Shadowed Ground, Sacred Place
Reflections on Violence, Tragedy, Memorials
and Public Commemorative Rituals*

1) How do ritual and memorial spaces arise from events of violence or tragedy?
2) Have the patterns of creation changed in recent years?
3) What about changes in the design and symbolic form of contemporary memorial spaces?
4) Do these new ritual and memorial spaces serve new purposes than in the past?

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How do ritual and memorial spaces arise from events of violence or tragedy?

Branch Davidian Compound (1993), Waco, TX
Wounded Knee (1890), SD
Roadside Shrine (1997), Austin, TX
Battle of Antietam (1862), MD
Cherry Mine Disaster (1909), IL
Bunker Hill (1775), MA
Sanctification

A "sacred" place, set apart from its surroundings and dedicated to the memory of an event, person or group, usually involving the construction of a durable marker and serving as the focus for continuing commemorative rituals.

Rectification

Obliteration

Designation

Gettysburg Battlefield (1863), PA

SS Eastland disaster (1915), Chicago, IL

Wall Street bombing (1920), New York City

Gallows Hill (1692), Salem, MA

Heroes & Martyrs

Garfield Memorial, Washington, DC

Tends to occur rarely, but the prominence of such sites tends to give the impression that sanctification is common.

A Sense of Community Loss

Peshtigo, WI

A "sacred" place, set apart from its surroundings and dedicated to the memory of an event, person or group, usually involving the construction of a durable marker and serving as the focus for continuing commemorative rituals.

Moral & Ethical Lessons

Gettysburg, PA
A site is marked - *something important happened here* - but not sanctified. Often a step on the path toward sanctification, a place to rallying support or protest.

**Rectification**

A site is "put right," repaired and reused making it, sometimes, almost invisible. By far the most common response to violence and tragedy.

**Obliteration**

Active effacement of evidence of particularly shocking or shameful events—mass murder, gang & mob violence, tragedies involving gross negligence, taboo subjects, etc.
The creation or “invention” of commemorative traditions and narratives taking decades or generations to unfold

Change involves the “politics of place” and competition, sometimes conflict, among many groups. Efforts often start at the grass-roots level.

Support builds gradually as meaning is debated, compromises reached

Inscribing traditions at the state, civic & local levels

Chicago's Heroic Moments

Chicago Fire Academy on site of O'Leary barn, start of 1871 fire
Bas relief of Ft. Dearborn Massacre (1812) on site of fort along Chicago River at Michigan Avenue bridge
Inscribing traditions at the state level

Shrines of Texas Independence (1835-1836)

First small shrine--San Jacinto graveyard (1883)

Change in scope and scale through time into cosmographical representations

The Alamo moves into public ownership (1905)

Major shrine at San Jacinto battlefield for centennial

Have the patterns of creation changed in recent years?

Increased Speed

Wider Range of Sites

Now Sanctified

Dedication of Columbine High School Memorial, 2007

Broader Range of Voices Involved in Process

Dedication of Oklahoma City Bombing Memorial, 2000
Accretion - including the spatial & symbolic linking of sites, rituals & symbols - occurs frequently

Arad Martyrs’ Square, Martonvásár, Hungary

Early stages are particularly important for negotiating meaning, symbols, and sites

Spontaneous 9/11 Shrine, The Pentagon

Branch Davidian Compound (2007)

The emergence of secular ritual and ceremonial spaces

Trees for Life Day honoring Dutch cancer victims, Queen Wilhelmina Forest, The Netherlands. Photo: Judith Tonnaer
The "hollowing out" of religious symbols and rituals

2008 memorial service for victims of 1976 Big Thompson River flood, CO

Meditation center, Antoni van Leeuwenhoek Hospital, Amsterdam. Photo: Jorien Holsappel

What about changes in the design and symbolic form of contemporary memorial spaces?

Experiments with new symbolic idioms and arrangements

Oklahoma City Bombing Memorial, 2000

Memorial to the 1956 Uprising, Szeged, Hungary
Many tensions: individual vs. communal, sacred vs. secular

Revival of traditional religious symbols and idioms

Battle of Muhi (1241), Hungary. Massive defeat by Mongol army.

Holocaust Memorial, Berlin. Photo: Maoz Azaryahu

Mount of Olives, Jerusalem
Do these new ritual and memorial spaces serve new purposes than in the past?

They often have traditional meanings and functions, such as...

- Affirming the symbols, rituals & traditions of collective life

Along the Mormon Trail in Wyoming, 1997

- Honoring victims and survivors

  Dedication of memorial (2007) to the deadliest school bus-train disaster in U.S. history (1961) near Greeley, CO

- Recognizing heroes and martyrs

  Memorial to two officers who died helping others escape the Big Thompson Flood (1976), CO
They can also assume new meanings and functions as sites of conflict, protest, resistance and contestation.

Protester at US Holocaust Memorial Museum, DC

Ludlow Massacre (1914), CO

Or as sites of reconciliation and accommodation

Little Bighorn Battlefield, MT

Angel Island Immigration Station, San Francisco Bay
Into the Future

The value of expanding the range of cases considered & moving beyond a "politics of place" perspective

Ukrainian Memorial along Raate Road, Finland

House of Terror, Budapest

The value of extending theoretical perspectives to better integrate time, space, ritual, place, and performance

Questions?