THESIS


WHO IS COLUMBINE?

FORGETTING THE PUBLIC IN CONTEMPORARY MEMORIAL SITES



Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

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The Columbine Memorial in Littleton, Colorado honors and remembers the thirteen victims of the Columbine High School shooting. The memorial presents itself as an open, public space in which all are welcomed to visit, mourn, or reflect as they wish upon the events of April 20, 1999; however, the memorial's rhetorical tactics seem intended exclusively for a particular and privatized public—namely, the survivors, family members, and intimates of those killed in the shooting. Through critique of the Columbine Memorial as a public memory place, this occurrence presents a rhetorically oriented instance of "forgetting the public." Forgetting the public, as conceived here, results from the privileging of individualized memories within public commemorative sites, ultimately leaving those visitors outside of a narrowly circumscribed public unacknowledged by the memorial site. I contend that forgetting publics prevents public identification with memorial sites, which disrupts the epideictic processes necessary for a memorial to achieve its intended civic purposes. This study critically examines the memorial's employment of specific rhetorical tactics, as viewed through the relationship between private and public memory. This lens reveals three trends occurring within the memorial that inform our understanding of contemporary memorial sites, including Presence/Absence, Intimacy/Publicity, and Discursivity/Materiality. Specific examples within each trend demonstrate an apparent forgetting of the public, ultimately leading to the conclusion that the Columbine Memorial perpetuates the privileging of private interests over those of the general public.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

During the final days of April 1999, Greg Zanis embarked on a cross-country journey in his truck from Aurora, Illinois to Littleton, Colorado. A carpenter by trade, Zanis was hauling emotional cargo: fifteen, handmade, eight-foot-tall, wooden crosses, each one dedicated to an individual killed at Columbine High School the week prior. He and his son installed the crosses atop Rebel Hill, near the high school, as an offering to commemorate the dead. Unlike other makeshift memorials that had cropped up around the area, Zanis' crosses explicitly included Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold—the two students responsible for the shooting. Fueled primarily by Zanis' well-intentioned recognition of the shooters, a division erupted within the Columbine community between those who found his gesture respectful and those who found it flagrantly offensive. Mementos piled up around the crosses, a common occurrence at public sites of tragedy. The two crosses designated for Harris and Klebold collected a curious array of sentimental tokens and hateful graffiti, until a victim's father removed them from the hill completely. After a barrage of threatening phone calls, Zanis returned to Littleton of his own accord, and he discreetly removed the remaining thirteen crosses before sunrise on the second day of May.[1] The contentious and controversial issue of how to appropriately memorialize the victims of the Columbine shooting would linger for years to come.

Zanis's controversial act of remembrance is just one striking example of society's intrigue and interest toward public memory. Public memory refers to how common, shared dimensions of the past are conveyed, contested, and negotiated within a particular community. While often characterized as an individual matter, memory is, in fact, a means by which significant events in the past that affect the community—such as tragedies, oppression,

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celebrations, or triumphs—are addressed in the public sphere. Iterations of these memories

originate from a multitude of sources, ranging from vernacular to official.[2] It is exactly because

public memory materializes out of multivalent, competing accounts of the past that rhetorical

scholars take interest in this area of interdisciplinary scholarship. Indeed, as Thomas Dunn notes,

"the past operates not as historical *fact* but as historical *interpretation* for the purposes of making

public argument."[3] Therefore, by investigating how particular groups advocate for certain

interpretations of past events, scholars can better understand the overlapping layers of individual

and public elucidations of memory that give public memory its complexity and help structure

how our pasts inform our collective presents and futures.

At the time of this writing, sixteen years have passed since the Columbine High School

shooting. Although school shootings have become a tragic and all too-familiar part of the U.S.

American experience, Columbine's multiple layers of complexity have deeply antagonized

traditional approaches to public memory of this event in particular. These layers (contestable in

and of themselves) have been characterized in a number of ways; however, in their most distilled

form, they may be reduced to the notions of youth, gun access, and mental illness. Firstly, the

Columbine shooting shook common understandings of youth, in that it defied cultural norms of

young people's mortality as well as their capacity to commit violent acts. Though any incident of

gun violence is indeed tragic, Columbine was debatably more gruesome than any the nation had

seen before, as it exposed two seemingly normal teens' capability to execute a calculated plan

that would prematurely end the lives of their peers. Second, Harris and Klebold's ability to

obtain their weapons with relative ease exposed several inherent flaws of the nation's gun access

policies and even the constitutional rights granted by the Second Amendment. A final layer of

complexity raised questions pertaining to Harris and Klebold's mental health. The sometimes

ominous invisibility of mental illness further perpetuated the unease and discomfort many U.S. Americans felt toward the teenaged shooters as well as the larger community of individuals struggling with similar disorders. Clearly, the components of the Columbine narrative were emotional, controversial, and largely unprecedented, so the task of representing them with respect and accuracy was a complicated one.

Within an already puzzling and contentious *kairotic* moment, the overwhelming media presence that pervaded Littleton and Columbine High within minutes of the shooting quickly blurred the lines between local tragedy and national controversy. People around the country watched, stunned, as live helicopter footage depicted SWAT teams and emergency responders entering the school building to retrieve wounded and detain the shooters, still at-large. They saw students flee, frantically, from the high school with hands clenched above their heads. And they listened, anxiously, as reporters described the SWAT team's rescue of an unidentified student from a window. The growing popularity of personal cellular phones in 1999 meant that news stations and reporters could solicit firsthand accounts from witnesses directly, allowing the American people to eavesdrop on the hysterical sobs of traumatized students. Even hundreds of miles from the Colorado Front Range, U.S. Americans were swept up in the harrowing event as it unfolded. The advent of such instantaneous technologies thrust Littleton onto the national and international stage, and as such, the Columbine shooting transmuted from a local tragedy into a time for national mourning.

Given these complexities, Columbine presented a unique commemorative exigency; not only did the situation demand an appropriate memorial response, it needed to be a fitting tribute that managed the harsh realities of the event while balancing the needs and demands of the victims' families, survivors, community members, and the nation as a whole. In other words,

remembering (and forgetting) Columbine has been and continues to be a particularly challenging rhetorical assignment, one in which the therapeutic functions of private, local remembrance and the broad, epideictic needs for public meaning-making must be negotiated.

Negotiating these complexities has not long been an expectation of public memorials. For centuries, memorials and monuments have exclusively addressed the past to public, national, and state-oriented audiences, often suppressing the recognition of individuals and private loss or sacrifice.[4] Yet, in 2007, rhetorical scholars Carole Blair and Neil Michel forecasted that contemporary public commemoration practices (like those at work in the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the AIDS Memorial Quilt) would increasingly contribute to a phenomenon they called the "dislocation of the public."[5] This dislocation, they argue, stems from the intentional privileging of private,[6] personal memories in public memorial spaces, and that such practices work to invite some visitors while leaving others unacknowledged. Blair and Michel highlight certain practices that contribute to this dislocation, including the "democratization of memory," described as the tendency to name or identify individual victims as well as the inclusion of laypeople's input in consequential ways.[7] Doing so raises concerns pertaining to the accessibility of public commemorative spaces, leading Blair and Michel to ultimately question "whether these really are public memorials at all, or whether they are private memorials that merely tolerate public spectators."[8] Should this privatization continue to infiltrate public commemorative spaces, Blair and Michel worry public memorials as such will be "unlikely to survive" occupation by the private sphere.[9] The ongoing occurrence of memorials tipped noticeably toward the private indicates a need for further weighing the motivations, costs, and stakes implicated in this cultural and political process. One recent and highly popular memorial illustrative of this trend is the 9/11 Memorial and Museum at Ground Zero in New York City. Though the 9/11 Memorial and

Museum at Ground Zero are open to the public, certain areas are designated solely for the families of those killed in the World Trade Center attacks. Arguments may certainly be furthered for the necessity of these special affordances; however, as Blair and Michel demonstrate, such exclusivity can displace the larger public, leaving them feeling excluded from the memorial space.

The Columbine Memorial in Littleton, Colorado offers a compelling case study for further examining issues surrounding public memorialization and memory. Dedicated in 2007, the memorial was built in remembrance and honor of those killed in the Columbine High School shooting on April 20, 1999. As a statement on the Columbine Memorial website (www.columbinememorial.org) reads, "The memorial is an open, public place for all to visit and reflect on the impact and lessons learned from this tragedy."[10] Though the memorial, located in a Littleton city park, is certainly "open" and "public" in a literal sense, critical analysis of its discursive and material tactics challenges the claim that the memorial is for "all" to visit, reflect, and ultimately learn from the Columbine shootings. Upon first glance, the memorial appears publicly accessible, but deeper examination reveals that its rhetoric calls out to a particular and privatized community and merely whispers (or even remains silent) to the general public.

Due to these apparent incongruities, I assert that the Columbine Memorial goes beyond simply preserving a special space for the private sphere in public memory; rather, the memorial represents what I designate a rhetorical "forgetting of the public." Like Blair and Michel's dislocation of the public, this phenomenon occurs when a significant privileging of individualized memories within public memorial sites leaves those visitors outside of a narrowly circumscribed public unacknowledged—and thus, forgotten—by the design of the memorial. While an entire public certainly cannot be forgotten in a literal sense, this forgetting occurs

rhetorically, as in Bradford Vivian's characterization of "public forgetting."[11] Therefore, forgetting the public extends Blair and Michel's idea by highlighting the prioritization of private interests and memories at the expense of public interests and memories. Although forgetting the public may occur unintentionally, I argue that this oversight veers toward problematic when forgetting the public interferes with the epideictic commemorative processes necessary for civic engagement with and reflection upon incidents like Columbine.

In examining the forgotten public audience of the Columbine Memorial, several issues and questions emerge for consideration: What is the value of public memorials that engender this commemorative contest? What are the implications for the public identification required for education and civic dialogue? What becomes of a public memorial that cannot fully enable the epideictic processes of memory and reflection necessary to learn valuable civic lessons? In what ways do public memorial spaces invite some visitors more emphatically than others? How are these invitations extended or omitted to certain groups? Is this phenomenon indicative of a trend in contemporary commemorative practices? Can future memorials still make a healthy attempt at balancing public and private memories?

In order to better understand the stakes and implications for forgetting the public in commemorative spaces, it is necessary to critically analyze texts that typify this phenomenon. The Columbine Memorial is one such text, and in this thesis project I examine the memorial and the rhetorical means, both discursive and material, by which it forgets the public. In the chapters that follow, I strive to answer the following questions: first, how does the Columbine Memorial perpetuate a dislocation of the public, or a more flagrant forgetting of the public? Secondly, what motivations compel the memorial to dislocate or forget its public? Finally, what are the consequences, stakes, and future implications of these phenomena, and do they indicate a trend

in public commemoration as a whole? In addressing these questions, I hope to provide a deeper understanding of the memorial tactics that afford privileges to narrowly circumscribed publics while preventing the larger public from fully gaining access to and identifying with the lessons the site has to offer.

As I argue here, a commemorative deficiency manifests in Columbine Memorial's discursive and material rhetorical tactics: despite its performance as a public memorial site, an evident disconnect between public and private memories works to privilege the latter, hindering the epideictic and civic goals of public commemorative spaces. Additionally, I contend that this deficiency is employed as a dual-function coping mechanism; firstly, privileging the private allows for the preservation of the victims' innocence and individuality, and secondly, it presents a rhetorical opportunity to erase the shooters and their violence from public memory and history altogether.

This study of the Columbine Memorial holds significance in a number of ways. First, as incidents of gun violence continue to occur nationwide, it is likely that commemoration of these events will also continue, making the study of these memorials and their messages increasingly (yet unfortunately) relevant. By examining the Columbine Memorial as a rhetorical text, I hope to produce the insight necessary to augment Blair and Michel's prediction on the evolution of memorial culture. Finally, my research sheds light not only on the rhetorical choices made by memorial committees and builders, but also on the responses these particular choices invite from various publics. In this way, such research can help inform and guide future commemorative choices made by those with the responsibility to do so.

The Columbine High School Shooting

Today, school shootings occur with an unfortunate regularity in the United States, but in April 1999, the Columbine massacre was dubbed the worst school shooting in U.S. history to date.[12] Presently, this macabre title belongs to the 2007 Virginia Tech shooting,[13] with the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary shooting[14] taking second place.[15] However, Columbine remains particularly memorable, due largely to its dissonant layers of complexity, including the incessant media coverage of the incident that blurred the distinction between local and national affect.

On an ordinary Tuesday morning in April 1999, seventeen-year-old Eric Harris and eighteen-year-old Dylan Klebold put their carefully prepared plans into motion with anticipation and excitement. Later investigations of Harris and Klebold's personal computers and journals would reveal they had been planning the attack for more than a year.[16] Plans in Harris' journal revealed they had organized the day's itinerary into three stages. Act I was to begin with the explosion of two, massive bombs in the student commons area, hand-built from propane tanks. In Act II, Harris and Klebold would station themselves around the school's major exits to mow down fleeing survivors with sawed off shotguns, a semiautomatic handgun, and a rifle. The finale, Act III, would finish off the show, when bombs planted in the boys' cars detonated to eliminate remaining police officers, EMTs, and bystanders in the parking lot.[17] Had the teens' meticulous planning been successful, the lethal combination of homemade bombs, small explosives, and firearms could have killed up to 2,000 students and hundreds more faculty and bystanders.[18]

At around 11:15 A.M., the stage was set and the props were in place. When the bombs planted in the cafeteria failed to detonate, Harris and Klebold's impromptu Plan B was to shoot anyone and everyone within range. Stationed on top of the building, the two boys shot down

students leaving campus for lunch or enjoying a cigarette in the Colorado springtime sun. From the roof, the pair proceeded into the school, near the student cafeteria-commons, tossing pipe bombs and gleefully pumping rounds of bullets into their human targets. Around this time Harris briefly exited the building, engaged in open fire with law enforcement officers who had arrived on the scene, and returned into the school to continue killing. The shooters reconvened in the school's library, where they taunted, terrorized, and shot more students as they shuddered beneath desks. At approximately 12:08 P.M., Harris and Klebold committed suicide alongside those already dead and wounded in the library.[19]

Aside from being one of the deadliest acts of school gun violence in U.S. history, Columbine is infamously remembered for the news media's and local law enforcements' irresponsible and inaccurate coverage of the incident. Initially, news outlets erroneously reported up to twenty-five dead, a figure they had allegedly acquired from the Jefferson County sheriff's department.[20] Among those killed were Columbine High students Matthew Kechter (16), Rachel Scott (17), Cassie Bernall (17), Kyle Velasquez (16), Daniel Rohrbough (15), John Tomlin (16), Corey DePooter (17), Kelly Fleming (16), Isaiah Shoels (18), Lauren Townsend (18), Daniel Mauser (15), Steven Curnow (14), and faculty member William "Dave" Sanders (47).[21] Twenty-three additional students and faculty were injured but survived the attack,[22] while hundreds of others escaped to safety by running as fast and as far as they could from the school. Many terrified students and staff fled to nearby Clement Park to distance themselves from the violence. It is in this park that the Columbine Memorial would be erected eight years later.

The Columbine Memorial

The Columbine Memorial is a product of the Columbine Memorial Committee, which was created two months after the shooting for the planning of a permanent memorial.[23] The committee's mission statement was "to develop a consensus recommendation to create a physical, permanent memorial for our community and others to honor and respect those touched by the Columbine High School tragedy."[24] This mission was reflected in the committee's four-tiered approach. They strove to prioritize first the interests of victims' families, and second priority was given to families of injured individuals. Next, they considered the needs of Columbine faculty, staff, and alumni, and finally, they addressed the larger community.[25] After the memorial's completion, the Columbine Memorial Committee disbanded, and today, the Columbine Memorial Foundation manages memorial maintenance and fundraising efforts.[26]

The Columbine Memorial Committee chose Clement Park as the site for the permanent memorial, both for its location and significance. During the shooting and immediately following, many survivors escaped to the nearby park for refuge. Within hours of the shooting, the park became a makeshift memory place—a temporary memorial—where mourners left piles of mementos as an offering to commemorate those killed and wounded.[27] Only days after the incident, portions of Clement Park were buried under four feet of flowers, cards, photographs, posters, T-shirts, candles, and stuffed animals.[28] Over the next few weeks, survivors and community members gathered in the park for vigils, memorial services, and reflection. Given the symbolic value and spatial proximity of Clement Park to the shooting, its selection supported the Columbine Memorial Committee's self-proclaimed goal of creating a "memorial with content and purpose 100% derived from members of the Columbine community."[29] Construction began

in June 2006, and the completed Columbine Memorial was unveiled and opened to the public fifteen months later, on September 21, 2007.[30]

When visitors enter Clement Park today, they might take notice of an unremarkable, brown sign upon entering the sprawling, green space, or they may not notice it at all. Stamped with the words "Columbine Memorial" in white lettering, similar, nondescript signs lead visitors to the southeast perimeter of the park. A short distance removed from the heart of Clement Park, the Columbine Memorial is tucked snugly into a rolling hill known to locals as "Rebel Hill," named after high school's mascot. Rebel Hill shields the Columbine Memorial from its namesake, Columbine High School, which is located several hundred yards south of the memorial. While the memorial cannot be seen from the high school (and vice versa), a short ascent to the top of Rebel Hill provides a jarring view of both the site of the rampage and the commemoration of its victims. For visitors old enough to remember the shooting, glancing back and forth between the two sites may even conjure recollected images of the harrowing news footage captured by helicopters hovering at a similar angle above Rebel Hill that day.

Built into the gently sloping contours of the surrounding landscape, the Memorial is partially hidden from view by grasses and shrubbery while walking up through either of two, angled entrances. Upon entering the space, the visitor is tunneled through a wide, unadorned passage that comprises the sole entrance into the Memorial. The Memorial's structure is relatively uncomplicated: made up of two, concentric rings, each circular space is denoted with special meaning.

Visitors are first funneled into the Memorial's outermost layer. While approaching the entrance, one's ears are initially met with the soothing and familiar sound of trickling water emanating from somewhere off to the left. Following this sound brings the visitor to stand before

a fountain made up of six, rectangular, stone faucets pouring water into a shallow pool below. The water feature comprises a portion of the larger, outer layer, designated the Wall of Healing (WH). Reaching into the side of Rebel Hill, the WH is constructed with red bricks of native Colorado stone. Embedded into the red rock wall, several dozen black stones display quotes from students, teachers, and parents of the Columbine community. These statements were gathered out of hours of workshops and interviews conducted by the design team over a two-year period,[31] and they capture a range of sentiments, opinions, and feelings surrounding the Columbine shooting. As one dark stone indicates, "This Wall of Healing is dedicated to those who were injured at Columbine High School and to all who were touched by the tragic events of April 20, 1999." Thus, the WH was dedicated to the various communities affected by the Columbine High shooting—students and staff injured during the shooting, the Columbine and Littleton communities, and the nation as a whole.

When visitors move toward the center of the WH's embrace, they encounter a large, circular area called the Ring of Remembrance (RR). This area is dedicated expressly to the twelve students and one faculty member killed at Columbine High School. The Ring is made up of thirteen, raised, granite placards, divided into three curved sections. Visitors may enter the RR through one of three openings in the circle. Standing before the inner edge of the Ring, one may then read the inscriptions of each granite slab, as it angles gently up and away from the center of the circle. Every placard honors one of the victims and features passages composed or selected by loved ones. These inscriptions uniquely convey an individual's memory via stories, Bible verses, poems, diary entries, and heartfelt words carefully chosen by their family members. The inscriptions, composed by the victims' families, were kept confidential and hidden from the public for several years until the dedication of the memorial in 2007.[32] Reminiscent of

tombstones, the placards depict their commemorated subjects in a unique light, determined by those who knew them most intimately.

The Columbine Memorial site, as I continue to explicate in subsequent chapters, is a site of discursive and material rhetorical complexity. Therefore, a rhetorical critique of the site is necessary in order to unpack some of the tactics employed in the commemoration not only of Columbine, but also of other school shootings past and present.

Preview of Chapters

To situate my argument within the larger conversations surrounding public/private memory, memorialization, and Columbine, the remainder of this study proceeds in three chapters. Chapter I provided an introduction to the present study, rationale and justification for the present study, and a brief description of the rhetorical text itself. Chapter II chronicles relevant literature necessary for an orientation to the theoretical conversation at hand. This review of literature not only demonstrates the scholarly origins of this study, it presents the theoretical framework upon which my argument and analysis are structured. Areas of particular focus within the literature review include a historical and rhetorical survey of public memory throughout the ages, followed by an explanation and exploration of the more recent concept of public forgetting and its potential therapeutic or instructive value for particular communities. Then, I discuss conceptualizations of "public" and "private" as theorized by several scholars, in addition to Blair and Michel's distinction between public and private memories and their manifestations within public memorial sites. Finally, I delve into scholarship surrounding material rhetoric and commemorative sites, as these methods are many of the same I employ throughout my analysis.

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Chapter III houses the entirety of my rhetorical analysis of the Columbine Memorial. Throughout this textual critique, I highlight three, primary rhetorical trends that by my observation characterize the "forgetting of the public" in this commemorative site. These trends—including Presence/Absence, Intimacy/Publicity, and Discursivity/Materiality—function as lenses through which to view the larger and certainly more contentious negotiation between private and public interests as manifested in the commemorative site.

In the fourth and final chapter, I expound upon the motivations and implications for forgetting the public in memorial sites. In doing so, I conclude by answering the questions presented earlier in this chapter, as they pertain to the Columbine Memorial and commemorative culture more generally. Additionally, I offer my critical assessment of this contemporary trend as well as discussion on the ramifications of forgetting the public in regards to remembering Columbine, rhetorical criticism, public memory, and commemoration culture overall.

Figure 1. View of Columbine Memorial from the top of Clement Hill. Photo by Jena Schwake.



Figure 2. The entrance to the Columbine Memorial. Photo by Jena Schwake.

Figure 3. The Wall of Healing extends into the side of Clement Hill. Photo by Jena Schwake.



Figure 4. Words of community members are inscribed on the Wall of Healing. Photo by Jena Schwake.

Figure 5. The Ring of Remembrance makes up the central areas of the memorial. Photo by Jena Schwake.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

To answer questions pertaining to rhetoric, memory, materiality, and the evidenced tensions between public and private in the Columbine Memorial, it is necessary to draw upon an array of interdisciplinary scholarship. In particular, I draw from the following areas of literature: rhetoric and memory in the rhetorical tradition, materiality, and public and private. Synthesizing these concepts allows me to put questions and observations concerning the Columbine Memorial into conversation with the most important and pressing issues of contemporary commemorative practices.

## (Public) Memory and the Rhetorical Tradition

The study of memory has captivated philosophers and rhetoricians since antiquity. Without technologies of writing, printing, or paper, an expansive memory was of utmost importance not only to teachers, scholars, artists, and performers, but to governing officials of the *polis*—the small city-states that characterized much of the ancient, Western world—as well. Eventually, memory earned a position within the five canons of classical rhetoric, a foundational topic still widely taught in communication and composition classrooms today. Ancient legends and various memory scholars credit a Greek poet, Simonides of Ceos, with developing the art of memory after identifying the remains of partygoers when the building of the party he was attending collapsed unexpectedly.[33] Simonides accomplished this noble feat by imagining a mental series of *loci*, or places, which mimicked the space of the hall and each individual's seating position within the hall.[34] This set of remembrance strategies, the *ars memoriae*, eventually evolved into what is known today as the practice of mnemonics.

The Greeks' infatuation with memory was intricately linked to their conceptualization of knowledge. As memory practices burgeoned, Frances Yates contends that this "art" of mnemonics was utilized as "a technique by which the orator could improve his [*sic*] memory, which would enable him [*sic*] to deliver long speeches from memory with unfailing accuracy."[35] Societies lauded men with expansive memories as embodiments of wisdom. In Plato's *Phaedrus*, this preoccupation with memory is evidenced in the tale of Theuth, the inventor of writing. King Thamus admonished Theuth for creating a device that would "produce forgetting in the souls of those who have learned it, through lack of practice at using their memory…aquir[ing] the appearance of wisdom instead of wisdom itself."[36] During this time, memory was synonymous with knowledge and wisdom, making it a crucial characteristic of the educated person, and the advent of writing was a threat to this aspect of one's learned memory capabilities. Exercising memory allowed orators not only to recite lengthy speeches without assistance, but also to readily access the available means of persuasion and choose the method best suited to the rhetor's goal.

For most of the next millennia, memory was classified as a device that allowed accomplished speakers and young pupils to recall information without the aid of tablet or paper. However, by the end of the nineteenth century, scholars began to think about memory in different ways. Sigmund Freud, for instance, regarded memory as a scientific, medical matter to be addressed by a physician; additionally, his concept of the Unconscious likened one's memory to a fluid, ephemeral "storehouse" from which memories never disappeared.[37] Yet, by the twentieth century, scholars had begun to expand memory's scope beyond the individual alone. Maurice Halbwachs' canonical text, *On Collective Memory*, was one of the first inquiries into the socially constructed aspects of memory. With his work, Halbwachs, a sociologist, demonstrates humans'

reliance on their peers and social networks to recollect and recall past events. As Halbwachs'

translator Lewis Coser notes, individuals remember in their own ways, but within a "specific

group context, draw upon that context to remember or recreate the past."[38] Accordingly,

individual memories are relatively frail without reinforcement from what Halbwachs terms

"social frameworks for memory."[39] These social frameworks are plentiful, for they crop up

virtually anywhere people join together, in families, workplaces, communities, and cultures.

Individual memories, thus, become localized, for their roots tie them to the original social

context in which the memory was sown.[40] Consequently, Halbwachs contends, "we cannot

consider them except from the outside—that is, by putting ourselves in the position of others—

and that in order to retrieve these remembrances we must tread the same path that others would

have followed had they been in our position."[41] So while collective memory originates from the

connective fibers of society, it is, in essence, a reflexive process requiring the contemplation and

incorporation of memories occurring both inside and outside of a particular social network.

As Halbwachs' conceptualizations gained momentum, it has become necessary to

establish distinctions between types of memory occurring on an individual, social, collective,

cultural, and public level. Individual memory is aptly named as such: memories on the individual

level refer to the singular person's subject position in regards to memory, as well as what the

person remembers and how they remember it. Social memory, according to Edward Casey,

includes the memories of people within an individual's social group, such as family or

colleagues. These memories, shared via "co-reminiscing" within the social group, are

collaborative, fluid, and subject to change.[42] Similarly, collective memory is derived from the

memories of many people. James Young describes collective memory as a repository of

"collected memories,"[43] that is, a multitude of distinct memories coalesced into common spaces.

The common thread of these collected memories, Casey argues, is "a conjoint remembrance of a certain event," regardless of individuals' locations or relations to one another.[44] Since individual memories to some extent retain their visibility, this gathering of disparate memories into a collective memory might be likened to the piecing of a patchwork quilt, a larger entity comprised of smaller, individual elements. Adding further complexity to the notion of collective memory, Marita Sturken describes cultural memory as "memory shared outside the avenues of formal historical discourse yet is entangled with cultural products and imbued with cultural meaning."[45] Lastly, it is through each of these forms of memory—individual, social, collective, and cultural—that public memory is constituted. As the term suggests, public memory occurs, and ultimately materializes, in the public realm; however, as Casey points out, public memory "is at once encompassing and only tacitly present until singled out as such…the very power of public memory resides in its capacity to be for the most part located at the edge of our lives, hovering, ready to be invoked or revised, acted upon or merely contemplated, inspiring us or boring us."[46] Thus, until the contents of public memory are challenged, scrutinized, or debated, it operates nearly seamlessly and invisibly, and breaking through its smooth surface releases the individual, social, collective, and cultural elements of public memory. Therefore, scholars like Carole Blair, Greg Dickinson, and Brian Ott are hesitant to ascribe to such compartmentalized forms of memory, for individual, social, collective, and public memories continually and fluidly overlap.[47]

When studying memory in its various manifestations, it is also important to distinguish between history and memory itself. Pierre Nora characterizes memory as "social and unviolated,"[48] that is, akin to lived, human experience. While it can become distorted over time, memory, in this sense, is like everyday life—real, organic, and variable. Conversely, history seeks to neatly chronicle memories and lived experiences into a more organized, representational

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narrative by which we may learn about our pasts. What Nora ultimately suggests is that memory might be understood as a more genuine version of history, since memory is a lasting vestige of what history strives to represent.[49] While certainly not all historical scholars adopt this standpoint, public memory research tends to examine these phenomena (in particular, the ways history (re)presents memory) from a rhetorical angle.

Public memory scholars have a vested interest in the contestable and persuasive aspects of memory. As Kendall Phillips suggests, "The study of memories is largely one of the rhetoric of memories."[50] The ways in which publics remember past events are unmistakably rhetorical practices, for they encourage individuals within and outside the public's borders to remember in a certain way. According to Blair, Dickinson, and Ott, "Groups tell their pasts to themselves and others as ways of understanding, valorizing, justifying, excusing, or subverting conditions or beliefs of their current moment,"[51] allowing certain aspects of the past to be highlighted while others are diminished. As communities work to negotiate their pasts in the present, Casey characterizes public memory as "bivalent," for it simultaneously attends to past and future.[52] In order to make sense of their present existence, communities must not only ponder upon where they have been, but where they are going. Focusing attention forward indicates a desire for future change: when "groups talk about some events of their histories more than others, glamorize some individuals more than others, and present some actions but not others as 'instructive' for the future,"[53] as Blair, Dickinson, and Ott note, public memory achieves both rhetorical and educational means.

While public memory can function pedagogically, it also indicates a community's desire to share and preserve communal experiences. In this regard, public memory works as an instrument to amplify, muffle, or even silence particular voices. Yet, in order for public memory

to enact these processes, Vivian purports it "requires conscious or unconscious decisions,"[54] by certain members of the public, that ultimately allow the remembrance to be observed. Such decisions, or rhetorical strategies, as observed by Greg Dickinson, Brian Ott, and Eric Aoki, can be employed to absolve existing guilt, shape perceptions, and highlight or diminish contrasting versions of history, while at the same time promoting "certain ways of looking and exclud[ing] others."[55] Quite often, public memory resides at the juncture between official, state-sanctioned memories and vernacular memories; it is not until a variety of experiences and voices converge that the framework through which we view history begins to emerge.

Scholars have long been interested in examining the processes enacted by public memory. The academic realm of memory studies grew in tandem with the cultural proliferation of memorialization in the mid-twentieth century. Post-World War II, the United States and much of Europe (in particular, Germany) experienced what Andreas Huyssen refers to as a "memory boom,"[56] that is, a near-obsessive preoccupation with the collection, preservation, organization, and display of objects of memory, including photographs, documents, artifacts, memorials, and other public spaces. Much of this fixation was focused on the protection of memories related to the horrors of the Second World War, in an effort to mobilize the instructional and educational functions of memory, in the hopes that such atrocities would never occur again. These historical events coincided with the popularization of post-modernism, a school of thought that seeks to undermine the existence of absolute truths and disrupt previously held knowledges.[57] In the United States, for example, World War II was commemorated with "living memorials,"[58] which Erika Doss describes as publicly accessible, functional spaces—such as hospitals, schools, parks, swimming pools, and libraries—able to be utilized by entire communities. As a result,

memorialization and epideictic commemoration became as commonplace in civic life as the local elementary school or neighborhood playground.

The memory boom would flourish for the next several decades, eventually evolving into a full-blown "culture of public commemoration"[59] in the 1980s. Where the latter craze departed from the memory boom was in its public nature; although memory mania became increasingly emphasized in many spheres, these memories were not necessarily public. Nonetheless, Blair and Michel assert that this sudden increase in public memorialization was catalyzed by the erection of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (VVM) in Washington, D.C.[60] As scores of local and national memorials cropped up throughout the 1980s and 90s, Blair and Michel observe that many of the post-VVM monuments "took up elements of its rhetoric"[61] and used them to achieve their own purposes. Doss describes this current epideictic desire as "memorial mania," a term that captures the "omnipresence" of memorials in today's society, as well as public anxiety and ambivalence toward issues presented by memory and history.[62] Because memorials, Doss adds, are fueled by "public feelings such as grief, gratitude, fear, shame, and anger,"[63] memorials possess the ability to shape public perceptions, craft public identities, and (potentially) incite political instability. Given these cultural predispositions, it should come as no surprise that demand for a memorial began as soon as the Columbine shootings had registered in the public consciousness.

Public Forgetting

With the rise of memorialization, attention must be paid to memory's necessary though often unspoken counterpart, forgetting. As evidenced by many individuals' frenetic tendency to collect mementos such as photographs, video clips, and souvenirs, the act of forgetting is implicated with negativity, loss, and absence, shaping it into the antithesis of remembrance and

memorialization. Like memory, forgetting has long been considered an individual act; Freud's

conception of the unconscious even suggested forgetting was orchestrated by past events in a

person's life.[64]  However, public memory scholarship has begun to challenge an exclusively

individual lens, for Harald Weinrich sheds light upon the power of forgetting to shape us

personally, socially, and culturally.[65] Similarly, in *Public Forgetting*, Vivian conceptualizes the

term not merely as a direct inverse of public memory, but to establish it as a valuable, communal

rhetorical practice. According to Vivian, a need exists for "a heuristic framework better suited to

reveal the positive contributions of forgetting,"[66] namely, by identifying how these processes

might be mobilized, as well as those contexts in which communities may benefit more soundly

from forgetting than remembrance.

Memory and forgetting need not be considered polar opposites, for these processes can

and should be thought of as symbiotic and complementary to one another. Ironically, as Vivian

points out, "Memory contains dimensions of forgetting; and forgetting, as it turns out, often

reproduces (however indirectly) a degree of shared recollection."[67] In this way, memory and

forgetting are not only dependent on each other but contribute to civic life overall.

Though memory and forgetting are not mutually exclusive, the distinction between

forgetting and public forgetting is immensely rhetorical. Forgetting is essentially the failure to

remember or the cessation of memory. For instance, birthdays, to-do list items, and everyday

happenings all fall victim to forgetfulness. Essentially, to forget is to misplace the memory

entirely. Though this kind of forgetting is most often unintentional and individualized, public

forgetting is deliberate, involving entire communities. Public forgetting is a strategic rhetorical

practice in which a community agrees to figuratively "cast out" a particular memory or

memories. The enactment of public forgetting, then, according to Vivian, "is notional rather than literal,"[68] requiring participation from the entire affected community.

Unlike individual forgetting, through public forgetting, communal memories are never truly lost. Communities who have experienced extreme sorrow or other adversities are not encouraged to deliberately erase these memories, for actively trying to forget can anchor memories deeper into the psyche. However, public forgetting may encourage communities to dwell on some aspects of the past rather than others. While members of such communities might never forget past tragedies or oppression, the community as a whole can collectively forget feelings of blame, sorrow, or hate affiliated with the particular memory. As Dipankar Gupta contends, "There is only one way to forget the past and that is to look ahead."[69] In this way, the mobilization of public forgetting can provide an outlet for affected communities to rise from the ashes of a broken past and into the future.

Given its positive applications, public forgetting can perform functions similar to public memory. Vivian explicates the beneficial aspects of forgetting as a way to reach out to affected communities, using Booker T. Washington's 1895 Cotton States Exposition Address as a case study. Here, Vivian demonstrates how a rhetor's appeals to epideictic forgetting may provide an outlet to divert communities from the sorrow that arises from prolonged and obsessive remembrance. In his address, Washington implored both blacks and whites to consider the era of slavery as mythic and removed from the present, instead of dwelling on slavery as an atrocity of the recent past.[70] Washington did not condemn white Southerners or show favoritism toward freed slaves; instead, he attempted to mobilize a metaphorical exodus out of slavery's dark past and toward a promising future. The circumstances of the Cotton States Expo, as Vivian suggests, "required [Washington] to witness the inauguration of a new era, not bear witness to the crimes

of old."[71] It was the *kairos* of the Expo that inspired Washington's rhetorical appeals to public

forgetting, allowing him to implore his audience to forget the dreadful era of slavery not literally

but figuratively. Much like Blair, Dickinson, and Ott's observation of the "instructive" elements

of public memory, Vivian asserts that communities may employ combinations of forgetting and

memory "to draw guiding lessons from important historical episodes."[72] Gupta concurs,

asserting, "Learning from the past helps us to forget it,"[73] for past prejudices simply cannot be

erased—and ultimately, a cohesive citizenship cannot be achieved—without some degree of

collective forgetting.

In *Oblivion*, Marc Augé examines a specific kind of forgetting. Contrary to popular

connotations of oblivion as a disruptive, corrosive force, oblivion, Augé insists, is "the life force

of memory and remembrance is its product."[74] Human memory cannot conceivably recall

everything it encounters, so like Burke's terministic screens, every memory is a simultaneous

reflection, selection, and deflection of reality.[75] Oblivion discreetly discards and organizes those

memories not worth retaining, and therefore, the memories left behind are "the product of an

erosion…as the outlines of the shore are created by the sea."[76] Augé categorizes oblivion into

three "figures," or forms: *return*, the search for a lost past by forgetting the present; *suspense*, the

search for the present by forgetting the past; and (*re)beginning*, to discover the future by

forgetting the past.[77] It is this third figure of oblivion, however, that aligns most closely with

Vivian's and Gupta's characterizations of public forgetting, for in order for individuals or

communities to proceed toward their futures, the affected parties must first (rhetorically) forget

that which is preventing progression.

Like its forebear public memory, public forgetting introduces the risk of silenced voices.

Luisa Passerini posits silence as a catalytic agent that can both induce and insulate forgetting.[78]

Silence, she argues, possesses the power to repress memories, and this repression leads to an irretrievable oblivion, unlike Augé's.[79] Conversely, silence also allows memories to propagate, to incubate until they are "able to come to light in a new and enriched form."[80] When certain memories go unacknowledged, individuals and communities alike may produce alternate or competing memories in order to fill the gaps unaddressed, so the act of silencing becomes a concurrent cancellation and production of memory. However, when studying the silence of forgetting, Passerini admits the difficulty of observing what is not present. Regrettably, the only observable silence is a broken silence, but the preservation of silence is also the preservation of hegemony.[81] So, while the loudest voices typically attract the greatest amount of attention, attending the unspoken is key to understanding the inner workings of public forgetting.

Public Versus Private

As addressed above, an identifiable distinction exists between public and individual memories. This demarcation rests on the notion that public memory is socially constituted and constructed within social groups, while individual memory remains isolated and specific to particular people. However, to cogently grasp the nature of this division, as well as tensions between traditionally conceived public memory and the "dislocation of the public," it is important to revisit characterizations of the private and public spheres of everyday human experience. The public and private realms have been characterized separately since before antiquity, and these distinctions have transmuted through time and culture. As Hannah Arendt describes, the public emerged in ancient Greece in contrast to the private household, where the activities of survival (for instance, food preparation, housekeeping, and child-rearing) were performed.[82] Because women and slaves were traditionally responsible for such duties, Athenian

men were typically freed from such constraints, which allowed them to engage in the political sphere of the *polis*.[83] While this description has colored the understanding of Western civilization for centuries, theorizing the public/private divide (as Arendt does) has been of primary concern to scholars in the last few decades.

Among the most influential of these scholars in defining the contrast between public and private is Jürgen Habermas. Habermas outlines the origins of the public and the bourgeois public sphere, a social institution that began to materialize in eighteenth-century Europe. Until this time, the public—comprised almost exclusively of the ruling, noble class—was understood as a sector of society set apart from rest, and they possessed an "aura" of power derived largely from performance rather than action.[84] The common people were accordingly identified as "private," for as societal institutions (such as churches and governments) became increasingly publicly regulated, the term "designated the exclusion from the sphere of the state apparatus."[85] All of this began to shift, however, when common folk, such as merchants and business people, started to gather in public spaces like coffee houses and salons to discuss and debate societal matters. According to Habermas, this budding bourgeois public sphere possessed three, significant characteristics: relative equality among members, intellectually challenging conversations on previously unquestioned matters, and accessibility to anyone who wished to participate.[86] The advent of this public sphere brought upon two, unprecedented changes in society. First, it created a safe environment in which commoners could articulate ideas of relevance to their lives, an activity that had laid dormant for nearly a millennium; secondly, the public sphere allowed the practice of rhetoric and deliberation to break free from nobility and reach the masses.

In the years before and after Habermas, a number of complex and contradictory definitions of public and private emerged. In the 1920s, John Dewey complicated

compartmentalized notions of public and private, suggesting the two spheres can and should be coexistent, for they enact overlapping social and individual functions.[87] Arendt additionally developed the idea of the "social" sphere as a liminal space between public and private that blurs individuality by absorbing people into a collective mimicking traditional familial structure.[88] More recently, Nancy Fraser problematizes Habermas' exclusively masculine, unitary public sphere. Fraser insists upon the presence of multiple, "subaltern counterpublics"—such as women, ethnic minorities, and queer-identified individuals—that exist as "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses."[89] Similarly, Michael Warner points out the linguistic, spatial, and cultural complexities of attempting to explicitly define the public and private spheres.[90] These scholars, and countless others, have made understanding these complicated relationships central to contemporary scholarship on the public and its commemorative practices.

Blair and Michel offer one of the most recent illuminations of this persistent binary by demonstrating how private memories may be rhetorically constituted and even privileged in public spaces. They suggest that certain memorialization tactics—for example, naming individual victims or preserving their individuality—work to solidify the presence of the personal, and ultimately, foster identification with some visitors more than others. As Blair and Michel point out, "Public memorials clearly are always about relationships," for without "survivor memories, there would be no public memorials."[91] Though these survivor memories might provide for the construction of public commemorative sites, the authors problematize this practice, for attending to these personal memories inevitably foregrounds and privileges those most closely linked to the victims or tragedy, resulting in a phenomenon they term a "dislocation of the public."[92] Thus, when a memorial forfeits public memories in favor of private memories,

Blair and Michel question "whether these really are public memorials at all, or whether they are private memorials that merely tolerate public spectators."[93]

Blair and Michel's critique of privatized commemorative sites calls for the exploration of the relationship between intimacy and commemoration in the public sphere. Since the Reagan era, as Lauren Berlant posits, the United States has experienced an ideological transmutation that thrusts traditionally intimate and personal affairs (e.g., sexuality, marriage, reproduction, abortion, family) into the political spotlight.[94] In addition to complicating the definition of American citizenship, Berlant notes that this rhetorical phenomenon "makes people public and generic," for "it turns them into *kinds* of people who are both attached to and underscribed by the identities that organize them [original emphasis]."[95] In doing so, intimate matters of identity become matters of economic concern and thus public debate. As politicians employ such "intimacy rhetoric," Berlant maintains they create a rhetorical paradox that simultaneously empathizes with and perpetuates conditions of social and economic inequality.[96] When such intimate topics enter the space of a public memorial, the space becomes even more complex, as visitors must negotiate the effects of public sentiments in addition to private, or intimate, feelings or emotions.

Materiality and Rhetoric

Throughout the thesis, my analysis will rely on combining media reports and discourses about the memorial with observations of the Columbine Memorial during visits to the site. While visiting the memorial, I engaged with the site by looking, touching, and experiencing it materially. By interacting with the memorial in this physical and experiential fashion, it becomes necessary to explore literature pertaining to the materiality of rhetoric. Traditionally, as Kenneth

Burke notes, rhetoric is conceived as inherently symbolic. This assertion rests on the premise that humans are compelled to utilize symbols, such as language or images, in order to make sense of their experiences and environments.[97] Symbols, by their nature, can only represent these experiences, and they are thus unable to fully account for that which is being conveyed. However, in the last two decades, some rhetorical scholars have begun to question the necessity of including symbols in discussions of rhetoric. Carole Blair, for one, implores rhetorical critics to expand this purely symbolic definition of rhetoric to include consideration of its materiality, that is, how rhetoric manifests itself in experiential, tangible forms. While materiality is in part related to tangibility, it must not be confused with physical presence, for Michael McGee explains, "rhetoric is 'material' by measure of human experiencing of it, not by virtue of our ability to continue touching it after it is gone."[98] Further explicating the conceptual leap from symbolic to material rhetorics, Kenneth Zagacki and Victoria Gallagher describe it as a "shift from examining representations…to examining enactments."[99] Inquiries of symbolicity, therefore, are concerned with meanings and intent, while studies of materiality attend to consequentiality and affect.[100] For example, a rhetorical critic may analyze a museum for the *symbols* it utilizes to convey particular messages and meanings (such as words or diagrams), but he or she can also examine the ways in which visitors themselves interact with and negotiate the museum's *material* elements, like the exhibits or architecture. By examining symbolic and material elements in tandem, the critic may construct a more holistic analysis of the text and its influence on those who encounter it.

The argument for material rhetoric revolves around symbolicity's inadequate representation of rhetoric as "partisan, meaningful, [and] consequential,"[101] which, for Blair, are necessary requirements for any text to be considered rhetorical. Ultimately, she encourages

scholars to ponder on the "significance" of a rhetorical text not only "through its symbolic substance but by its very existence."[102] Thomas Rickert concurs, for although symbolicity is key to deciphering a text's messages, "intent cannot suffice for its full accounting *as rhetoric* [author's emphasis]."[103] Therefore, consideration of material rhetoric contributes an integral dimension of physical enactment, so critics may better understand a text's consequences and implications for all whom it touches.

Material rhetoric attends not only to the media or channels through which messages are conveyed, but also the spaces and places in which they exist. Blair, Dickinson, and Ott, explicating the work of Henri Lefebvre, describe place as "bordered, specified, and locatable by being named," whereas space is more "open, undifferentiated, undesignated."[104] Through careful manipulation of space, rhetors can craft "spaces of attention"[105] as well as "experiential landscapes"[106] that encourage audiences to view, perceive, and experience texts in particular ways. Zagacki and Gallagher note that spaces of attention create environments conducive to performativity and experimentation with one's surroundings. Similarly, experiential landscapes, according to Dickinson, Ott, and Aoki, "invite visitors to assume (or occupy) particular subject positions,"[107] for they engage their audiences physically and psychologically. The authors continue by arguing that these rhetorical tactics (for instance, sound, lighting, or color schemes) can "entail certain ways of looking and exclude others."[108] Such sites, through material rather than symbolic means, provide expanded opportunities for visitors to experience, learn, engage, challenge, or appreciate the messages presented within them.

The rhetoric of place is also intricately linked to public memory, as numerous rhetorical critics have observed the ways in which memories crystallize in public places, such as memorials, monuments, or buildings. According to Young, motives for constructing places of

public memory, like memorials, are numerous and varied—including, but not limited to, official and vernacular remembrance, education, cultural experience, redemption, nationalism, or tourism.[109] Contrarily, Doss argues, such architectural manifestations are merely "memory aids" that function as "materialist modes of privileging particular histories and values."[110] Both Young and Nora visit the "memory aid" argument, asserting that through the designation of particular places in which memories may thrive, individuals are allowed (or even encouraged) to displace memory onto a physical artifact. As a result, the practice of public commemoration may actually promote forgetfulness, as the memorial becomes a placeholder—a stand in—for memory itself. So, while Nora maintains that the presence *lieux de mémoire* have ultimately contributed to the "absolute absence of a will to remember,"[111] the intricate relationship between these sites and the memories (forgotten or otherwise) they represent remains a compelling issue for the study of materialist rhetoric.

Clearly, the issues being taken up by rhetoricians, memory scholars, and material critics are many. While here I have drawn clear distinctions between and among these areas of scholarship, it should be noted that these literatures—rhetoric and memory in the rhetorical tradition, materiality, and theories of public and private—are not unconcerned with one another. Each of these areas of scholarship certainly contains issues that permeate the others. However, this inter- and intra-disciplinary cohesiveness allows for a richer overall inquiry into the rhetorical tactics of the Columbine Memorial, while allowing me to contribute to the scholarly discourse surrounding the most prominent issues of contemporary commemorative practices.

ANALYSIS

Upon first glance, the Columbine Memorial certainly achieves its overarching goal of honoring the victims of the Columbine shooting. However, the civic goals of public commemorative sites are decidedly more complex and difficult to fully accomplish. People typically erect public memorials to foster remembrance, reverence, or reflection. The latter, reflection, creates a discursive space for the utilization of epideictic rhetoric, which may praise or blame its subjects within the context of a community, such as an ancient city-state or a local school district. In addition, this commemorative rhetoric compels its audience to consider that praise or blame within the temporal, present context. As Aristotle proffers, in epideictic rhetoric the "present is the most important; for all speakers praise and blame in regard to existing qualities, but they often also make use of other things, both reminding [the audience] of the past and projecting the course of the future."[112] Thus, epideictic rhetoric fosters civic reflection by compelling listeners to examine which of the virtues portrayed are most beneficial or detrimental to a community in the present moment, the here and now.

In order for epideictic rhetoric to achieve these ends, a text must first encourage connection between audience and rhetor. This connection might be characterized in a way resonant with contemporary rhetorical theories, like the notion of identification, often attributed to Kenneth Burke.[113] Usually, before a message can be conveyed, Burke reminds us, "the speaker draws on identification of interests to establish rapport between himself [*sic*] and the audience."[114] In the case of the Columbine Memorial, this establishment of a relationship with a private, intimate audience is privileged over forging a similar bond with the wider, general public. The general public, as I frame it in the context of the Columbine Memorial, might be

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somewhat loosely defined as anyone with either limited or zero ties (e.g., personal relationships or geographic proximity) to the shooting. Due to the circumstances of these individuals, their lack of social or proxemic connections to the Columbine shooting distinguishes them as apart from an intimate audience comprised of victims' family members, Columbine students, and faculty and staff. As I explicate below, the enactment of particular rhetorical tactics staunches the opportunity, at least for those individuals outside of the narrowly circumscribed public, to achieve adequate identification with the events of Columbine.

Because the memorial makes limited attempts to connect with individuals outside of its intimate, localized audience, the gravity of Columbine will quite likely be lost, for example, on a teenaged visitor from the upper Midwest. In the decade and a half since the Columbine shooting, one public in particular has emerged and matured whose significance cannot be overlooked. This public, known colloquially as Generation Z, includes those individuals born beginning in the mid-1990s through the 2000s. These Americans were born after the occurrence of Columbine (or they were too young to remember the event), and therefore, this group of young people does not possess the experiential knowledge necessary to fully grasp the magnitude of the shooting and its subsequent impact across the country. While certain rhetorical tactics—like the Wall of Healing—gesture toward the inclusion of the larger public, the lack of definitive temporal or historical markers makes it difficult to place the Columbine Memorial in its proper context.

The Columbine Memorial manifests the complex commemorative struggle faced by members of the Columbine Memorial Committee during its planning stages. Therefore, an examination of the existing site as a material rhetorical text exposes the ways in which private and public memory become immortalized within the memorial. Throughout my analysis, I utilize the paradoxical relationship between private and public as a lens through which to view three

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rhetorical trends occurring within the Columbine Memorial, including Presence/Absence, Intimacy/Publicity, and Discursivity/Materiality. Within each, I point to specific rhetorical tactics at work in perpetuating the complicated negotiation of memories, both private and public. However, it is also necessary to note that while my analysis distinguishes the trends from one another, these demarcations serve a largely organizational purpose. Given the often blurry and ephemeral nature of memory, categorizing these trends allows for their individual discussion— while at the same time acknowledging that these rhetorical boundaries can, and do, overlap and allow for permeation, as evidenced by the physical space.

In doing so, I argue the Columbine Memorial privileges private memory at the expense of public memory, identification, and epideictic reflection surrounding the event. Furthermore, I suggest these rhetorical tactics constitute a "forgetting of the public," that functions as a two-sided coping mechanism for family members and intimates. First, privileging the private allows for the eternal preservation of the victims' innocence and individuality; second, it presents a rhetorical opportunity to erase the shooters and their violence from public memory and history altogether. Examining the trends listed above through the private-public paradox thus adds complexity and nuance to the material tactics at work in the memorial, provoking not only alternate readings of the site but also encouraging richer discourse surrounding the commemoration of localized and national tragedies alike.

## Presence/Absence

As rhetorical critics, it is crucial to examine texts not only for what is present, highlighted, and included in the space, but also for what is absent, downplayed, and excluded from the space. The inherently symbolic nature of human communication cannot conceivably

capture all of what we intend to convey, so, for the sake of clarity, most messages inevitably guide listeners' attention in certain directions and steer their attention away from others. Burke likens these processes of selection, reflection, and deflection to "terministic screens," that, like a pair of tinted spectacles, tinge the world according to the color of one's own experiences and interests.[115] In this way, what is said represents what is valued as well as what is not valued. Similarly, Blair approaches presence and absence in materiality as "existence" and "non-existence," suggesting that a text derives consequentiality from the mere fact that it *exists*, while the *non*-existence of a parallel or competing narrative may demonstrate an issue of equal or greater importance.[116]

Many of the Memorial's most present, and arguably striking, elements pertain to intimate memories and private experiences surrounding the Columbine shooting and its victims. The site's most visible aspects—namely, the Wall of Healing (WH), the Ring of Remembrance (RR), and the location of the memorial site—highlight the memories of individuals, rather than speaking to communal or public experience. At the same time, several gaps emerge in the commemorative narrative as a result of what is absent from the memorial—particularly, what took place, and who did it. While the magnitude of the Columbine shooting might not feasibly be depicted through mere symbols and material structures, the significance of what has been omitted calls for further inquiry of that which is "non-existent," in accordance with Blair's theorization.[117]

My discussion on this curious relationship between presence and absence in the Columbine Memorial proceeds along three, primary lines of argument. First, I visit the oxymoronic nature of the WH, as its signifiers contribute to competing impressions of vagueness and specificity that create particular ways of seeing the aftermath of Columbine. Next, the

foregrounded positioning of loved ones' sentiments within the RR contributes to an obvious presence of intimate memories within the space. Finally, I examine the apparent lack of factual information and absence of narrative indicators pertaining to the Columbine shooting as a historical event. In doing so, this section sheds light upon the Columbine Memorial's present and absent elements that contribute to the polemical interplay between public and private memory.

The WH was conceived as a gesture to the larger community affected by the impact of the Columbine shooting, yet its compositional elements challenge the wall's claim to communal experience. On one end of the WH, a dark stone (indistinguishable from dozens other lookalikes) vaguely identifies the wall's purpose: "This Wall of Healing is dedicated to those who were injured at Columbine High School and to all who were touched by the tragic events of April 20, 1999." Such a description is so broadly defined that it essentially speaks to anyone who was affected—physically, emotionally, or otherwise—by the shooting. As such, the WH presents itself as a democratic site, dedicated as equally to a wounded Columbine faculty member as it is to an East Coast suburbanite who relentlessly followed news coverage of the shooting in 1999.

However, when juxtaposed with the quotes and memories inscribed on the WH, this dedication creates an oxymoronic effect. The memories immortalized in the WH are singular and individualized, as evidenced by certain identifiers (e.g., "student," "injured victim's family," "faculty"). Four stones bear the real names of their authors, while another three remain unmarked and unidentified. On the whole, these markers—simultaneously specific and anonymous—preserve unique identities at the same time they protect the individual people implicated by such identities.

This deliberate and rhetorical choice of naming can be read in a couple of ways. Even though the quotes inscribed on the WH are those of individual people, labeling the memories

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with vague descriptors preserves the anonymity of the people who uttered them. This broad

scope is reflected in the range of comments featured on the WH:

> "I hope people come here to this place to think about how they themselves can be better people rather than come here to reflect on death." (parent)

> "A kid my age isn't supposed to go to that many funerals." (student)

> "It brought the nation to its knees, but now that we've gotten back up how have things changed; what have we learned?" (unmarked)

> "You're a Columbine Rebel for life and no one can ever take that away from you." (student)

> "Nobody ever trained for this; we were just teachers doing what we did every day." (faculty)

> "Those of us who are people of faith in this community turned to God, found he was there and found he wasn't silent." (unmarked)

> "I didn't have any answers." (student)

> "I'm trying to raise my kids normal, even though I'm not normal anymore." (parent)

> "The children and Dave are what we need to remember." (faculty)

> "Rather than a loss of innocence, I've got to hope that something like this encourages us to be better people." (unmarked)

> "The definition of normal changed on that day." (parent)

As an identity protection mechanism, the inclusion of nondescript identifiers, such as "student"

or "parent," retains some semblance of the speaker's connection to Columbine while not sharing

his or her real name with anyone and everyone who visits the memorial. In addition, by replacing

individual names with broad descriptors, the individualized nature of the memories captured in

the WH becomes blurred. The glossing-over of individual entities thus provides the illusion that

these are the memories of the entire community: it furthers the idea that these are the memories

of *any* "student" or *any* "faculty" or, in the case of the unmarked stones, *anybody*.

Because each comment is labeled with a sliver of the identity of the person who produced it, these memories take on a distinct, yet still shapeless, form. The assimilation of memories into neatly categorized identities nonetheless characterizes the utterance to some degree; however, the vagueness of such labeling functions to erase the diversity found within any community. As such, a significant portion of the WH, while devoted to those "touched by the tragedy," leaves the community's individual nuance muted and unaccounted for.

At the same time, four WH stones contain the marks of their authors. Three of these comments were made during the memorial groundbreaking, and the fourth from a Columbine teacher:

> "We dedicate this ground to the memory of the 13; We dedicate this ground to those who suffered physical harm; We dedicate this ground to the students and staff who were at Columbine High School; We dedicate this ground to all of their families; And we dedicate this ground to the community that is Columbine; We are … Columbine." (Lee Andres, Columbine Teacher)

> "Columbine was a momentous event in the history of the country… Even in the midst of tragedy we've seen the best, the best there is to see about our nation and about human nature." (President Bill Clinton at groundbreaking)

> "They're here; can you feel them? Our angels ………." (Dawn Anna at Memorial groundbreaking)

> "We remember every parent who battled depression and grief, anger and sorrow; who battled the relentless task of waking up knowing their child would not come home. We remember every parent, every friend who spent countless hours in dozens of hospital rooms and bedside vigils, in the slow and painful process of recovery. We remember our pain, we remember our sorrow; we remember our heroes. We remember those who in selfless acts of courage; who in sacrificial dedication risked all in time of crises and need." (Gino Geraci, at Memorial groundbreaking)

Given their detail and depth of expression, the words inscribed on these four stones take on a definitively more complex and human nature than their vaguely identified counterparts. Rather than following a linear pattern or narrative, these individualized sound bites, along with the rest, are arranged in seemingly random fashion.

Unless indicated otherwise, each of the memories on the WH were gathered out of hours of interviews with community members and subsequently handpicked by the Columbine Memorial Committee. This deliberate and highly rhetorical process exemplifies Burke's conceptualization of terministic screens in regards to the reality of Columbine.[118] Out of a wealth of interview material, the Columbine Memorial Committee deliberately *selected* which comments to display, and in doing so, presented a particular *reflection* or holistic image of the community's memories of the shooting. The final product, then, inevitably *deflects* and omits those memories not chosen for inclusion in the memorial. By choosing only fragments of individual perspectives of the event, the result is a fleeting glimpse of Columbine through a particular and narrow lens. These specific memories may then subconsciously shape how others, outside of the circumscribed public, remember the event.

Though the presence of fragmented and individualized memories is evident throughout the site, it is undoubtedly most apparent in the memorial's central Ring of Remembrance. As the central and most visible feature of the memorial, the RR is a space dedicated exclusively to the thirteen victims of the Columbine shooting. Here, the Columbine Memorial Committee afforded a majority of design control to the immediate families of each victim, in that the families determined what the inscriptions of their loved ones would include. The content of each victim's placard is unique to the individual, but they all share a distinct commonality—in the RR, the victims of Columbine have been immortalized by the intimate moments of their everyday lives:

> …Academically you shined so very bright. Never forgotten will be the moment when you were listening to music, watching a football game and working on your Algebra. When questioned about the distractions, using your Forrest Gump voice you replied, "I have a 4.0, and that is all I am going to say about that."… (Matthew Kechter)

> …In her diary she wrote: "*I won't be labeled as average.*"… (Rachel Joy Scott)

[Excerpts from Lauren's Diary] …I feel so peaceful, calm, and joyful; like I am on the verge of enlightenment. There is so much more going on here than we realize. I do think humanity is losing touch with itself and their relationship with their surroundings. Unfortunately it usually takes a huge trauma to get people to realize what is important and I feel that is what is going to happen to wake up everyone to get in touch with their spiritual sides. I am not afraid of death for it is only a transition. For, in the end all there is, is love. (Lauren Townsend)

…We remember Daniel as a boy with a gentle spirit and a shy grin. Often charming and sometimes intense, he was just coming into his own. He still saw the world through largely innocent eyes. He was an inquisitive and occasionally maddening adolescent who would challenge you to examine your assumptions about most everything…
(Daniel Mauser)

Isaiah died in a room filled with hate and darkness. He now lives in a beautiful heavenly room filled with light… (Isaiah Shoels)

…We are grateful for his final words: "Tell my girls I love them", we love you too.
(William "Dave" Sanders)

A young man, who as a child struggled with developmental delays and learning disabilities…Kyle had been a student at Columbine only three months and was just beginning to spread his wings. The world around him was beginning to open up for a young boy who had struggled through school and life. But, through all his delays and difficulties he always smiled, forgave and saw the GOOD in those around him…
(Kyle Velasquez)

These comments and others illustrate the wealth of sentiments inscribed throughout the RR. As an identification mechanism, these commemorative excerpts certainly personalize and humanize the victims' stones. However, the foregrounding of such intensely private memories and recollections from family members can also function in quite the opposite way. From the perspective of someone outside the narrowly circumscribed public, these intimations might appear intrusive, voyeuristic, or inappropriate. For instance, the families of Rachel Scott and Lauren Townsend chose to publicize and make permanent portions of the girls' diaries. Documents such as journals and diaries—as we know through mediated depictions and everyday experience—are often a physical repository for one's most personal ponderings, desires, struggles, or frustrations, and typically, their access is intended for the owner alone. Yet,

substantial portions of Lauren's diary, and selected sentences from Rachel's, have been etched in stone for thousands of strangers to read. Lauren and Rachel's stones, like the others, demonstrate the obvious, and rather dissonant, presence of intimacy as it is highlighted within the memorial site. Through the opportunity for the victims' families to exercise agency over their loved one's inscription may be read as decorous or respectful, it additionally constrains victims' identities and potentially alienates members of the larger public.

While private interests are distinctly present in the Columbine Memorial, significant public interests are entirely excluded from the conversation the memorial site initiates. Although public memory materializes in the comments embedded on the Wall of Healing, the memories presented are primarily those of a specific and narrowly defined public: members of this public hold direct ties to the Columbine community, as students, faculty, or parents. For those existing outside of this narrowly circumscribed public, the Memorial falls short in its efforts to invite the larger public into the space. The WH, though dedicated to "all who were touched" by Columbine, proclaims the Columbine Memorial was in part erected to "provide a historic record of this tragedy and to deliver a message of hope for many generations to come." In the case of public commemorative sites, historical information and epideictic reflection often work in tandem—even if the facts themselves are painful to acknowledge. Indeed, as Kirt Wilson contends, "Memory is not comprised simply of facts about the past, nor it is solely myth. It is, instead, a rhetorically negotiated commingling of history and commemoration, each form dictating slightly different exigencies."[119] Even though stomaching the specificities of a grisly historical event might be uncomfortable for some audiences, these epideictic appeals to emotion and human nature ultimately strengthen the necessity for a community to reflect and learn from the event. For example, what would be the significance of the Spartan 300 who stood against the

Persian army in ancient Greece if the story omitted the brutal slaughter of all 300 men? Despite

its painful and gruesome memory, this legend, and many others throughout Western civilization,

gleans much of its epideictic and cultural value from the historical facts and information that

structure the story itself.

Whether presented in the form of stories or memorials, people turn to historical accounts

and records for essential information pertaining to the factual record of events. What happened?

Who was involved? When did it happen? How did it take place? Why did it occur? Although for

Columbine, the question of "why?" may never be answered, the Memorial site omits other vital

details. The plaque at the entrance to the Memorial introduces visitors to the site as such:

> On April 20, 1999, in a senseless act of violence, twelve students and one teacher were
> killed, and many others injured at Columbine High School. It was a tragic event that
> shook the Columbine and metro Denver communities, horrified and saddened the nation,
> and changed forever our perceptions of the safety and security within a school typical of
> so many across America.
> Over time, Columbine parents, students, faculty, and community leaders designed and
> constructed this Columbine Memorial to remember those killed and injured that day and
> honor their lives. This Memorial is dedicated to those innocent victims, so that they are
> "never forgotten".

Though the introduction briefly orients visitors to the purpose and intent of the Memorial, it

virtually erases *what* happened (a mass school shooting) and *who* did it (two Columbine

students, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold), two fundamental elements of the Columbine narrative.

This indicator of this absence, it seems, might be distilled to a single phrase featured on

the introductory plaque: "a senseless act of violence." That the events of the Columbine shooting

were characterized by violence is hardly disputable. However, the words "senseless act" connote

a greater level of subjectivity, particularly within the memorial site. First, the "senseless act," as

the inscription suggests, occurred out of nowhere and was perpetrated by no agent. In addition,

"senseless" is a term typically associated with acts of unconsciousness or foolishness—neither of

which is totally accurate in this instance. From what we know in retrospect, the young men who carried out the Columbine shooting were cognizant, alert, and capable. Therefore, the phrase "senseless act of violence" is almost certainly reflective not of Klebold and Harris' agency, but instead of the subsequent reactions from families, community members, and people from around the country.

Within the memorial space, the Columbine narrative's evident plot holes are implied and left unstated for members of the public familiar with the events of the shooting. In doing so, this omission may be read as the utilization of enthymeme, a rhetorical pattern of argument in which one or more pieces of an assertion are omitted—with the intention being that audiences participate in their own persuasion by filling in the blanks. Enthymemes, then, rely heavily upon commonsense and cultural knowledge in order to function successfully. However, nearly sixteen years after the Columbine shooting, a growing percentage of the population was either too young to remember the event or had not yet been born. Because the *who* and *what* are erased from the "historic record" of the Columbine Memorial, the blanks of this enthymatic space remain unfilled. Additionally, this information would aid those visitors whose memories of the event have faded with time and the proliferation of high-profile school shootings. This omission of historical information, in many ways, disintegrates the memorial's rhetorical argument—and ultimately, public identification with the Columbine legacy.

Aside from withholding the facts of Columbine, the purpose of excluding this information may be interpreted in several ways. First, such action demonstrates the Columbine Memorial Committee's efforts to erase the carnage of the shooting. The Columbine shooting, even a decade and a half later, remains seared into the cultural memory of many U.S. Americans. It was, and still remains for many, a tragedy that shocked the Denver metropolitan area and the

nation as a whole. In the days, weeks, and months following the shooting, mainstream news outlets rehashed facts and speculation incessantly, and this zealous coverage contributed to the notoriety and memorable nature of the Columbine shooting. Yet, as years pass, and as the intensity and emotional coverage of Columbine fade, it is quite likely that younger generations cannot and will not experience the same degree of affect as their parents or older siblings without some anchoring in objective facts and information about the shooting. Although the choice to exclude grisly descriptions respects many families and loved ones, it compromises the Memorial's ability to "provide a historic record" of Columbine and ways it has shaped contemporary U.S. American society.

At the same time the Memorial suppresses objective historical record of the Columbine shooting, it silences the perpetrators completely. Because Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold remain unnamed whatsoever, the "senseless act of violence" mentioned on the introductory plaque—the "tragedy" mentioned elsewhere around the Memorial—was, in a literal sense, committed by no one. The emotionally charged question of whether or not Harris and Klebold deserved posthumous commemoration existed from the start, as evidenced by Greg Zanis' fourteenth and fifteenth crosses. In the end, the decision to focus solely on Harris and Klebold's victims prevailed, resulting in an apparent discrepancy between the memorial site and Columbine's historical narrative. Though this omission may be desirable, even purgative or cathartic, for some visitors—specifically, the intimate Columbine community of families, students, teachers, and loved ones—it blatantly scapegoats the teenaged shooters and effectively keeps other visitors uninformed. Not only does this absence of information about the shooting and the shooters distort and render the historical record incomplete, it also exposes the privileges at work in determining what is and is not appropriate in public commemorative sites.

The ways in which presence and absence play out in the Columbine Memorial further characterize the site's contentious relationship between private and public memory. Despite its labeling as a dedication to "all who were touched by the tragic events," the WH's curious amalgam of specific memories and vague identities calls into question its ability to connect with members of a widely defined public. In addition, one of the memorial's most prominent features, the RR, places the private memories of victims and their families quite literally at center stage within the commemorative space. Further, the site's self-presentation as a permanent reminder and historical record of the Columbine shooting all but eliminates any factual information of the incident itself, in particular, the shooters Harris and Klebold. Taken together, these material tactics produce a compelling and very rhetorical message that ultimately publicizes the private and makes public interests absent.

## Intimacy/Publicity

As gestured to throughout the discussion of Presence/Absence, a second trend that materializes within the Columbine Memorial is the compelling presentation of intimacy in a public setting. With its permanent location in Littleton's Clement Park, just a few hundred yards from Columbine High School, the Memorial is physically and spatially public; it is also temporally public, as it is open to anyone, year-round, from 6 A.M. to 10 P.M. While the Memorial is public in multiple senses of the word, certain aspects of the commemorative site are undeniably private—contributing to an interesting, and even privileged, manifestation of intimacy in public space. My aim here is not to argue that no public details exist, but rather that gestures toward the public are minimal and often undercut by private interests repeatedly throughout the memorial. This trend, therefore, serves as further evidence that the responses

invited by the Columbine Memorial do little to promote civic and epideictic engagement with the events and issues of Columbine itself.

The Columbine Memorial's public nature makes the identification of privacy and intimacy within the space somewhat difficult. Furthermore, nearly all visitors to the Columbine Memorial will interpret and respond to the site in multiple and competing ways. These contested and varied readings occur largely due to the polysemic nature of rhetorical artifacts such as memorials or popular media. Indeed, as Celeste Condit illuminates, polysemic texts are "capable of bearing multiple meanings because of the varying intertextual relationships they carry…and because of the varying constructions (or interests) of receivers."[120] In essence, any given artifact both shapes and is shaped by its socially constructed position—in relation to other texts as well as its audience.

Drawing from the assumption that rhetorical texts are by their nature polysemic, words are one of the most common—and complicated—ways humans convey intimacy in both private and public settings. For example, if two lovers express the phrase, "I love you, meat-head," the ironic message, despite the words' literal meaning, likely conveys caring and affectionate humor toward the other person. Should the couple utter the same words in public, the connotative, relational meaning (and thus, irony) of this affectionate phrase might be lost and appear a bit strange in the presence of others. Hence, when the connotative meanings of the words used are not agreed upon or understood by all audience members, the message becomes mistranslated and its intimacy falls silent.

During the Columbine Memorial's planning stages, immediate members of victim's families had the opportunity to compose a personalized message to be inscribed on their loved one's placard. Written in various points of view and verb tenses, the inscriptions vary in degrees

of intimacy. For instance, Isaiah Shoel's message refers to the boy in the past tense: "He loved sports, playing and joking with his family, and was taught to love others no matter how they treated him." Kelly Fleming speaks in her own words, as her family selected for her placard a poem she had written the year prior: "I step outside, what did I hear? / I heard the whispers, / And the cries of the people's fear. / The loneliness of wisdom, / Can that be?" Likewise, Lauren Townsend's family selected passages from the teen's personal journal that seemed to forecast her untimely demise and eagerness to meet Jesus in heaven. A few families included sentiments addressed directly to their deceased. A portion of Daniel Rohrbough's stone reads, "Just beginning your journey with so much to learn, yet you taught us so much. We miss you…" The presence of multiple points of view connotes some degree of ambiguity, as family members struggle to make sense of their position within the context of a significant loss. It is also worth noting that some family members used these passages as an opportunity to communicate their final messages and sentiments to their loved one. By employing a direct style of address, such inscriptions (like those of Matthew Kechter: "you brought joy to those around you with a kind word or a gentle smile," or Steven Curnow: "Steve, you are forever in our hearts. Soar high, and fly straight. We love you!") mimic the ways in which family members might actually communicate with one another. This pseudo-conversation between family members and the dead further demonstrates the heartfelt and intimate intentions of the RR space.

Similarly, the content of the thirteen inscriptions varies widely. Most entries paint an image of the victim as their family remembered him or her. These recollections often take the form of description in the past tense, and often these memories are augmented by inside jokes, vivid recollections, cherished Bible verses, quotes, or diary entries. In addition to personalizing and humanizing their subjects, these stylistic additions imbue the inscriptions with myriad

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emotions, including grief, hope, pain, love, sorrow, or faith. In some cases—particularly those

stones featuring words written or spoken by the dead, for example, Rachel Scott, Lauren

Townsend, or Daniel Rohrbough—these passages function as material remains of the victim and

his or her memory. However, the texts used to convey these memories are intensely intimate, for

they portray a side of the individual many visitors to the Columbine Memorial would never

know. For instance, Steven Curnow's stone portrays him through a touching family vacation

memory that inspired the boy's passion for flying:

> The plane hit some pretty rough turbulence, dropping altitude, tossing side-to-side and
> shuddering. Talking on the plane suddenly stopped, with many of the passengers
> becoming white-knuckled and tightening their grips on the arms of the seats. Ten year-
> old Steven's reaction was: *"Wow! That was cool; let's do it again!"*

Daniel Mauser's stone alludes to the ways his family has had to continue their lives without him:

> …To his parents he was a first-born gift with spiritual dimensions that caused us to seek a
> deeper life. To his sister Christine, he was a fun companion but also one who was willing
> to share his wisdom and knowledge. To his sister Madeline he will be the brother who
> was never known, but whose presence will always be felt…

Likewise, visitors are made privy to the teenage aspirations and desires of Corey DePooter:

> …Corey had just turned seventeen and was excited about his future. He was working at a
> golf course to save up for his first car. His goal was to become an officer in the Marine
> Corps. Corey looked forward to becoming a husband and a father and sharing his faith
> with his children…

In this way, the intimacy of these memories and passages create a space primarily designated for

the victims' families, their loved ones, and those who knew them personally. Displaying these

aspects of individuals' private lives in the Memorial space appear to make those aspects

available for public consumption and perhaps spectacle. Yet, in reality, the degree of intimacy

featured in the RR complicates and contributes to a barrier that in some ways prevents the

general public from fully being able to process and make sense of the individuals commemorated

in the space. Despite its position in a public memorial, the RR in particular thus seems more

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convincingly designated for private consumption by the families and loved ones of the

Columbine victims.

One placard in particular infuses the RR with intimacy in a different way. The message

displayed on Daniel Rohrbough's stone, for instance, contains an overtly political message:

> My son, in a Nation that legalized the killing of innocent children in the womb, in a
> County where authorities would lie and cover up what they did, in a Godless school
> system your life was taken… Dan, I'm sorry.
> *"I love you Dad, I'll see you tomorrow."* 7:00 p.m., April 19, 1999.
> *"There is no peace,"* says the Lord, *"for the wicked."* Isaiah 48:22

Composed by Daniel's father, Brian, this message (and the sentiments behind it) has received a

great deal of negative criticism and positive feedback. In the years following the shooting,

Rohrbough achieved notoriety through a number of public statements expressing that Columbine

was a direct result of the growing amount of secularism in the U.S.[121] According to pro-life

organization American Right to Life (ARTL), "Brian Rohrbough became publicly involved in

the fight to recriminalize abortion after his son Daniel was murdered," and he eventually served

for two years as ARTL president.[122] Although Daniel's stone is the only one to house such a

controversial message, it brings up a compelling example of the memorial's infiltration by

private sentiments. Clearly, Brian Rohrbough sought to spread his message within the space and

via the medium he viewed as most advantageous to substantiating his claims. However, in doing

so, the memorial's lasting testament to Daniel becomes less about public acquaintance with the

slain student and more about Brian's advancement of his personal arguments.

Although the nexus of intimacy and private memories resides in the central RR, this

phenomenon is also observed in the outer WH. As described above, the WH dedicates itself to

those injured or otherwise affected by the Columbine shooting. Contained within the wall are a

number of comments and responses gleaned from personal interviews about the incident. Though

these memories are meant to represent the community's memory, the individual (albeit anonymous) signifiers distinguish the community being represented as a specific community—a community comprised primarily of students, injured victims' families, parents, and faculty. The memories etched in the WH, therefore, tattoo a very specific, particular, and individualized image into the cultural flesh and public memory of Columbine.

This tension between intimacy and publicity is compounded not only by physical evidence, but also by how visitors must experience the Memorial itself. Not only are the majority of memories presented individualized in and of themselves, for many visitors, the very means by which to consume these memories—through the act of reading—is also an individualized and personal endeavor. It is likely uncommon for visitors to experience the memorial by reading the words of the WH and the RR aloud; instead, each visitor experiences, processes, and connects with the words in their own way. Conversely, the individualized experience of the Columbine Memorial contrasts with those of other types of memory spaces that encourage more social and public engagement. For example, visitors to the Mount Rushmore National Memorial may gaze in awe of its grandeur, or they may take part in a number of activities and exhibits offered by the National Park Service. Each of these options allow for individuals and groups alike to reflect upon our country's quintessential values alongside and in the presence of others doing the same. Similarly, museums are another kind of memory space that foster participation and a greater level of social interaction than traditional memorials through a variety of experiential channels and media. Although visitors will inevitably perceive these spaces in his or her own way, Mount Rushmore and museums alike allow for a variety of meaningful, participatory experiences, whereas the very nature of the Columbine Memorial is such that its meaning must be gleaned from reading and interpreting its textual messages. Therefore, experiencing the Columbine

Memorial promotes individual (and thus, intimate) readings and interpretations of the epideictic message.

Adding further complexity to the Columbine Memorial, the site's dedication ceremony was imbued with rhetorical meaning. According to *The Denver Post* news coverage of the event, the ceremony was noticeably tailored toward the interests of a private, narrowly circumscribed audience. The day's itinerary first included remarks by a victim's parent, Dawn Anna Beck (mother of Lauren Townsend); a wounded student, Patrick Ireland; and a community member, Kirsten Kreiling.[123] After the speeches, the families of the thirteen victims led a procession toward the memorial. There, doves for each Columbine victim were released into the sky, and soon, 200 more doves followed the first thirteen, to represent injured students, first responders, and the larger community.[124] After the procession and dove release, the victims' families entered the memorial for the first time, where they were permitted to spend as much time as needed inside the memorial space. Once all family members had exited, community members and the public could proceed inside.[125] Despite these remarkably intimate measures, Phyllis Velasquez, whose son Kyle died at Columbine, remarked that the memorial was not solely for the families; instead, "It's more for the community and for those who want to remember."[126] Nevertheless, over one thousand people attended the ceremony, including families, school officials, former Colorado governor Bill Ritter, and community members.[127]

Even though the dedication was a temporary and ephemeral rhetorical event in comparison to the memorial itself, the ceremony's significance as an extension of the material site cannot be ignored. In addition, news coverage of the event suggests it was a day in which the emotional needs of the victims' families were foregrounded above those of anyone else in attendance. Traditionally, dedication ceremonies occur in public, as they introduce something,

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for example, a new structure or facility, to the world for the very first time.  Dedications, then, might even be interpreted as a metaphorical birthing ceremony, during which the audience is invited to see the new object in a particular way. In the case of the Columbine Memorial dedication, the frequent prioritization of families—at the risk of displacing the public—quite likely acts as a filter through which many people, especially those present at the ceremony, view the site. So while the dedication ceremony is not a central focus of my analysis *per se*, its deliberate and rhetorical staging further supports the assertions I offer pertaining to the privileging of private and individualized memory over that of the public.

The demarcations between intimacy and publicity within the memorial site are not definitive or clear-cut. Instead, their distinctions are fluid, making the relationship between the memorial's intimate and public elements negotiable and open to interpretation. Yet, because intimacy is amplified to the extent that it stifles the Columbine Memorial's public purposes, these issues of private memory become most salient and recognizable throughout the site. Much of the memorial's intimacy occurs via a particular channel—written word. However, the messages communicated through discursive and material means function in ways that further blur the prioritization of memory in the Columbine Memorial.

## Discursivity/Materiality

A third and final interaction to consider is that which occurs between the Columbine Memorial's discursive and material elements. Discursivity and materiality undoubtedly play a pivotal role in the overall memorial experience; however, the ways in which each is enacted shape the types of responses the Columbine Memorial might invoke from its visitors. In many

ways, the overwhelming presence of discursive elements within the memorial contribute to the meaning able to be ascertained from the site, as well as the privileging of private memory in public space. Furthermore, material rhetorical elements give the memorial its pleasing aesthetic appearance, while also offering alternative ways of viewing the physical site as well as the tragic event it commemorates.

As compared to many public memorials, the Columbine Memorial contains a great deal of text that must be read in order to make sense of the site. For example, the WH alone contains nearly 750 words; the thirteen placards of the RR range in length from approximately 160 to 250 words, for an overall total of between 2,000 and 3,250 words. With these word counts, should a visitor read the memorial's text in its entirety, they will essentially read up to the equivalent of a sixteen-page, typed, double-spaced essay. For educated visitors (e.g., with a high school diploma or higher) this amount of reading may seem relatively harmless. Though sentence structure and syntax are relatively accessible throughout the memorial text, for those with lower reading skills, the sheer volume of this amount of reading can be daunting and even turn them off from reading each inscription. Similarly, the site's inclusion of so many discursive symbols neglects entire audiences of sight-impaired or illiterate individuals, further hindering the Columbine Memorial's ability to "deliver a message of hope for many generations to come," as one inscription on the WH suggests.

So, in one sense, the memorial is made of stone, but in another sense, it is constructed of words. Even if visitors take the time to read the Columbine Memorial's thousands of words, the content contained in these words is particularly significant. As observed within the tensions of presence/absence and intimacy/publicity, the privileging of private memory is made evident through the Memorial's discursive aspects. The memories presented throughout portray only a

narrow remembering of the events and victims of Columbine, and these memories are communicated through exclusively linguistic, discursive tactics. And yet, what is the significance of the Memorial without these words? Without its discursiveness, the site would be rendered meaningless, for it is through the power of words that the Columbine Memorial retains any significance at all.

As a result, the Memorial is not what it appears to be on first glance. In fact, some might read the site as externally public and internally private. Upon arriving at the Columbine Memorial, it is certainly presented as a public space for all to enter. Upon actually entering the space, however, the inner workings of the Memorial are revealed: these tributes and memories are intimate, private, even foreign to some—perhaps making those not directly tied to the Columbine shooting feel distanced, like intruders and outsiders.

At the same time the Columbine Memorial is an intensely discursive and intimate space, it is in many ways structurally tailored toward a general public audience. This general public (folks not directly connected to the Columbine shooting as students, parents, or faculty) may initially identify with the site for its use of traditional memorial forms. According to signs posted near the entrance, the Memorial is a space in which to use quiet and respectful voices. A soothing, flowing fountain greets visitors once inside the Memorial's natural, red stone borders. Trees, shrubs, flowers, and other foliage flourish near the center of the structure, where visitors may rest or reflect on long, low, stone benches. All of these elements are commonly found in public commemorative sites, and therefore, including design elements such as water structures and plant life is familiar and likely meets many visitors' expectations for a memorial site. The planning of a memorial is a richly rhetorical process, and the Columbine Memorial Committee's

choice to employ these tactics helps to foster identification and understanding between visitors and the space.

Some of the Columbine Memorial's most significant elements are deliberately positioned at center stage, in the RR. Made up of thirteen placards, the ring is dedicated exclusively to those killed during the Columbine shooting. The placards embody a distinct style—large, rectangular, granite, engraved, waist-height with the victims' name in large lettering near the top—that bears an uncanny resemblance to the form of a traditional gravestone. While visitors are likely to identify these markers as such, the presence of gravestones in this space lends an air of dissonance, as most visitors typically experience these granite structures in a cemetery or similar place of mourning. So, at the same time visitors are reminded of the death and pain of Columbine, they are enveloped by the RR's circular shape and rounded embrace. As a shape devoid of sharp angles or jutting corners, the ring is visually soothing and thus provides a degree of material comfort to those inside its borders.

Though the RR's shape is consonant with the rounded design of the larger memorial, the RR provides an embodied experience different from other portions of the site. Its spatial dimensions make it the smallest (semi-) cordoned off portion of the memorial, compelling visitors to stand closer to each other than in any other sections of the site. Though the RR is ring-shaped, three openings interrupt its circular borders to allow visitors to enter the ring's center. So while the RR is a ring in many senses of the word, it is a broken ring, made up of the stone placards that commemorate each victim of the Columbine shooting. Visitors standing inside the RR stand inside a physical barrier separating them from those viewing other portions of the memorial. Second, the presence of metaphorical gravestones compels visitors to approach (consciously or unconsciously) the sections of the RR with reverence, respect, and hushed

voices. Finally, the RR lies deep in the center of a larger circular form, and thus it may be read as a metaphorical, material representation of a mother's womb, one of the most intimate spaces known by humankind. While standing within its comparatively tight confines, visitors feel the RR's embrace, and they become enveloped in its messages of peacefulness and tribute.

Aside from the Columbine Memorial's tangible elements, implicit material signifiers offer themselves for public consumption as well. The trees and foliage—at the same time they aesthetically pleasing and eco-friendly—create the aura of a familiar and welcoming natural environment. These plants also indicate the presence of life. Placed symbolically at the center of the memorial, the healthy, green foliage and flowers communicate to visitors the resiliency of life—even deep in the midst of tragedy. Though these rhetorical tactics may not be consciously acknowledged by a majority of visitors, their presence continues to affect the experience of all who enter the memorial space.

However, the uplifting messages of reverence, resiliency, and hope are not limited to the confines of the memorial itself. In addition to the meanings conveyed within the Columbine Memorial, additional meanings may be drawn from traveling an elevated walking path that loops around the site. Visitors who choose to walk this path may exit the memorial and stroll up a sloping, paved walkway that will bring them around the memorial and end at the top of Clement Hill. Not only does this short journey provide stunning views of the surrounding suburban area, the picturesque Rocky Mountains, and Columbine High School, it allows visitors to situate the Columbine Memorial in its natural surroundings.

This bird's-eye view mirrors Dickinson, Ott, and Aoki's notion of the "experiential landscape," in that the experience of a memory site "comprises not just the tangible materials available in that place, but also the full range of memorized images that persons bring with

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them."[128] Because the physical environment and memories associated with the Columbine Memorial are inextricably interconnected, this metaphorical pilgrimage provides greater contextualization while affording visitors the ability to rise up and out of the depths of tragedy. In traveling the path around the memorial, visitors' widened visual scope, from atop Clement Hill, allow them to participate and experience the site in different way from those who remain within the isolated walls of the space. Visitors who choose to walk this path, then, take in a scenic view that not only produces alternate and embodied ways of seeing Columbine in its geographic location, but also provides an opportunity to reflect upon, and ultimately transcend, the violence that originally prompted the need for a memorial.

In summation, the experience of the Columbine Memorial produces a range of various readings and interpretations of the site as well as the Columbine shooting itself. By approaching the memorial as a rhetorical text, several trends emerge that inform our understanding of public and private memories pertaining to commemoration of the Columbine shooting. An observation of the memorial's present and absent elements uncovers rhetorical tactics employed, especially in the WH, that advance particular ways of seeing communal and individual memories. Furthermore, the absence of certain contextual information (namely, the shooters and their actions)—despite the memorial's attempt to serve as a historical record of the event—pierces significant plot holes into the story of Columbine with little attempt to complete the narrative. Secondly, a trend may be observed that speaks to the nuanced manifestations of intimacy within the Columbine Memorial as a public site. As discussed, the apparent privileging of private and individualized sentiments within the memorial site (and its the dedication ceremony) produce a somewhat dichotomous experience for visitors who identify outside of the narrowly circumscribed public of family members, students, and intimates. Lastly, the memorial's

discursive and material elements illustrate yet another trend of rhetorically crafting particular ways of seeing within the Columbine Memorial. As a relatively text-heavy memorial, a majority of the site's meaning is conveyed discursively, and therefore, visitors must take the time to read, process, and make sense of the particular messages portrayed throughout the space. At the same time, the Columbine Memorial's tangible structure and material elements lend additional interpretations and alternate ways of seeing the site within its larger, contextual landscape.

This examination of the Columbine Memorial functions as just one case study in the burgeoning field of research on public commemorative sites. Nonetheless, my analysis allows me to make several conclusions regarding this memorial in particular. First, the rhetorical tactics of the Columbine Memorial result in an overall privileging of private interests (namely, those of victims' family members) that leave members of the larger public either excluded or uninvited into the deeper, intimate interstices of the memorial experience. Though the memorial contains a few inclusionary gestures toward the loosely defined larger public, the site ultimately presents itself as a space intended for those related to the Columbine victims, be it through blood or social ties. Though the critique furthered here speaks to just one memorial, it contributes to and moves forward a number of scholarly conversations pertaining to memory, commemoration, and the materiality of memory places.

Figure 6. Proximity of Columbine Memorial site to Columbine High School, as observed via Google Maps satellite view. Screenshot taken April 12, 2015 by Jena Schwake.

CONCLUSION


It goes without saying that the legacy of the Columbine High School shooting was (and continues to be) incredibly complicated. Not only did the shooting thrust Littleton into the national spotlight, it demanded the attention of journalists, politicians, and everyday folks from coast to coast. Furthermore, the Columbine shooting marked the first time Americans had watched such a gruesome attack—involving young people, nonetheless—in real time, as it unfolded, from their television screens. The phrase "We are Columbine" entered local vernacular, as it signified solidarity and identification with the victims, witnesses, school staff, families, and community members. Once the thirteen victims had received their proper interments, the complex rhetorical situation urged the erection of an equally proper, permanent memorial. Upon first glance, the Columbine Memorial accomplishes what most people would expect of it—a sincere, aesthetic, decorous, physical tribute to thirteen lives cut short. A deeper look, however, begs the question: Who is Columbine?

As has been explicated in the preceding chapters, questions of commemoration, memory, and memorials—particularly in regards to traumatic or tragic events, like Columbine—have circulated for decades. What, and who, should be highlighted? What, and who, should be excluded? How should the Columbine narrative be told? Who is the memorial for—victims, families, students, the nation? Whose interests should be addressed, and whose interests should not be considered? More often than not, issues of remembrance are difficult to navigate, for they are inextricably tied up in complicating factors, such as representation, history, media, or politics. Commemorating Columbine was especially contentious, for the shooting's occurrence disrupted many dominant discourses surrounding youth, gun access, and mental illness.

Furthermore, the popularization of personal cellular devices in the late 1990s allowed news media outlets to exploit and cover the horrific event even as it continued to unfold. The scope and seriousness of these complexities, therefore, presented a unique commemorative exigency, in that a memorial dedicated to the shooting needed to pay homage to the victims while negotiating the needs of the multiple publics involved, including families, Columbine students, and the wider community.

However, the responsibility for acknowledging the distinct interests of these various publics has not always been left up to the memorial itself. In recent decades, rhetorical scholars have taken up these questions in order to explore the intricate and evolving relationship between memory and public space. Namely, Blair and Michel as well as Blair, Michel, and Pucci, Jr. examined such phenomena within the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the AIDS Memorial Quilt, ultimately determining that the privileging of private memories within public memorials contributes to a "dislocation of the public."[129] As they argued in 2007, these privatized memory practices would overshadow the public nature of memorials and eliminate the need for public memorials altogether.

In order to further explore this potential commemorative trend, here I have turned to the Columbine Memorial to conduct a contemporary critique of a public memory place. Through my analysis of this particular site, I have identified a similar phenomenon at work within the space, one that I term "forgetting of the public." By my theorization, I observe this occurrence as a rhetorically oriented (and thus, deliberate) extension of Blair and Michel's dislocation of the public. Forgetting the public, as I conceive it, results from a significant privileging of individualized, private memories within public commemorative sites, ultimately leaving those visitors outside of a narrowly circumscribed public unacknowledged—and thus, forgotten—by

the memorial site. This forgetting is, of course, rhetorical, and it extends Blair and Michel's idea by highlighting the prioritization of private interests and memories at the expense of public interests and memories. While a memorial may genuinely forget to consider public interests in its design, this oversight becomes decidedly problematic when forgetting the public interferes with the epideictic processes necessary for civic engagement and reflection upon incidents like Columbine.

The Columbine Memorial's many layers of discursive and material complexity make it a compelling rhetorical text that may be approached from a number of angles. For the purposes of my study, I set out to examine the memorial's employment of specific rhetorical tactics, as viewed through the paradoxical relationship between private and public memory. Peering through this critical lens, I identified three trends occurring within the Columbine Memorial site that inform our understanding of contemporary memorial sites, including Presence/Absence, Intimacy/Publicity, and Discursivity/Materiality. Within each, I pointed to specific instances that demonstrate an apparent forgetting of the public, arriving at the conclusion that the Columbine Memorial perpetuates the privileging of private interests over those of the general public.

In pushing this concept forward, I sought to tease out the answers to three questions. First, how does the Columbine Memorial perpetuate a dislocation of the public, or a more flagrant forgetting of the public? Secondly, what motivations compel the memorial to dislocate or forget its public? Finally, what are the consequences, stakes, and future implications of these phenomena, and do they indicate a trend in public commemoration as a whole? Not only do these questions address the rhetorical implications of the Columbine Memorial, they work to shed light upon the issues of forgetting the public as well as the culture of public commemoration more broadly. In the remainder of this conclusion, I attempt to answer these

questions and consider what implications these answers may have for public memory and rhetorical studies.

The Columbine Memorial and Forgetting the Public

Through my analysis in Chapter 3, I demonstrate there are several rhetorical tactics that play a key role in facilitating forgetting of the public in the Columbine Memorial. First, the memorial highlights the presence of certain, narrowly circumscribed memories. This, I contend, is accomplished in a number of ways, beginning with the vague identification of memories throughout the outer WH. As visitors move toward the center of the memorial, it becomes apparent that private and intimate memories are prioritized as a focal point of the site. At the same time these privileging tactics are at work, the historical information crucial to a complete understanding of the Columbine shooting has been all but eradicated. Second, the Columbine Memorial's privileging of intimacy within a public space calls into question the ways it functions as a public memorial. The most salient examples of this phenomenon occur as a result of the highly sentimental, intimate memories—which include diary entries, inside jokes, and political statements—located throughout the RR. Intimacy is also evidenced through the rather isolating experience of the memorial itself, in that most of the memorial's significance must be gleaned through the private and individualized act of reading. Lastly, the interplay between discursivity and materiality suggests that while a vast majority of the memorial's meaning might be ascertained from its written words, materiality plays a pivotal role in how visitors experience and ultimately make sense of the site. Though much of the site's meaning is communicated discursively, and visitors must invest the time to read, process, and make sense of its thousands

of words, the site's overall design and material elements provide wider, alternative ways of seeing the site within its larger historical and geographical landscape.

By understanding the tactics for forgetting the public in the context of the Columbine Memorial, we can also consider what other instances of forgetting the public are likely to emerge in future commemorative acts. An evident place to consider additional tactics for forgetting the public may be memorials and commemorations to the victims of other school shootings who share many of the same exigencies as remembering Columbine. One notable example is the formation of the Sandy Hook Permanent Memorial Commission, a group dedicated to researching, fundraising, and making recommendations pertaining to the construction of a memorial to honor the twenty-six victims of the 2012 shooting.[130] So similar, in fact, are the exigencies of remembering Sandy Hook and Columbine that the Newtown commission has reportedly turned to the Littleton community for guidance on the issue.[131] If, as this collaboration suggests, the Newtown committee finds the Columbine Memorial to be a righteous commemoration of its victim-subjects, it is quite likely that a permanent Sandy Hook memorial will reflect some of these tactics of forgetting the public. For instance, I expect the Sandy Hook memorial to take the interests of victims' families into primary consideration, followed by those with fewer ties to the shooting. In addition, I anticipate this memorial to include the names of the twenty-six victims as well as some form of personalized tribute to each child and staff member killed at Sandy Hook. As memorials dedicated to victims of gun violence crop up around the country, it will be necessary to examine these memorials within the larger culture of public commemoration and contemporary ideals of memory and national identity.

Taken within the context of other notable memorials of the last three decades, I believe the rhetorical tactics of forgetting the public detected in the Columbine Memorial indicate a

larger, evolving trend in contemporary memorial culture. In addition, I would include the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, AIDS Memorial Quilt, and 9/11 Memorial to round out this commemorative chronology of memorials that have made increasing rhetorical moves toward forgetting the public. The earliest exemplar, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, might be said to have kick-started this trend, as it was one of the first memorials that paid tribute to individual victims (as opposed to a collective of victims) on a national stage. Then, the AIDS Memorial Quilt and the Columbine Memorial take the notion of individualized tribute a step further by affording loved ones the ability to craft specific, personalized images of their deceased—even if this portrayal is heartbreakingly intimate. Although these practices venture toward problematic for their voyeuristic and potentially off-putting nature, each memorial exerts some effort to inviting their visitors into the site. Most recently, however, the 9/11 Memorial makes more dramatic rhetorical moves toward exclusivity, for this memorial contains spaces explicitly designated for the immediate family members of those killed on September 11, 2001. This, I argue, is where memorials cease to forget their publics and instead blatantly exclude them— literally and metaphorically—from entry into the memory space.

While I am hesitant to offer a staunchly positive or negative assessment of forgetting the public as a rhetorical practice in memorial sites, I do not condone explicit efforts to exclude members of the public from a public memorial—especially one that commemorates a national tragedy, like Columbine or 9/11. If present and future memorials repeatedly dislocate, forget, or even exclude their publics, the ramifications for the commemorative landscape are unavoidable. Not only would this trend eliminate the impetus for public memorials, but it may also signal the disintegration of public memorial culture—and ultimately, a breakdown in epideictic rhetoric and civic engagement with the past. As I have evidenced throughout this project, memorials

should make every possible effort to include their publics, for doing so increases the likelihood of successful epideictic reflection upon and civic engagement with the event commemorated. Although the chances of pleasing all publics is unlikely, a failed attempt to reach a particular audience bodes more favorably for civic engagement than forgetting to attempt at all.

*Motivations for Forgetting the Public*

My analysis also illuminates possible motivations for a memorial to forget its public in the first place. In examining the Columbine Memorial, the three rhetorical trends I have identified help us to characterize the impetus for forgetting a public in a public space. Here, I assert that this impulse is compelled by the victims' family members and intimates need for a metaphorical coping mechanism, and the construction of the Columbine Memorial allowed for this necessity to be fulfilled. This rhetorical coping device, I contend, satisfies two desires inherent and unique to the Columbine shooting.

First, the memorial's privileging of private memory enabled the eternal preservation of the victims' innocence and individuality. Because family members were primarily responsible for determining the content of the tributes to the thirteen victims, the families were also able to craft particular images of their deceased. This allowance of rhetorical agency, bestowed upon the families by the Columbine Memorial Committee, largely reflects cultural tendencies to privilege the family (particularly the parents of deceased children) throughout the planning of funeral and burial practices. Though the victims were afforded their own funerals, the RR placards in some ways allowed families a second chance at commemorating their loved ones. These descriptive, linguistic choices of the placards in the RR varied in content and form, contributing to the individuality and unique message portrayed within each victim's tribute. Analysis of these

textual remembrances reveals the use of diary entries, cherished Bible verses, inside jokes, and even quotes by the deceased, and these inclusions create a richer and deeper understanding of the victims and who they were before their untimely death. The fact that twelve of the thirteen were children is also significant, for in several instances this allowed the families to construct particular images of the victims as pure, innocent young people with promising futures and high aspirations. Often, this imagery relied upon religious references, for nine of the thirteen tributes explicitly mention God, faith, or the Bible. Doing so not only exposes the religious inclinations of the victims (or at least, their families), but it also in many ways positions the children especially as angels or even martyrs of the Christian faith.

Secondly, the privileging of privatized memory presents a rhetorical opportunity to erase, or even forget, the violence of Columbine from public memory and history altogether. As explicated above, one of the most consequential ways the Columbine Memorial forgets its public occurs through the omission of historical information from the commemorative site, resulting in narrative deficiencies for visitors unfamiliar with the events of the shooting. Upon arriving at the site, visitors become oriented to the memorial with vague language (what occurred was a "senseless act of violence") and a passive voice ("twelve students and one teacher were killed," with no mention of a subject) that ultimately eliminate the presence of shooters Harris and Klebold, and more blatantly strip the young men of their identity, agency, and personhood. Though the propriety of this measure is certainly reasonable from the standpoint of families and survivors—for recognition of Harris and Klebold might conjure unpleasant recollections and negative attitudes—it must be noted that their absence indicates a deliberate move toward writing the boys out of the historical event they instigated.

These motivations for forgetting the public need not be limited to the singular occurrence of Columbine. Thinking more globally about the increasingly technological societies in which we live, the memorial's forgetting of the public may in some ways be motivated by an equally noticeable increase in self-centric attitudes, values, and standpoints. Though we are certainly more connected with one another via social media and electronic devices, these technologies are at the same time largely contributing to a decrease in the need for face-to-face and group-oriented dialogue. This widespread shift often encourages individuals to voice their own, individualized thoughts, feelings, and experiences (for example, via personal blogs or Twitter feeds), largely to the chagrin of public consideration. While I do not intend to trivialize the Columbine Memorial by likening it to a Facebook news feed, the private sentiments expressing heartfelt emotions, professions of faith, and polarizing political arguments in many ways mirrors this twenty-first century cultural phenomenon.

Many of the same social forces that compel today's citizens to become isolated from social interaction also in some ways work to insulate us from those voices or conversations we choose not to hear. A variety of social networking sites contain an "unfollow" feature, allowing users to immediately disengage from content they find disturbing, offensive, or even mildly irritating. This affordance of such agency, I would argue, leads to two major ramifications. Not only does the affordance of such agency condition users into a mindset that encourages disengagement and detachment, users become accustomed to seeing only content and images that they want to see. These observations, in conjunction with the Columbine Memorial, suggest another motivation for forgetting the public, in that the memorial foregrounds positive and intimate memories at the expense of making some of the more painful memories known to the public.

Forgetting the public is a consequential rhetorical phenomenon that carries implications for remembering Columbine, rhetorical criticism, and public memory and commemoration more generally. These resounding implications, therefore, can be detected in realms far beyond a single memorial. The contentious and emotional nature of the event presented a number of commemorative challenges for the memorial planning committee, which resulted in a rich rhetorical artifact for critical study. Here, I further demonstrate the relevancy of this particular case study by exploring the Columbine Memorial's larger ramifications for remembrance, rhetorical critics, memory, and memorial culture.

Implications for remembering Columbine

Sixteen years later, the Columbine shooting remains a defining event in our country's social and political discourses surrounding gun control, school safety, and mental health. Since 1999, our nation has witnessed numerous more instances of gun violence in schools and communities—some even more gruesome than Columbine—however, the event retains its notoriety and infamy throughout the decades. The dedication of the Columbine Memorial in 2007, then, solidified some public and private memories of the shooting, yet the memorial's forgetting of the public influences the ways in which visitors are permitted to remember the event. Though many people are cognizant of Columbine's magnitude, memories fade with time, and visiting the Columbine Memorial may reshape or reconfigure some of these distorted memories—in potentially productive or unproductive ways. Furthermore, today's teenagers and children who visit the site, without prior knowledge of the incident, take in only a narrow sliver

of the gravity and impact of Columbine on our nation's collective and public memory of school shootings.

Similarly, by forgetting its public, the Columbine Memorial's commemorative deficiency affects its practicality as a material artifact of a major event in contemporary U.S. history. Even though interested persons may search news archives, Internet sites, and libraries for information and commentary surrounding Columbine, the memorial serves as a physical space, situated near the very site of the shooting, intended for remembrance and instruction of present and future generations. However, for many of the reasons outlined above, the Columbine Memorial especially may not carry out the responsibilities assumed by its position as a historical artifact.

Implications for rhetorical criticism and communication studies

Not only does my study expose the societal or cultural repercussions of forgetting the public, it also draws out the implications for those who perform rhetorical criticism. Aside from examining the rhetorical intricacies of a particularized text, this project illustrates the fluid and ever-changing boundaries of our responsibilities as rhetorical critics. Where does a text begin, and where does it end? How does the text affect people, places, or institutions, directly or indirectly? Who does the text speak to, and who does it not? As rhetorical scholars, we perpetually seek out texts that allow us to engage with and comment on the consequentiality of rhetorical messages. The form of these texts varies immensely—from presidential addresses to feminist speak-outs and children's books to interactive museums—and yet, each provides a glimpse into the values, attitudes, and beliefs of a particular people.

For critics studying memorials and memory spaces, the notion of forgetting the public becomes particularly salient. Indeed, should these rhetorical tactics continue to proliferate,

rhetorical critics will likely be compelled to shift their approaches in studying public memory spaces. For instance, one aim of many materially oriented critics is to determine what kinds of responses their respective text invites from an audience or audiences, just I have attempted to illustrate the reactions the Columbine Memorial prompts from its visitors. However, through this exploration, I have also endeavored to shed light upon the notion of forgetting the public, and in my view, the presence of this phenomenon warrants a slightly different approach to rhetorical texts, especially memorials and memory spaces. Much rhetorical work demands that the critic examine the text's unsaid utterances or absent elements, yet when forgetting the public is observable, it becomes even more imperative. Indeed, when this is the case, may be more productive to begin from these absences, for that which is unsaid is in many ways a productive starting point for the ways in which a memorial forgets its public. So while a trend toward forgetting the public does not drastically change the way critics should approach memory texts, the notion of "starting from nothing" it is certainly an additional consideration that should not be taken for granted in such scholarship.

The study of memory spaces, however, need not be limited to critical work. Indeed, this project opens possible avenues along which future research on the Columbine Memorial and other commemorative sites may proceed. Though this study adopts a materialist rhetorical perspective, I encourage scholars in other areas of communication studies to conduct further research utilizing alternative methodologies in order to uncover richer understandings of the site and its relationship with various publics. For example, a qualitative researcher might conduct a content analysis of the text featured at a particular memorial site. Likewise, scholars who employ ethnographic or auto-ethnographical methods might uncover the ways the site speaks to its publics as well as how the publics respond to the site.

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Implications for public memory and commemoration

Finally, the public commemoration of a particular event or tragedy has direct

implications for its recollection in public memory. As I have mentioned prior, memorials can

oftentimes function as a visitor's only tangible connection to the event being memorialized,

especially when the visitor's memories have dissipated or they are too young to remember its

occurrence. In these instances, a memorial should assume some level of responsibility as a

historical record that aids in either clarifying fuzzy memories or completing the narrative

surrounding the event.

Even twenty years after the bombing, similar discourses of memory, commemoration,

and progress continue to circulate at the Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum.

Indeed, as Shari Veil, Timothy Sellnow, and Megan Heald note, "Memorializing requires more

than just the marking of an event, but also the construction of what the marker should signify to

future generations."[132] In other words, simply erecting a memorial in a public space does not

suffice; instead, careful consideration should be paid to the messages and lessons visitors may

internalize as a result of engaging with the site. Sites like the Columbine Memorial or the 9/11

Memorial certainly succeed at marking their respective events. However, each site could

strengthen its mission by first, reexamining the core civic values upon which each structure was

built, and secondly, by reemphasizing the necessity of those values for future generations of

visitors.

After more than 4,000 miles and 60 hours of driving from Chicago to Littleton round-trip

*twice*, Greg Zanis knew, perhaps better than most, that the issue of how to commemorate the

Columbine shooting would not (and could not) be resolved easily. Even with the best of

intentions in mind, the planning of a memorial for what was, in 1999, the worst school shooting

in U.S. history would pose questions to which no one could answer with certainty. Many of the questions regarding the Columbine Memorial, as addressed throughout this project, have contentious and complicated answers, and some of them cannot be answered at all. The memorial's various, competing layers of complexity make it a difficult text from which rhetorical scholars may ascertain equally varied and competitive meanings. Despite the memorial site's apparent rhetorical markers of a forgotten public, one consideration remains relatively indisputable: because of the Columbine Memorial, the names and legacies of Matthew, Rachel, Cassie, Kyle, Daniel, John, Corey, Kelly, Isaiah, Lauren, Daniel, Steven, and Dave live on—for now, as memories that will not soon be forgotten.

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