contributed to the memorial's formation.

In addition to the crosses discussed above, Christian symbols also frame the bottom corners of Figure 10: an image of Christ, not unlike the one that appears atop Krystle Campbell's cross, peeks out from one shoe, and a white ceramic cross sits in the

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<sup>205</sup> Doss, *Memorial Mania*, 69.

<sup>206</sup> David Wade, "Work Underway," n.p.

<sup>207</sup> Nordin, "The Art of Public Mourning," n.p.

<sup>208</sup> Doss, *Memorial Mania*, 71.

adjacent corner. These religious images are not set apart from the other objects, suggesting that spontaneous shrines serve as spaces where the religious and secular appear side-by-side.<sup>209</sup> In Thirdspace, the way contributors displayed these things implies that they belong together; there is no assertion of difference by virtue of their arrangement. Neither is a categorical distinction made when archivists decide what to preserve. Although the materials are considered worth saving because people brought them to the finish line, their preservation privileges the visual over the bodily experience of the people who brought the materials to this all-important location.

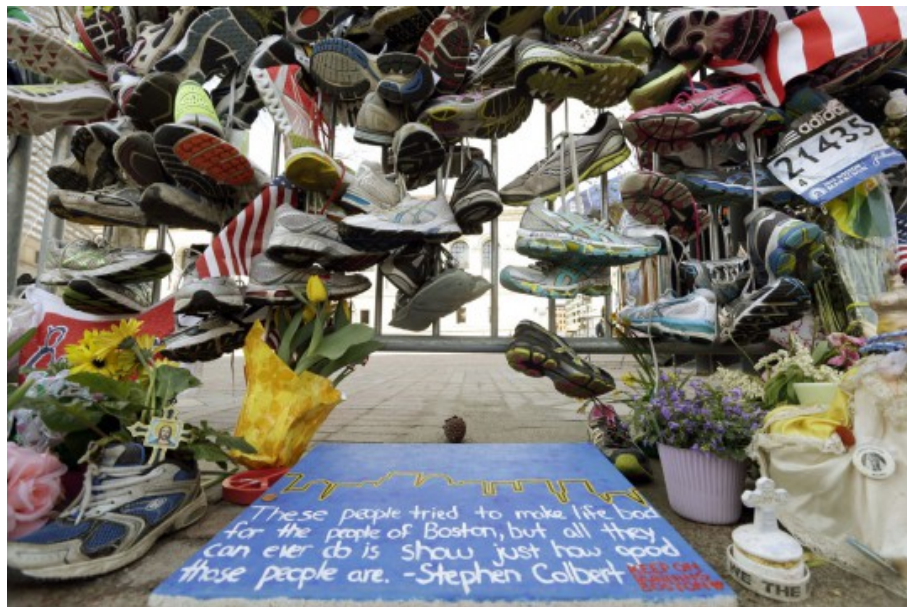


Figure 10. “Items arranged at the Copley Square fence.” Photograph by Elise Amendola, Associated Press, April 25, 2013. *WBUR*, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://radioboston.wbur.org/2013/04/25/health-2>.

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<sup>209</sup> On the white cross dedicated bombing victim Lu Lingzi, a note hangs with a quote attributed to Saint Pio of Pietrelcina that reads, “Love the Madonna and pray the rosary, for her rosary is the weapon against all the evils of the world today.” According to Lu Meixu, a fellow Chinese student at Boston University, Lu Lingzi had become interested in Christianity. Chris Buckley, “Grad Student With Eye On Career in Finance Is Mourned in China,” *The New York Times*, April 18, 2013.

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The push for digital preservation in the twenty-first-century has consequences for the way people experience material things in two fundamental ways. First, the availability of the online archive directs participation with the materials in lived space. Visitors' desire to capture moments as photographic images when they visit spontaneous shrines occurs not in place of but in addition to careful preservation of the materials themselves. This fact suggests that images alone are inadequate for fully preserving memory. Second, the fact that the archivists do not distinguish between religious and secular materials when preserving implicitly deems all things worth saving. What is discarded, however, is the constellation of embodied interactions that led to their coexistence at a location characterized as sacred space. The digital archive represents a movement in the direction of the visual, which transforms the memorialization process into an increasingly reflexive endeavor.

### **Conclusion: Making Space for Memory**

Reflexivity has resurfaced as a theme throughout both the memorialization process and this project. Paradoxically, the word can mean either "directed or turned back on itself; marked by or capable of reflection," or, alternately, "characterized by habitual and unthinking behavior." In the Introduction I explored the first meaning of the term, examining the reflexivity inherent in participant observation through an

engagement with Richard Carp, Tim Ingold, and Robert Orsi, each of whom attempts to account for emplacement of the scholar. Those who narrate histories, these writers maintain, should take into account not only their ideological biases that inevitably determine the trajectory of their narration, but also the ways that academic protocols shape the scholarly body and its interaction with the subject matter under consideration. These scholars engage with the dual senses of possibility and precariousness that participant observation generates—a tension that Michael Stausberg sums up with the question, “What the hell am I doing here?”<sup>210</sup>

My participation in the Boston Marathon alerted me to the possible overlap between running and ritual. While the tragedy at the finish line of the 2013 Boston Marathon had little to do with my initial decision to train and qualify for the 2014 Boston Marathon, I soon became interested in the stories of those who turned to running as a way to cope with the tragedy and honor the victims. For these runners, including those I interviewed, physical movement was reflexive in the second sense: they ran because it was the “natural” thing to do. The difficulty these runners experienced in verbally articulating *how* running was an efficacious response to tragedy suggested that, at least in some cases, the benefit they derived from the act defied rational explanation. Their silence resonated with the words of Michel Foucault, often cited by ritual theorists, that highlight this quandary: “People know what they do; frequently they know why they do what they do; but what they don’t know is what what they do does.”<sup>211</sup> While in training

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<sup>210</sup> See Michael Stausberg’s discussion of these dual senses in his, “Reflexivity,” *Theorizing Rituals: Issues, Topics, Approaches, Concepts*, ed. Jens Kreinath, Jan Snoek, and Michael Stausberg (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 627-37, here 631.

<sup>211</sup> Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 2nd ed., ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 225.

in 2013, I could empathize with their inability to articulate the value of running.

As I familiarized myself with the stories of individual triumph and tragedy surrounding the Boston Marathon bombing and its memorialization, I noticed the recurrence of other reflexive, knee-jerk responses, such as the creation of a spontaneous shrine at the finish line. Leaving material things as a way of marking one's presence attested to the transitoriness of the memorialization process. As people performed memory and further sacralized the finish line by crossing it, they also left offerings that attested to the impermanence of memory. The digital archive thus functions reflexively in the first sense mentioned above—an example of what Pierre Nora calls “sites of memory” (*lieux de mémoire*), which “have no referent in reality; or, rather, they are their own referent: pure, exclusively self-referential signs.”<sup>212</sup> The materials these visitors deposited, however, could not be simply thrown away. As Nora concedes, *lieux de mémoire* are not without physical presences. As the painstaking preservation process indicates, simply discarding the physical referents of the photographs appearing on the digital archive would render the commemoration incomplete. The digital archive serves as a *lieu de mémoire* insofar it is “a site of excess closed upon itself . . . but also forever open to the full range of possible significations,”<sup>213</sup> capable of transforming an old pair of Nikes into an artifact “infused with meaning and emotion.”<sup>214</sup>

In tracing the various ways in which mourners made space for memory, I have

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<sup>212</sup> Nora, “Between Memory and History,” 23.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>214</sup> Commenting on the preservation of the Copley Square shrine, Rainey Tisdale observes that while “that sneaker was a sneaker a minute ago, [. . .] it becomes an artifact.” See Ruth Graham, “Boston’s Marathon memorial: How much should we save?” *Boston Globe*, May 25, 2013.

attempted to show that movement is the defining characteristic of the Boston Marathon memorialization process. Attentiveness to the movement of bodies and materials in downtown Boston suggests that emplaced subjects perform memory, ritual, and the sacred. In turn, these various performances in lived space call into question both the detached objectivity of the historian and the disposability of material things. Because they are reflexive, these performances invite us as creatures of memory to re-evaluate the fluid, dynamic relationships among our own bodies, memory, and history.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: Human Subjects IRB Approval



**Approval Date:** 3/27/2014

**Expiration Date of Approval:** 3/26/2015

**RE:** Notice of IRB Approval by Expedited Review (under 45 CFR 46.110)

**Submission Type:** Initial

**Expedited Category:** 7.Surveys/interviews/focus groups

**Study #:** 14-0403

**Study Title:** The Ritual and Memorial Functions of Running as Response to Tragedy

This submission has been approved by the above IRB for the period indicated. It has been determined that the risk involved in this research is no more than minimal.

**Study Description:**

The purpose of this project is to document the experience and reflections of Ozarks runners who were involved in the 2013 Boston Marathon, to document the reactions of members of the non-profit organization Ozark Mountain Ridge Runners who participated in the One Run for Boston relay in June 2013, and to examine the role of running as a response to local and national tragedies.

**APPENDIX B: Timeline and Map of Events**

April 15, 2013: Bombs explode near the finish line of the Boston Marathon at approximately 2:50 p.m.; the race time clock at the finish line reads 4:09:43.

April 16, 2013: President Obama speaks at interfaith gathering held at Old South Church. A small makeshift memorial forms at the Boston Fire Department on Boylston Street; a larger makeshift memorial forms at the **Boston Public Garden**. That afternoon,

volunteers move the materials at this memorial to the police barricade that blocked off **Boylston Street at Berkeley Street.**

April 19, 2013: The makeshift memorial's growth causes it to encroach upon Berkeley Street.

April 24, 2013: Boylston street re-opens; visitors volunteer to move the makeshift memorial from where the barricade had stood on Boylston Street to the perimeter of the **Bank of America** building on the corner of Berkeley Street.

April 25, 2013?: City officials load the materials into trucks and deposit them in newly re-opened **Copley Square.**

May 25, 2013: Runners gather for an event called "One Run" to cross the finish line.

June 7, 2013: One Run for Boston begins in Los Angeles.

June 20, 2013: One Run for Boston passes through Springfield, Missouri.

June 25, 2013: The items from the Copley Square memorial are disassembled and moved to **Boston City Hall** to the Boston City Archives collection. In the following weeks, many of the items are cleaned and moved to the Iron Mountain storage facility in Northborough, Massachusetts, some 40 miles west of downtown Boston.

July 1, 2013: One Run for Boston ends at the Boston Marathon finish line on **Boylston Street.**

April 7, 2014: The **Boston Public Library** exhibit "Dear Boston: Messages from the Marathon Memorial," begins. Materials from the City Archives and Iron Mountain are in display.

April 21, 2014: More than 30,000 runners gather to participate in the 118<sup>th</sup> Boston Marathon.

May 11, 2014: The **Boston Public Library** exhibit is disassembled and returned to the **Boston City Archives** and Iron Mountain to be stored.

