

SPONTANEOUS SHRINES AND THE PUBLIC MEMORIALIZATION OF DEATH  
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# SPONTANEOUS SHRINES AND THE PUBLIC MEMORIALIZATION OF DEATH

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## Chapter 4

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### “We’ll Watch Out for Liza and The Kids”: Spontaneous Memorials and Personal Response at the Pentagon, 2001

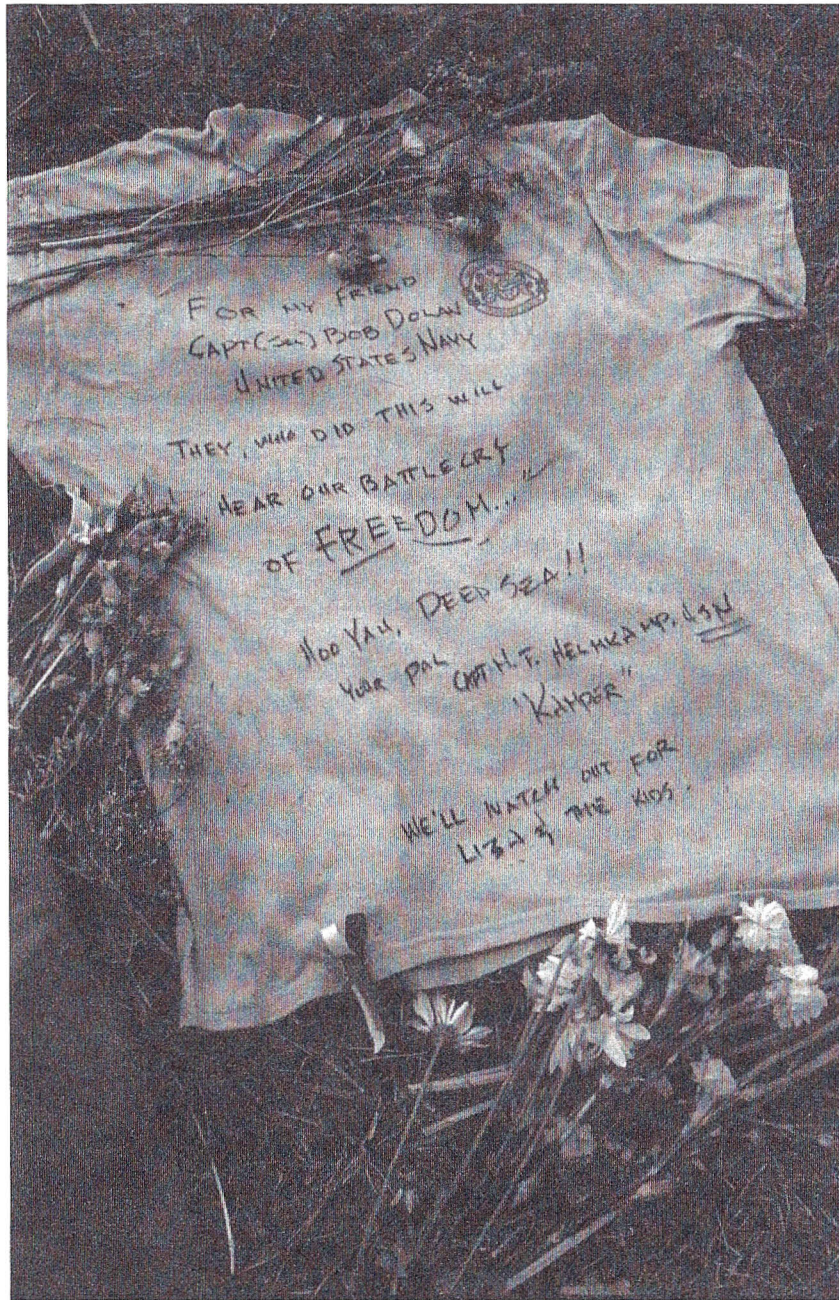
*Margaret R. Yocom*

September 22, 2001. Lying on the lawn with many other memorial tokens, a mustard-yellow t-shirt with a small “NAVY DIVING & SALVAGE TRAINING CENTER” insignia and a handwritten message printed in black magic marker

FOR MY FRIEND,  
CAPT. BOB DOLAN, UNITED STATES NAVY.  
THEY, WHO DID THIS WILL  
HEAR OUR BATTLECRY OF *FREEDOM*  
HOO YAH DEEP SEA!!  
YOUR PAL  
CAPT. H.T. HELMKAMP, *USN*  
“KAMPER”  
WE’LL WATCH OUT FOR LIZA & THE KIDS.<sup>1</sup>  
(see figure 4.1)

\* \* \*





**Figure 4.1** At the memorial, Capt. H.T. Helmkamp promises his fallen friend, "We'll watch out for Liza & the kids."

Source: Photo: c Margaret R. Yocom.

September 22, 2001. Hanging on the black metal fence of the Arlington National Cemetery across the street from the t-shirt, a six-foot red sign with white letters plastered with cutouts of red, white, and blue hands:

PEACE

St. Bartholomew's School

(see figure 4.2)

\* \* \*

*There is no place that is not haunted by many different spirits hidden there in silence, spirits one can "invoke" or not. Haunted places are the only ones people can live in.*

—Michel de Certeau

\* \* \*

The first time I ventured down to the memorial I heard was growing near the Pentagon crash site, I didn't go alone. In fact, the times I did go, I always went with friends or family—my husband, John, or my cousins. My friend and fellow folklorist Mary Hufford and her daughter Katherine went with me the first time to see what we, as folklorists and as Virginians who live near the Pentagon, could see there.



**Figure 4.2** St. Bartholomew's School poster features the hands of their students. Damaged wall of the Pentagon appears in background.

Source: Photo: c Margaret R. Yocom.



It is never easy for me to visit the spontaneous memorials that dot our northern Virginia landscape. And it's especially awkward to travel with a camera in tow. Sometimes when I read and then photograph the displays, no matter how reverently I move through the site, I feel like a voyeur. Like someone unworthy of entrance, or someone too much a stranger to the dead.<sup>2</sup> I never know who the other people around me might be. Friends of the deceased? Family, maybe? For some years now, though, I've been teaching about these memorials in my folklore classes, curiously drawn to them as are many of my George Mason University students. And though I've made my pilgrimages<sup>3</sup> to several in the area, I am never prepared for what I see.

It's not that I am unused to visiting memorials; I've visited many. After all Washington DC, the place where I live is a city of memorials. People the world over visit the figurative statuary erected in honor of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Benito Juarez, African American Civil War veterans, Mary McLeod Bethune, Albert Einstein, Eleanor Roosevelt, the Korean War dead, the Iwo Jima flag raising, the World War II dead, John F. Kennedy, the Vietnam War dead, the astronauts lost on the space shuttles Challenger and Columbia, and many more.<sup>4</sup> On grassy knolls, in marbled buildings, and under spreading trees, the statues sit and stand, often appearing larger than the people they commemorate did in life. Thanks to their stone or metal exteriors, they stand stoically like stalwarts through rain, sun, and snow.

The spontaneous memorials of the region are something quite different, and they easily outnumber official monuments. Flowers, crosses, teddy bears, poems, messages, and more decorated the corner where 17-year-old Tandy Leigh Fitzgerald was killed by a drunk driver on October 22, 1995, on Annandale Road in Falls Church, just minutes from her home. Friends decorated the locker of 17-year-old Oxon Hill High School honor student Charles Marsh with flowers, bows, cards, and more after he died from a stray bullet. He had been waiting in line for the school bus to take him home when a stray bullet shot by a masked youth trying to steal a jacket from another student hit him on December 14, 1995. After their friend Devin Fowlkes was killed by a stray bullet in Washington DC as he walked out of a school pep rally and dance on the afternoon of October 30, 2003, fellow students wrote messages to him all over his bedroom walls (Blum 2003: B1,5).

One of the largest and most complex of these memorials began to take shape shortly after the September 11, 2001, 9:45 a.m. plunge of American Airlines Flight 77 into the west face of the Pentagon, just a river away from Washington DC, two miles from the White House, and three from the Capitol. Fifty-nine passengers and crew, and 125 people in the Pentagon,

ranging in age from 3 to 71, lost their lives that day. By that evening, a site lying just west of the gash in the Pentagon had become a place to leave offerings.

Some people, especially writers for the popular press, have called such sites "makeshift memorials,"<sup>5</sup> but there is nothing makeshift about them. These places where people visit, linger, and sit for hours in silent contemplation have a rhythm, a precision, an aesthetic arrangement, and a set of behaviors all their own. These encounters, these acts of witness, these experiences in places carved from the roadside compel many of us. Why do we go to such sites as the Pentagon memorial, and what experiences do we have once we're there? What do the tokens we leave signify? And what lasting influences do the memorials have on us?

## The Pentagon Spontaneous Memorial

To drive to the Pentagon memorial, I had to go closer and closer to the twisting eight-lane highways that could, given one false turn, send me spinning across Washington DC into the Potomac River instead. The spot lay just west of the Pentagon, at the juncture of Columbia Pike, Southgate Road, and Joyce Street, but where the boundaries of Arlington National Cemetery, the Navy Annex, and the Pentagon do not quite meet (Hufford 2001: 5).

Arriving on September 22, just 11 days after the attack itself, I was amazed to see how large the memorial had already become.<sup>6</sup> Two main components formed the memorial. One was a wall of messages superimposed on the iron and masonry fence that forms the southeastern boundary of Arlington Cemetery. The second was a spreading array of flowers, wreaths, candles, and posters across Southgate Road from the Cemetery, on the lawn below the Navy Annex building. Displays clustered around trees and hung from branches. They covered the large wooden message board that stood on the right. They spread up the slightly sloping lawn and stretched over to the left, toward the open lawn where nothing had yet been laid.

By November, a third component appeared even closer to the torn side of the Pentagon. Recalling the tokens left on fences at so many other sites of tragedy such as the Murrah Building in Oklahoma on April 19, 1995, people had found several ways to leave messages on the heavy metal fence that cordoned off the bulldozers, excavators, and other equipment being used for reconstruction from the lawn that rolled back toward the Navy Annex.



Just yards away from busy Route 395 that borders the Pentagon, people pinned messages, posters, flags, and flowers on the fence and fastened others to the ground with rocks.

This entire site was, as Mary Hufford wrote later, a “plot of grass and trees at the conjunction of highly administered worlds, facing the site of physical impact, [where] signs of impacts that are spiritual, emotional, and psychological pile[d] up” (2001: 5).

On that September day, Mary, Katharine, and I were three of about eighty people quietly walking through the site. Many lingered as they walked gingerly around the many tributes. Silence was broken only by passing cars, occasional soft whisperings, and the click of cameras. Visitors<sup>7</sup> stood nearby the fence by Arlington National Cemetery in the golden afternoon light, taking photos of the distant blackened wall of the Pentagon with its gaping hole.

Some visitors had brought messages. Some came with no plans, but ended up leaving a note or a signature. Some had brought tokens, not knowing whether they would leave them behind or not. A tow-headed 10-year-old dressed in a black and neon-green Mt. Vernon soccer team t-shirt clutched his black and neon yellow soft-cloth fireman figure whose foot and a half length seemed glued to the boy's body. He had gotten it earlier, his mother told me, and it had quickly become a favorite.<sup>8</sup> He came thinking he wanted to leave it at the site, she explained, in memory of the firefighters in New York who lost their lives, but now, faced with setting the figure down and walking away, the boy had begun to think he couldn't part with the fireman after all (see figure 4.3). When I returned eight days later, his fireman was standing watch over a new plaque that displayed the names of the Pentagon dead.

Some visitors came with humor: a mother and her older son posed for my camera, as they smiled under their tall, floppy Dr. Seuss-like hats that were decorated with the bold stars and stripes of the American flag. The younger son sported camouflage wear; the older son and the girlfriend of the mother displayed Old Navy t-shirts with American flag and “United States of America 2001” beneath it.

Instead of walking the site, some people chose a spot for themselves and rooted themselves there, keeping vigil. One couple wore complementary flag shirts: red and white stripes covered his; hers was blue with stars. When they sat side-by-side, leaning against a pole at the edge of the lawn just a few feet away from Columbia Pike staring at the blackened hole in the Pentagon, they formed one flag. They were there when I arrived, and an hour and a half later, they were still there.

Similarly, a couple sat by a small shrine they had made. Crying softly, they lighted and relighted two long, white, tapered candles that kept



**Figure 4.3** At the Pentagon memorial, a boy gives tribute to firefighters at the World Trade Center.

Source: Photo: c Margaret R. Yocom.



blowing out in the breeze. A manhole cover in the grass formed a base for their mementos, candles, and potted pansies. Like visitors to the Vietnam Memorial who sometimes leave cigarettes and beer underneath names, this couple left a six-pack of Coca-Cola in a gray and red box as well as a yellow jumbo bag of M&Ms that were untouched a week later. A white paper heart whispered, "I miss you. Ann and Michael."

A young girl sat quietly on a plastic folding chair by a tree covered with toy airplanes. Two young women sitting by the large white message board twisted red, white, and blue ribbons into yarn for visitors. Several people stood reading the many written messages on the board. As the golden afternoon sunlight deepened, more people came to walk through these artful offerings at the spontaneous memorial.

Art is universal human behavior, Ellen Dissanayake tells us, just as speech and the skillful manufacture of tools are. Art can best be described as "making special," she claims, and, as such, it transforms our everyday reality:

In whatever we are accustomed to call art, a *specialness* is tacitly or overtly acknowledged. Reality, or what is considered to be reality, is elaborated, reformed, given not only particularity (emphasis on uniqueness, or "specialness") but import (value, or "specialness")—what may be called such things as magic or beauty or spiritual power or significance." . . . In both functional and nonfunctional art an alternative reality is recognized and entered; the making special acknowledges, reveals, and embodies this reality. (1988: 92, 95)

People engage in such artistic behavior, Michael Owen Jones contends, for many reasons: to experience sensory pleasure; to pose and perhaps resolve an intellectual puzzle; to preserve a way of life; to feel a connectedness to past eras, family, or community; to develop, express, clarify, or reconstruct their identity; to gain therapeutic benefits; and more (1995: 254–271). And such art, as Robert E. Walls suggests, also affords people the opportunity to communicate ideas that they may not be able or willing to speak in words (1990: 107).

We learn about people's responses to the events of September 11 at the Pentagon by investigating their artistic behavior that produced the memorial. What did people emphasize as they wrote messages on signboards, and who were they addressing? What images did people turn to over and over again as they left tokens on fences, lawns, and tree branches? And, what do these messages and images tell us about why people came to the Pentagon memorial with the art works they did?

## The Public's Message Boards: Addressing the Living and the Dead

Each time I visited the site, people stood reading the many word-filled posters and reading and writing on the large wooden message board that dominated the hillside component of the memorial. Shaped like the gable end of a house and painted white, its back was propped up by three firmly rooted pieces of lumber. Identical 5 × 7 inch paper USA flags dotted the face of the message board, and people had written their messages, most unsigned, all along the white stripes: "The tree of liberty must often be watered with the blood of patriots. Thomas Jefferson. The sad reality" and "God Bless America. Soon to be Vets of the Terrorist War God Bless You All." Others had pinned cards, messages typed at home, newspaper articles, a scarf, and even a baseball hat to the board. Someone had fastened a fulsome white bow festooned with  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch tall green plastic soldiers pointing rifles at invisible targets, and trailing red, white, and blue streamers. As the crowded message board filled, other visitors placed posterboards of articles with photos by its side: the Twin Towers in flame, FDNY firemen raising a flag, and the Pentagon—one of the very few images of the building at the site.

### Addressing Each Other, the Military, Grieving Families, and Friends

By September 30, people had covered every inch of the back of the message board and its wooden support beams with black ink. Urgently, often as if there were no time to lose, visitors addressed each other, citizens in the military, and friends and family of the dead. Some, like Jeanine Nesselt, offered comfort: "May God bless us all!!! Please be with us through difficult times. Trust God. I love you all. . . . 9–28–01." The Provost family of Knoxville, Tennessee, left a note saying "Comfort and Courage to the families who are grieving" (Dart 2001: 2).

Others called both members of the military and civilians to action. One person sought to spur on those Americans in or about to be in the military: "Beat 'em B.A. Boys! Be Careful. God and America and V.B."<sup>9</sup> And Charles H. Evans urged others with his handwritten poem "Remember September 2001," which he had handwritten on a red posterboard and laid it on the green lawn:

THE GALL OF THE PERPETRATORS  
SURELY MUST GALL US ALL



IN SOLIDARITY WE RISE  
SO TERRORISM MAY FALL

PEOPLE  
HEAR THE CALL  
AND  
MAY GOD BLESS US ALL  
Charles H. Evans

Dedicated to ALL who may read these words AND ESPECIALLY THOSE  
DIRECTLY AFFECTED BY THE TRAGEDY OF (9-11-01)

Many writers never clarified who the "we" of their messages were. They preferred the powerful ambiguity that hinted that more than one person authored the words of the sign as they called out to passersby to join in the effort: "WE WILL NEVER FORGET SEPTEMBER 11, 2001" someone had printed on an 8½ by 11 inch red, white, and blue plaque, edged in silver pop-beads.

### Addressing Fellow Americans

For other message writers, though, clarifying the "we" for other visitors was one of the most critical priorities; in fact, many post-1965 immigrants to the United States understood that their lives depended on getting the understanding of those who walked the Pentagon site.

On the grassy bank, someone had laid a handprinted sheet of 8½ × 11 white paper:

The Palestinian  
Community sends  
condolences to the victims and their  
families. God Bless  
Everyone

From the Sudanese Voice for Freedom: "As refugees who have found home in this country we stand in solidarity with this great nation to denounce and fight terrorism" (Hufford 2001: 6).

The Washington DC area, home to 5,000,000 people of whom 832,000 (16.9 percent)<sup>10</sup> were born outside the United States, is one of the most international areas of the United States. But even in this culturally diverse

milieu, new immigrants, especially those whose skin color set them immediately apart from European Americans, certainly felt their difference and their vulnerability. And, in a series of attacks, new Americans had that difference horribly pointed out to them. While listening to President Bush memorialize victim of the September 11 attacks during a service at Washington National Cathedral, for example, Michael Johnson asked deliveryman Mustafa Nazary if he were Afghani. When Nazary, a 10-year citizen of the United States said he was, Johnson threatened him, followed him to a shopping center parking lot, and punched him repeatedly (Jenkins 2002: 1,2). On the first of November 2001 in Manassas, Virginia, two men from Waynesboro berated their cab driver, a Pakistani American, because he was of Middle Eastern descent, refused to pay him, threw him to the ground, and kicked him repeatedly in the head (White 2001: 1). A Dumfries woman and her son led a mob attack against two Afghan American teenagers, people attacked local mosques, broke windshields, and smashed mailboxes. An airline security screener at Baltimore-Washington International Airport forced a Muslim teenager to remove her headscarf while allowing a fully covered nun to pass through. Some Arab Americans went to court to change their names to help avoid harassment. A series of Nazi rallies with swastika-clad marchers have been held in Washington, DC. Bigoted violence and vandalism increased fourfold in Fairfax County, Virginia, since September 11; in nearby Montgomery County, Maryland, hated incidents jumped 76 percent.<sup>11</sup>

The Pentagon memorial, discussed as it was in regional newspapers, gave new Americans one way to publicly mourn their fellow Americans and announce their allegiance to America, even an America that had become increasingly nativistic. Most of the signboards from ethnic and international communities appeared early in the life of the spontaneous memorial.

Displays from Thai, Lao, and Cambodian Americans stressed that they, too, mourned for the loss of their fellow Americans: "WE MOURN ALL THE LIVES THAT HAVE BEEN LOST IN THE TERRIBLE TRAGEDY AND MOURN FOR AMERICA. THAI ALLIANCE," announced the heavy, 11 × 17 inch sign with thick, black printed letters, leaning against metal legs of a tall stand. A wreath of light yellow mums, bright yellow and purple orchids topped the sign. Nearby on the grassy knoll, a plain white canvas board with heavy, black, printed letters stated, "THE CAMBODIAN COMMUNITY UNITED AGAINST TERRORISM PRAYS TO THE VICTIMS." In late November, a white canvas board sign with its bright, bold red letters stood on the green lawn. Held high by a wooden stand and decorated with an American flag, it declared,

LAO AMERICANS FOR AMERICA  
LAO COMMUNITY AND

### OTHER COMMUNITIES PRAY FOR 9-11-01 VICTIMS

Several Latino groups and individuals brought displays to the spontaneous memorial. Each one clearly linked their new country and their homelands in friendship by using overt claims of brotherhood and by writing in both Spanish and English. One sign read, "God Bless America: El Pueblo Latino American Esta Con Los Hermanos de U.S.A."<sup>12</sup> (Hufford 2001: 6). A second one, written with black ink on cardboard by Luisa, Silvia, Raul, Roberto, and Rosa Linda, announced

Viva Freedom, Peace, and Love  
Sep. 18-2001  
Guatemala Love USA  
Nuestro Dolor Con Las  
Personas Que Han Perdido  
Sus Familiares  
Dios Salve America<sup>13</sup>  
We Love USA Too

Another sign spoke of the ultimate sacrifice for one's new country. On the grassy bank with many other displays around it, lay the *Washington Post* obituary of Sgt. First Class José Orlando Calderon, 44, of Annandale, who was born in Puerto Rico and served in first Persian Gulf War. An American flag, flowers, and handwritten note on an 8½ × 11 sheet of white paper signed by the Familia Calderon and the Puerto Rican Community of Metropolitan Washington accompanied the obituary: "Our prayers are with you. Puerto Rico will always be with you. Neustras [*sic*] oracuones [*sic*] siempre eſtaran con ustedes. Boricue [*sic*] los queremos."<sup>14</sup>

### Broadcasting to the World

In addition to addressing those visitors close at hand, sign-writers also broadcast their messages further afield. Many messages seemed to speak to the world at large: "GOD SPEED AMERICA" "God Bless America. Stay Strong. Stephanie White"; "LAND OF THE FREE GOD BLESS. KURT HELFRICH '01"; "AMERICA IS STILL FREE. WE WILL NEVER ACCEPT TERRORISM."

### Speaking to God

Like new Americans, many other visitors to the memorial invoke God. "Have mercy on me O God for in you I will take refuge under your wings

until this disaster has passed," someone penned on the message board. Church fellowships came in vans to the site to bless the air with their words as they prayed for the living, the relatives of victims, and the firefighters and police working in the debris of the Pentagon (Cho and Stockwell 2001: 2). Buddhist monks wrapped in rust-colored robes led about 250 followers in prayers for the dead (Cho and Stockwell 2001: 2). Prayer flags made of brightly colored fabric squares of red, green, blue, and yellow with images of Buddha and text written in Sanskrit fluttered from three parallel cords strung along the Arlington National Cemetery's black metal fence. And a visitor had brought the Mourner's Kaddish in Hebrew and a poem in English; six rocks arranged on the corners held down the 8½ × 11 sheet of white paper the poem was printed on.

So say the words that must be said  
Prayer for the beloved dead  
And as our precious tears are shed  
We shall remember  
Death and loss are what we pay  
For finding love along our way  
A gift forever, sweet bouquet  
A rose in December.

### Talking With the Dead

Some visitors came as they would to an altar or a shrine: to be with the dead. And here, at the memorial site, people could come as close as possible to the spot where loved ones had drawn their last breath. "Renee," a friend wrote to Renee May, a flight attendant on American Airlines Flight 77, "I've thought of you and your engagement and upcoming wedding" (Dart 2001: 2). "TO THOSE WHO DIED," someone wrote in black ink on the message board, "MAY GOD BLESS ALL OF YOU AND YOUR FAMILIES." On a large paper flag with many handwritten messages, Joe & Sue Brearley wrote, "Your sacrifice will not be forgotten"; "Your sacrifice is not in vain," added CPO Cash & family. And in words painstakingly printed by someone still practicing her letters: "To Dad from Faith. I love you Daddy. I miss you Daddy" (Dart 2001: 1).

The creators of these signs that sprawled throughout the site believed in the power of their words to travel, for their signs created a place that spoke way beyond the Navy Annex. The memorial enabled them to speak to other visitors, to the grieving families, and to visiting soldiers, but it also gave them access to the world, to God, and to the dead themselves. People did not stand by their signs and seek out face-to-face encounters with other visitors; rather, they trusted that the written messages they left



on the lawn, the message board, and the fences would speak well enough on their own.

## Clusters of Meaning: The Airplane Tree

One striking display at the Pentagon site did not depend on words for its power but rather on the accumulation of objects that people perceived as similar to one another. Among the branches of one of the trees, visitors hung airplane after airplane. "My father put this together," a young girl told me as she pointed to what I came to think of as the airplane tree. On September 22, she sat protectively on a bright yellow plastic chair wearing a red t-shirt decorated with "F-14 TOMCAT" and a picture of the fighter plane. She planned to stay awhile: a willow basket filled with snacks and a water bottle rested in the grass by her side.

Someone, perhaps the girl's father, had written "#1 USA / GOD BLESS AMERICA" across the wings of a model jet plane, its gray body festooned with flags decals and miniature flags and fastened it to the tree. A small bright-white jet hung by its side. Wired to the tree trunk just below was a camouflage-colored jet; and above, two more jets—one bright blue and gold, a second light and dark gray—lay motionless in the tree's lowest branches. Though tied fast to the tree, all the jets pointed nose-up, ready to blast into the sky. Those same branches also supported two signs. In a photo, military pilots by their plane stand in a row with a young boy; the caption read, "MINI ASTRONAUT & FUTURE PILOT, Isilay Davaz." The other sign proclaimed, "YOUR [*sic*] STILL BEAUTIFUL AMERICA." Around the base of the tree, someone had sunk metal stakes in the ground and surrounded the airplane tree with a cord to prevent other visitors from coming too close.

Within the cord's perimeter, someone placed a child's poster that screamed, "NO MOORE." On it, the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center stands erect, marked with multiple American flags, as a plane heads straight toward them, hotly pursued by two USA helicopters. Across the top of the sign "#1 USA / GOD BLESS AMERICA" flanks a large American flag. Cut flowers, plastic flowers, lighted candles, and a dizzying array of small flags cover the ground. And President Bush, the American flag behind him in an official photo, smiles out from among these tokens at the tree's base.

Eight days later, another white jet and a model of the space shuttle Atlantis, nose-up, had been fastened in the airplane tree's lower branches. By late November, the flags at the airplane tree multiplied; they fluttered around the base, twined up the trunk, and hung from the lowest branches.

Four three-foot tall spikes also bore American flags at their tops and were wound around with red, white, and blue ribbons. Two more smaller planes had been tied on the lower branches. And around the large white shuttle, someone had wrapped a navy blue ribbon of cloth with "TURKISH AIR FORCE" stamped on it in bold white letters.

At the airplane tree, visitor after visitor followed the pattern established by one family. People added additional planes, flags, and flowers, but they kept intensifying their messages through the repeated image of the United States fighter plane. No one placed models of commercial planes, such as those involved in the attacks, on the tree. It was fighter planes, similar to those absent from the skies over New York and Washington in the fateful hours of September 11, that became the focal point of the display, as visitors clustered messages about American military power, achievements in flight, patriotism, international cooperation, and protection. Visitors to the site took pleasure in creating this constantly changing display, especially one that was driven by community purpose, wordlessly agreed on.

## Multiple Fragments: The Body in Pieces

At the Pentagon memorial, visitors created displays with multiple images of similar fragments more than any other kind of display. Using representations of heads, hearts, hands, thumbs and feet, people turned to these resonant forms to evoke both human presence and human loss. The "redundant repetition" of these multiple-image displays, as Ellen Dissanayake reminds us, also signals a ritualistic and artistic intent to make something special (1988: 85).

## Linked Together: Faces, Signatures, and Chains

Presenting the reality, if not the enormity of the tragedy, several of the displays lined up face after face of the dead. "In Memory of our Friends and Family / Flight 77," a bulletin from a memorial service read, and printed on the bulletin were the photos of the faces of all on board the American Airlines carrier.<sup>15</sup> On one laminated piece of white paper, a visitor had printed photographs of the faces of all the crewmembers on Flight 77 and Flight 11, the flight that crashed into the World Trade Center's North Tower. Also on the lawn stood a framed plaque with a government seal, a photograph of the Pentagon in flames, and the typewritten names of all those who died in the Pentagon attack, with a photo of the building in flames, smoke billowing from the top. Like the Vietnam War Memorial, the



plaque's protective surface was so shiny that visitors who knelt before it to read the names saw their faces reflected on its surface. People left flowers and flags all around the base of the plaque.

A far greater number of the multiple-image displays featured representations of the people who were sending their condolences: their faces, their signatures, and more. On a laminated, foam-core poster standing erect on metal supports, the faces of Native Americans from Marysville, Washington, superimposed in rows on a large American flag stared out at visitors, a candle to the right of their faces as if all of them were holding a vigil for the dead.<sup>16</sup> "TULALIP BINGO-CASINO EMPLOYEES WILL NEVER FORGET SEPTEMBER 11 2001," the poster read. Affixed to the poster, a letter announced that their Nation had sent \$100,000 "to the families in need from the terrorist tragedy—to symbolize and illustrate our support as an independent Native Nation to the Nation of the United States" (see figure 4.4).

Another group of people brought a chain made of hundreds of laminated paper links, each with a message and a signature. As I arrived on September 30, 10 people from a Hair Cuttery salon in Baltimore, Maryland, were debating whether to string their chain along the Arlington Cemetery fence, given the warning of a visitor's BE ADVISED sign that



**Figure 4.4** With a foam-core poster of their faces, Native Americans from Marysville, Washington, tell visitors to the memorial that "TULALIP BINGO-CASINO EMPLOYEES WILL NEVER FORGET SEPTEMBER 11 2001."

Source: Photo: c Margaret R. Yocom.

told of and protested the removal of the displays along the fence. "After all our work and the promises we made to others," they told me, "we don't want to just throw the chain away." Their customers had decorated the links. When the hairdressers saw the metal chain on the perimeter of the grassy lawn, they walked across the street and strung their paper chain along it, securing their red, white, and blue paper links to the metal ones with plastic twisty strips. "Most of our customers wrote 'God Bless America' or 'United We Stand,'" one of the women told me. Every so often, a single star dangled from one of the links.

### Hearts, Hands, Feet, and Thumbs

Another predominant multiple-image display at the Pentagon site were the large rectangular signs covered with images of body parts—especially hearts, hands, feet, and thumbs—as many as they could possibly fit on the paper. Some creators signed their names; others let their hands and feet speak for them.

Images of hands predominated. "The future's in our children's HAND'S [*sic*]," announced a bed-sized white cloth sign that ballooned out from the black fence spokes along Arlington National Cemetery's edge, catching the breeze on September 22. Decorated with the American flag, red handprints formed the flag's stripes, and yellow stars and blue handprints in a blue square created the flag's upper left field. The friends of an 11-year-old from Leckie Elementary School in southeast Washington DC had pressed their hands on this cloth, and one of them had handprinted "In Remembrance of Bernard Curtis Brown" below the last red stripe. Winner of the National Geographic Society's award for scholastic achievement, Bernard, along with two other DC students, was on his way to California aboard Flight 77 (Hufford 2001: 7). Some of Bernard's classmates and their parents also signed the flag: "Our hearts are with you. Love, Cheryl and Matt" and "The language of children is the language of peace."

The Woodbridge Run Community Playgroup hung a large white canvas sign along the Cemetery fence, too, with "To America's Heroes" handprinted on top in red and blue and "From America's Children" on the bottom. Red and blue handprints, with names trailing along side, filled the spaces in between: "Tyler Henley-3," "Hannah Tesmond-2," "Shamiek Aetis." Along the very bottom in small script, someone had written, "In loving memory of those lost and injured in the attack at the Pentagon on September 11, 2001."

"GOD BLESS THE FAMILIES / AND FRIENDS WHO LOST LOVED ONES / BY TERRORIST ATTACKS" read a yellow poster on



the lawn. Students had traced the outlines of their hands and had written messages on the palms and fingers, one word per finger. "GOD / Bless / ALL / Of / You," one student's fingers read; across the palm appeared "MELLOW Valley 6th Grade ABBEY JONES."

Some featured feet or a combination of hands and feet. On the lawn, fastened down by candles, the children of Winwood's Jr. Kindergarten, Fairfax, Virginia, laid a large white paper sign in the shape of a foot on which they had pasted red or blue stencils of the patterned bottoms of their shoes. Below the heel they wrote their names: "Graham," "Austin C.," "Zoe W." "PEACE . . . one step at a time," their sign read. Combining handprints and footprints, the children of Learn As You Grow from North Syracuse, New York, made a flag with about a square yard of white paper. They had obviously slathered their hands and feet with paint before walking on the paper to form the red stripes. In the flag's blue field, they had lain their white-painted hands. The shaky letters of one beginning writer provided the only words: "UNITED WE Stand."

Other visitors turned to thumbprints or hearts.<sup>17</sup> In late November, a flag made by students and staff of Yelm Middle School, Yelm, Washington, lay on the lawn. Made from heavy paper, the flag's blue field had fifty white-paint thumbprints on it. Dark blue thumbprints filled in around them. Students had painted the board with white and red stripes, and in the red stripes, students had pressed their black-painted thumbs, side by side. "Our thumbprints / in remembrance [*sic*]," someone had written in the white stripes. An unsigned flag on the lawn in late November was made completely of hearts. Blue and white hearts interlocked to form the starred portion of the blue field. Similarly, rows of white interlocking hearts and rows of red interlocking hearts alternated to form the stripes.

These images of hearts, hands, and feet appear regularly in art of all kinds.<sup>18</sup> Linda Nochlin in her study *The Body in Pieces: The Fragment as a Metaphor of Modernity* affirms that the trope of the body fragment has long had a "central" role in European and American iconography from the late 1700s through the twentieth century. Nochlin cautions, though, that this popular icon has "ever-shifting, polyvalent" meanings (1994: 54, 56). Visitors to the Pentagon used the fragment in their own way: to evoke compelling dialogues between presence and absence, the infinite and the finite.

## Why People Came

In some ways, all the displays at the Pentagon were alike. All addressed some imagined reader or readers. All were fragmentary. Even the writing was

brief, as if the writer had more to say but held back to leave space so others could comment, too. All seemed multiple since one written comment rested by another, one item was piled beside others similar to it. What can we learn from these messages, multiples, and fragments about why people came to the Pentagon memorial and left the artful tokens they did?

## What Did Not Bring People to the Memorial? Protest and the Image of the Pentagon Building

The displays at the spontaneous memorial indicated the reasons that did not bring visitors to the Pentagon: they did not come to protest the approaching storm cloud of war, and they did not come to declare the Pentagon a much-loved building and mourn the harm done to it.

In my visits to the site, I saw no messages that overtly criticized the United States' international policies or its plans for war in Afghanistan. The message board would have been a perfect place; someone could have blended their message in among the others, in print as small or large as they felt comfortable using. Instead, messages called on visitors to agree with one another and, presumably, the George W. Bush administration policy. "United We Stand," wrote Susanna Zarbough, "God Bless America." And John Green told visitors, "As long as the ties that bind us together are stronger than those who would tear us apart, all will be well." Schoolchildren wrote the great majority of messages for peace; their words were soft-edged, gentle on the eyes of visitors. Very few messages appeared that called on visitors to be aware of other political issues. One white poster with black print announced in late November, "freedom from gun trauma 1-800-RINGING THE BELL CAMPAIGN [www.bellcampaign.org](http://www.bellcampaign.org)."

Voices did appear after September 11 that criticized United States policies and called on Americans to consider why Middle Eastern terrorists might have flown planes into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, symbols of American economic and military might. Immediately, though, other voices rose not just to argue with protestors, but to silence them. The American Council of Trustees and Alumni, for example, distributed a November 13, 2001, report that listed 117 American university professors who they deemed were insufficiently patriotic because of comments they made or the peace rallies they organized (Eakin 2001: 1). And the *Wall Street Journal* singled out for attack the Middle Eastern Studies Association of North America (Jones 2001:1).<sup>19</sup>

At the Pentagon memorial, though, no one aired these issues overtly. Or, if they did, others removed the signs before I saw them. Clearly, Pentagon memorial visitors, unlike some visitors to New York City memorials,<sup>20</sup>



thought that messages critical of United States policy were not appropriate at this memorial, that personal mourning took precedence over and must be protected from what they saw as the potential discomfort and divisiveness of debate. Visitors may also have feared that others might accost them if they posted a political message that challenged the status quo.<sup>21</sup>

The absence of alternative political messages at September 11 memorials, however, did not go unnoticed. In "Before I start this poem," poet Emmanuel Ortiz (2002) critiques the many "moments of silence" being observed at services held for victims of the September 11 attacks as the poem's narrator reminds fellow Americans of places where United States policy has led to thousands of deaths as well:

Before I start this poem,  
I'd like to ask you to join me in  
a moment of silence  
in honour of those who died  
in the World Trade Centre  
and the Pentagon  
last September 11th.

I would also like to ask you  
a moment of silence  
for all of those who have been  
harassed, imprisoned, disappeared,  
tortured, raped, or killed  
in retaliation for those strikes,  
for the victims in both  
Afghanistan and the U.S.

And if I could just add one more thing . . .  
A full day of silence  
for the tens of thousands of Palestinians  
who have died at the hands of  
U.S.-backed Israeli forces  
over decades of occupation.

.....  
You want a moment of silence  
You mourn now as if the world will never be  
the same  
And the rest of us hope to hell it won't be.  
Not like it always has been  
.....

In the memorials that sprang up after September 11 in New York City, postcards, newspaper photos, and hastily made models of the World Trade

Center towers were everywhere, as people mourned the loss of a beloved city building. Even the buildings' nickname, the "Twin Towers," draped humanity around the otherwise inanimate skyscrapers. At the memorial within sight of the Pentagon, however, not a single postcard lay among the thousands of commemorative objects. Many items spoke of the Towers; and when people did mention the Pentagon, they linked the building to the Towers. "Honor the innocent who passed away in the terrorist attack on the pentagon and twin towers," one visitor wrote in black magic marker on cherry construction paper. On the plaque with the names of the Pentagon dead, a visitor leaned a plastic envelope that held a single rose, a photo of the Twin Towers, and a poem he or she had written to the Towers themselves:

...  
You were once a symbol that put us above  
the rest  
Now you are one of the symbols that will  
bring us all together.  
The world will unite in a common cause  
Peace

Visitors were clearly affected by the sight of the charred Pentagon. They took countless photographs, and they walked the twenty minutes that it took to get as close to the building as they could. At first, we might think that images of the Pentagon weren't needed since the building itself lay in view, but the lack of Pentagon imagery and the preponderance of representations of the Towers at the memorial signals something more.

The allure of spectacular images, especially those of the Twin Towers, influenced visitors to the Pentagon memorial as well as people the world over. Considering the "Kodak Moments / Flashbulb Memories" of September 11, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett suggests that the "sheer spectacle of the World Trade Tower collapse (and magnitude of the casualties) overshadows the attack on the Pentagon and the plane that crashed into a field in Pennsylvania. Many witnesses to the collapse of the Towers reported a sense of unreality. They felt like they were watching a movie they had seen before" (2002: 7). After pointing out the many pre- and post-9/11 computer games that enabled players to zoom between the Towers or shoot down would-be terrorists, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett suggests that, over New York City, the "sky was the ultimate big screen" (2002: 9).

In comparison to the Towers, the Pentagon is not a spectacular building, even though it has three times the floor space of the Empire State Building (The Pentagon 2001). Low to the ground and folded in on itself, the



intrigue of its architectural pattern becomes more clear, ironically, from the air. Unlike the Washington Monument, it does not loom large either on the landscape or in the architectural imaginary of the people in the nation's capital. Its five floors do not give it the compelling, paradoxical image that feminist critic Hélène Cixous paints of the Towers. "I loved the T.T. tenderly," she writes:

As did millions of human beings. As Windows on the World one could believe for a few instants one was equal to the gods. Image of triumph, soaring, jubilation, beauty, detachment. And: trembling. I only went there with a person I love. Fearing for life. . . . And yet what caused the seduction of the T.T., the fascination they exerted in the entire world? Sexual ambiguity. The representation at once obvious and hidden of the mystery of the *Phallus*. The towers embodied phallic power in all its ever disquieting complexity: there is nothing as fragile as the erection, properly or *figuratively*. The T.T. were the figure par excellence of triumphant, therefore threatened, power. To tower over: as soon as one towers one attracts castration. . . . The T.T. attracted looks, desires, love, *therefore*, they aroused the death drive. (2002: 431)<sup>22</sup>

For many Americans, new immigrants, and visitors to the United States before and after 9/11, the Towers stood for American exceptionalism and capitalism, for better lives in a new world, for genius and enterprise and more.<sup>23</sup> "I wanted to see it because that was the building that I loved," said Ayatollahi Tabaar, who visited the Towers as soon as he moved to New York from Iran four years ago. "When I saw them burning, for me it was like two people were dying. I feel like I've lost a relative" (Bahrapour 2001: 1). The Towers were a place for dreams and a place that symbolized the realization of dreams: "I went to the top floor," Leticia Velasquez who grew up in Honduras and moved to New York 12 years earlier remembered, "and for me it was like dreaming. Every time someone came here, I always brought them here" (Bahrapour 2001: 1). In the end, they had become a symbol, a myth of America itself.<sup>24</sup>

The Pentagon arouses different feelings and associations. Many Americans referred to the Pentagon as a symbol of freedom, strength, and the protection of American ideals.<sup>25</sup> For many, though, the Pentagon has been a focal point for protest, symbolizing war (Pershing 1996). Above all, it is a building that few people know. Although tours of the Pentagon are available, the building is identified more with limited access and layers of security and secrets that mirror the layers of its infolding architecture. The building neither seeks nor offers a high profile. "A building," suggests phenomenologist Edward Casey, "condenses a culture in one place. . . . Within the ambience of a building, a landscape becomes articulate and begins to

speak in emblematic ways" (1993: 32). The limited number of images of the Pentagon proceeded from many peoples' lack of familiarity with the building, their ambivalence toward the activities within its walls, and the deflection of their eyes to the more spectacular Towers.

### Why People Came: Being Present, Individually and Collectively

If people did not come to protest or to mourn the Pentagon building, the mementos they left suggest that one of the reasons they came was to be present at the site, both as individuals and as members of a group of mourners. Being present, though, is not a simple act. It was so important to many people to be present, for example, that if they couldn't come in person, they sent a tracing of their hand or foot instead. Being present involves many acts of attention available to memorial visitors, among them doing, seeing, caring, and forming both individual and shared memories.

Some visitors felt they *had* to do something in the days after September 11, and the memorial became their focal point. Like visitors to the New York City memorials,<sup>26</sup> people whose help had been turned away elsewhere found their way to the Navy Annex site. Sitting on a blanket by the large wall, Jenny Riley, from Mt. Airy, Maryland, and Justine Smith from Centreville, Virginia, came to make red, white, and blue yarn ribbons and distribute them to passersby who would place a money donation in their box marked for the Red Cross. Wanting to do something to help, Jenny had approached both the Red Cross and the Salvation Army, but they both said no. So she and Justine came to the memorial. They made 250 pins as they sat at the site on the weekend of the fifteenth. By the afternoon of the twenty-second, they had made 400, and they intended to stay several more hours.

Many came to burn images in their minds, to try to comprehend what felt so incomprehensible. Through sight, sound, touch, feel, and smell, those "five rivers"<sup>27</sup> of the senses, visitors could begin to reach toward experiencing the reality of September 11. The materiality of the memorial, its sensual substantiality, beckoned.

On the curb where the memorial's lawn met Columbia Pike, a man viewed the breach in the Pentagon wall through binoculars that he then passed to a friend. "It takes your breath away, doesn't it?" he asked (Hufford 2001: 7). Seeing is not believing, of course, but it is the beginning of believing. One of the ways we come to understand dramatic events, philosopher Avishai Margalit suggests in *Ethics of Memory* is to insert ourselves into the event. "The significance of the event for us," Margalit writes, "depends on our being personally connected with what happened, and hence we share



not only the memory of what happened but also our participation in it, as it were. . . . [W]e find it important to report (even falsely) the channels by which we become related to a shared event when that event is of immense importance to us" (2002: 52–53). Walking throughout the memorial and carrying away stories of their experiences at the site allowed visitors to participate more intimately in the events of September 11.

People also came to the Pentagon memorial to bear witness to the tragedy, to show their care and respect for the dead, and to signal their intent to remember. One woman visitor reading the messages on the large white board told a journalist, "I can't talk about it, but I don't want to forget about it either. And I'm afraid we will" (Dart 2001: 2). Caring, philosopher Margalit notes, is intimately linked with mourning and memory since even the word to "care" used to mean to "mourn" (2002: 31). In order to care for someone, to give someone the attention that is implied by caring, we need to be able to remember him or her. Caring, Margalit stresses, "is a way of living in time" (2002: 33, 35). Spontaneous memorials provide people with a way to deepen the caring, to impress images into the mind that will find their way, eventually, to memory.

The desire to be in the company of others who had also turned their hearts and minds toward the events of September 11 also drew people to the Pentagon site. People sensed that their lives had been changed forever, and this perspective and their need to be witness to it united them, even if their politics divided them. People may have initially come for an individual experience, but even as they tried to find a parking space and saw all the others walking toward the memorial and the Pentagon with its black gash, they would have begun to sense their communion and, perhaps, hunger for more.

Individual memories can become shared memories, and philosopher Margalit describes the process. "A *common* memory," he suggests, "... aggregates the memories of all those people who remember a certain episode which each of them experienced individually." A "*shared* memory," though, "... integrates and calibrates the different perspectives of those who remember the episode ... each experiencing only a fragment of what happened from their unique angle on events—into one version" (2002: 51–52). Perhaps it was the desire for such a "shared memory," that lead visitors to the Pentagon to eschew overt messages of protest and accept only those messages that would provide a feeling of unity in a time of need.

### Claiming Space, Hallowing Ground

With the site clearly bearing such meaning to people, it is no wonder that people believe firmly in their right to claim the space and hallow it as a

memorial to the dead. People snarled traffic coming in numbers that they did, parking their cars in lots and on the sides of streets when the lots overflowed. They walked across curvy access roads that were never meant for pedestrian access. Their walking, along with their laying down of mementos, is as Michel deCerteau suggests, a "process of *appropriation* of the topographical system ... a space of enunciation." Walking "makes [possibilities] exist as well as emerge" because, as it "alternately follows a path and has followers, [it also] creates a mobile organicity in the environment ... [it] is an effort to ensure communication. ... Walking affirms, suspects, tries out, transgresses, respects, etc., the trajectories it 'speaks'" ([1984] 1988: 97–99).

When visitors realized that authorities were threatening those claimed rights by removing memorial tokens, they interpreted the removal as a violation of both them and the dead. "BE ADVISED," the thick white foam-core board shouted as it leaned against the stone-wall part of the Arlington Cemetery fence on September 22:

JOHN METZLER, SUPERINTENDENT OF  
ARLINGTON CEMETERY HAS  
TWICE THIS PAST WEEK ORDERED THE  
REMOVAL AND *TRASHING* OF ALL THE  
MEMORIALS PREVIOUSLY PLACED ON THIS  
FENCE AND WALL!

APPARENTLY, THE FEELINGS OF THOSE WHO  
WISHED TO EXPRESS THEIR GRIEF OR THEIR  
SYMPATHY FOR THOSE WHO LOST THEIR LIVES AND  
THEIR LOVED ONES MEANT LITTLE TO HIM!

On top of this sign was another with many signatures and messages; at its feet lay a small bouquet of fresh flowers.

The creators of this BE ADVISED display clearly believed that their signs should be honored, not molested, especially since they addressed grieving Americans and the dead.<sup>28</sup> They had brought signs that evoked the powerful healing of hands and their warm touches, yet here was handiwork of another order. To visitors, their signs and the spaces they claimed had been made sacred.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, my George Mason University students reacted viscerally when I told them about a photographer who had taken home one of the most meaningful signs she had seen in New York City because she did not want it to be destroyed or taken by another. "No matter what the reason," my students said to me later, "taking that sign away was like desecrating a grave."



Even before this threat by the Superintendent, visitors understood how fragile their claim to this space was. They sought to preserve its boundaries and constantly attend to its sacredness by acts of special ritual maintenance.<sup>30</sup> Eyyup Davaz, for example, who lives nearby, went to the memorial each day at 3 a.m. to straighten all the American flags that had fallen or been knocked over (Dart 2001: 3). Members of the group Free Republic kept vigil over the memorial to protect the mementos that people had left there (McCaslin 2002).

The flowers, t-shirts, and signs on the grass symbolized the remains of the dead, lying as they did within sight of the incinerated ruin of the Pentagon, which held the ashes of the victims' actual bodies. And as visitors walked amidst the mementos, they could see themselves there, rooted to the site by these self-referential images: faces frozen onto paper stared out their visitors' faces, hands on signs recalled visitors' own touches as they placed handmade tokens on the ground, images of feet mirrored their feet. For the visitors, then, these tokens rested in their proper place. The messages, especially those on the ground, hallowed a cemetery-like space that visitors strongly believed should have been left to itself.

### Conjuring Absence: Fragments and their Dialogues of Absence and Presence, the Finite and the Infinite

Like walking a sacred maze or a circle, visitors who walked the grounds of the Pentagon memorial came to meditate on death. One visitor, for example, haunted by thoughts of the passengers on the doomed planes, left a letter to them, asking, "What did it feel like to look death straight in the eye?" (Dart 2001: 1). The voices that visitors encountered at the site, made material by the repeated images of body fragments, led visitors to experience within themselves, to dramatize internally, the paradoxical feelings that death and catastrophe conjure up.<sup>31</sup> These symbolic images of multiple faces, hearts, hands, thumbs, and feet contained several internal dialogues—especially between those of presence and absence, and the finite and the infinite—not as opposites, but as complements that "mean," as folklorist Henry Glassie suggests, "in association" (1982: 178). These compelling fragments with their oscillating messages electrified people as they walk the grounds of the memorial, offering to them an experience they craved in the weeks after September 11. Here were no simple palliatives. What people found, rather, were the richly allusive, ragged edges of meaning's fragments.<sup>32</sup>

Fragments—and the terrain of loss that results from them—have been seen by many as the wellspring of art, the bloody ground from which art

gives birth to itself. Art "is born of a wound that does not heal," surrealist writer Georges Bataille notes in his article on "Sacrificial Mutilation and the Severed Ear of Vincent Van Gogh" (qtd. in Nochlin 1994: 49). Sociologist George Simmel reminds us of another way fragments are essential to art. Art's work, he suggests, is linking fragments to a totality: "The essential meaning of art lies in its being able to form an autonomous totality, a self-sufficient microcosm out of a fortuitous fragment of reality that is tied with a thousand threads to this reality" (qtd. in Frisby 1986: 39). Art critic Lucy Lippard also focuses on the fragment's role in creating a new kind of whole: "Fragmentation need not connote explosion, disintegration. It is also a component of networks, stratification, the interweaving of many dissimilar threads, and de-emphasis on imposed meaning in favor of multiple interpretations" (qtd. in Turner 1999: 99–100). With fragments, Linda Nochlin reminds us, the "issue of 'relationship' " gets posed, sometimes in "new and paradoxical way[s]" (1994: 43).

The fragmented mementos at the memorial pressed visitors to experience presence and absence in conversation with one another. By sending replicas and tracings of the hands, thumbs, and feet, people surely meant to leave the most earnest token of their physical presence and their personal concern that they could. "Our thumbprints in remembrance," the children and adults from Yelm, Washington, had written. Memento creators verified their seriousness of purpose not by signing in blood but by offering replicas of parts of the human body—finger-, hand-, and footprints—that are often used for identification. And, through the images, they make present and visible the vulnerable body parts that humans usually keep hidden from another's gaze: upturned palms, exposed hearts, the exact print of the soles of feet, and the soft bottom cushion of thumbs. The posters with multiple fragments on them—red footprints forming a red stripe of a flag, for example—also testify to people's desire to be physically present at the site, to show up as a "body," a substantial aggregate of people who want to substantiate, to make visible, their intent. Such repetition in art, one image after another similar image, also witnesses to their ritual intent (Dissanayake 1988: 87).

Though these fragmented tokens conjure up people's purposeful presence, the images also convey absence. To look closely at the handprints and footprints on cloth at the memorial was to see images that looked like they could fade away at any moment. The paint was not evenly distributed over the hands, for example, so the edges of the hand appeared and retreated; white spaces slivered the palms and gaps severed the fingers into two to three parts. Fingers floated just above the palm, unconnected, as if drifting away. Thin drops of paint trailed down the cloth, as if the image were dissolving in front of visitors' faces. The prints evoked muddy handprints left



on a wall where they will soon be wiped off or the, chalky sidewalk prints that will wash away with the rain.

In addition, the images of hands and feet were replicas; as such, they remind visitors of the actual, flesh-warm hands that are not present. Among their many meanings, they represent the promise of bodily touch but not the embrace; the echo of footsteps, but not the arrival. And since fragments serve in figurative language as synecdoches, as parts that symbolize wholes, the hands and feet evoke the full body of the person even as they signal the person's absence from the Pentagon site. Similarly, the images of body fragments on the grassy lawn may well have reminded visitors of the very real body fragments that lay less than a mile away in the charred rubble of the west face of the Pentagon. Through such juxtapositions,<sup>33</sup> these images referenced the whole bodies lost forever in the September 11 attack and reminded visitors, unintentionally, that the body was the site of suffering for so many.<sup>34</sup>

Along with the dialogue between absence and presence, that between the finite and the infinite coursed through the trope of the fragment at the memorial, especially because the fragments appeared as multiples: a hand alongside another hand; a foot, after a foot, after a foot. "The fragment," philosopher and poet Edmond Jablonski muses, "is our only access to the infinite. . . . Only in fragments can we read the immeasurable totality" (qtd. in Waldrop 2002: 18). Even seemingly whole objects such as the fighter jets on the airplane tree, for example, take on the nature of fragments when arrayed next to others of their kind, forming a collection. Remove one from the series, and that plane would then appear incomplete, fragmentary. To play with individual items displayed as multiples, as Susan Stewart warns in her study on the collection, "is play with the fire of infinity" ([1984] 1993: 159).

At the Pentagon memorial, infinity and finality lay all around. Jets kept multiplying on the airplane tree. And if 10 people laid bouquets of flowers by the plaque that announced the names of the dead, then tens and tens more appeared. The posterboards were filled with many, many hands placed close by one another; counting them would have made visitors dizzy as they tried to distinguish one from another in the tightly packed arrangements. Although only a finite number of hands could fit onto one poster, the multiple hands seemed to shout that their numbers could go on forever, that the finite boundary of the posterboard was really just an artificial one. Placing one item alongside a similar item quickly became a representation of the enormity of what had happened, of the thousands dead and the millions who grieved. If images representing all who died in the attacks and all those who grieved had been placed in one spot, the immensity would have been terrifying. Boundaries like those offered by the posterboard serve a purpose,

Stewart suggests: "In the collection the threat of infinity is always met with the articulation of boundary" ([1984] 1993: 159).

Boundaries, through these expressions of the finite, also invited images of infinity at the Pentagon memorial. Certainly the site presented visitors with few boundaries, and the mementos stretched eastward across the grassy slope and sprang up along the fence just across the freeway from the Pentagon building. The boundaries that did exist, however, quickly became sites of resistance and of intensified display. The black metal fence that marked the start of the federally protected Arlington National Cemetery, for example, was draped with message after message. And it was by this boundary line that visitors displayed the "BE ADVISED" sign protesting the removal of mementos and where others heaped tokens all around that placard in support of its sentiments. When another fence blocked visitors' access to the ground closest to the Pentagon building itself, visitors piled signs of hands and bouquets of flowers there, as well. These fragments and all the others at the Pentagon memorial, with their ability to conjure the finite and the infinite, absence and presence, provided the most hauntingly evocative images at the Pentagon site for those who had come to meditate on life and life's end.

### Disruption, Transformation, and the Promise of Renewal

Feeling the rupture that the events of September 11 had brought to their lives, people also came to the memorial's informal ritual space with its evocative mementos for an experience that would help them find a way into a much-changed world. Such times of personal disruption and, especially, of the move toward reintegration are the most intense, philosopher John Dewey suggests. "Life itself consists of phases in which [a person] falls out of step with the march of surrounding things and then recovers unison with it—either through effort or by some happy chance," he explains. "And, in a growing life, the recovery is never mere return to a prior state, for it is enriched by the state of disparity and resistance through which it has successfully passed. . . . The moment of passage from disturbance into harmony is that of intensest life" ([1934] 1980: 14, 17).

The mementos at the memorial help with such a journey, since objects, Dewey suggests, help people in their quest for reintegration. "Desire for restoration of the union," he writes, "converts mere emotion into interest in objects as conditions of realization of harmony. With the realization, material of reflection is incorporated into objects as their meaning" ([1934] 1980: 15). Objects especially help people move from disturbance through



harmony because they themselves, Dewey suggests, are often born of such a passage: "Since the artist cares in a peculiar way for the phase of experience in which union is achieved, he does not shun moments of resistance and tension. He rather cultivates them, not for their own sake but because of their potentialities, bringing to living consciousness an experience that is unified and total" ([1934] 1980: 15).

At the memorial site, people could leave their artistic tokens, look over others filled with symbolic meanings, walk through the others on the ground and the fences, watch over the offerings to keep them safe, and speak with the dead and the living. This ritual space, they sensed, offered a place of encounter where anything could happen. Here, they could experience these moments of "intense life" and they could reach toward harmony and renewal—for here, transformation was possible.

The site, after all, made the process of transformation material. The lawn amidst all the government buildings was no longer a lawn and the chains and the fences were no longer merely boundary lines of properties. The physical space, itself, became an example of the possibility of transformation. To walk in it was to walk a landscape of transformation—but not to their pre-9/11 selves, but to something new, a ritual passage, the chance to move from everyday to changed site and take the experiences in that liminal place back home and use them to reintegrate our lives.

The memorial also charted the passage of time and guided people through their days by the ritual moorings of the symbolic objects. Here they could reach toward transformation and yet be anchored in time. In late September when the pumpkin sellers, as always, brought their autumn wares to the shopping center parking lots throughout Northern Virginia, memorial visitors placed an uncarved pumpkin on the lawn and surrounded it with small American flags, bouquets of flowers, and a "God Bless America" sign. Reminding visitors of Halloween and of all the approaching holidays in the Christian, Judaic, and Muslim calendars, they wrote on the pumpkin in bold, black letters: "For the children who won't carve pumpkins this year."

Walking through the artistic ritual environment at the memorial also lead people toward transformation by offering them new ways to see past, present, and future. Strangers' faces on a posterboard become fellow-mourners; finger-painted images of children's hands metamorphose into icons of witness. "Our lens is refocused" by making special work of both ritual and art, says Ellen Dissanayake. She explains that

A new figure or ground is established in regard to the former topology and we will probably respond emotionally with stronger feelings than we would to

"nonspecial" reality. Reality is converted from its usual unremarkable state—in which we take it or its components for granted—to a significant or specially experienced reality in which the components, by their emphasis or combination or juxtaposition, acquire a meta-reality. (1988: 95)

It was to refocus the everyday, to move through disruption toward harmony, and to receive the blessings of ritual that people also came to the memorial. Their visits offered them an encounter with death as well as the promise of renewal. And it is such an encounter and such a renewal that poet Christopher Howell places before us in "Blessing's Precision" as he tells of a group of people who emerge from tree line in an unnamed land and chance upon a dying lion with a man-angel by his wounded, bloody side. Like those who visited the spontaneous memorial, the people of the poem must consider how to respond to the horror—and the wonder—they see before them. Once separate but now brought unexpectedly into communion with one another, the people experience, through ritual, a transformation of their own

Finally we decided to make a ritual  
for passing by a wounded lion and an angel  
when you come upon them  
by accident  
and one of them is watching his heart's blood  
run bitterly away, in spite of the sweetness  
it had always brought before.  
And so we held our faces up against the sky  
and said our benedictions  
and gave up each a bead  
from our own red estuaries. And a caress  
we might have saved  
we placed in the man's palm  
till his hands overflowed with little stones  
smooth as a lion's ear.

Then we left the both of them there, dying  
I suppose, and many of us have been speechless  
since then, curiously  
simplified in a kind of sunlight asleep  
in a kind of shade. Since then  
we have begun to build this rose,  
this village of our days  
where every breathing thing must be received  
and tended, because mercy, now, locks our arms



out wide, and nothing, not even happiness,  
is ever turned away. (1996: 28–29)<sup>35</sup>

\* \* \*

By the time the six finalists for the official Pentagon Memorial were chosen and the exhibit of their designs and 78 others had opened at the National Building Museum in Washington DC on October 30, 2002, the spontaneous memorial was much diminished.<sup>36</sup> Its effects, however, were still being felt. The memorials at all three September 11 attack sites inspired several of the top designs for the official Pentagon Memorial.<sup>37</sup>

On February 26, 2003, "Light Benches" by Julie Beckman and Keith Kaseman, two graduates of Columbia University architecture graduate school, learned that their entry, "Light Benches" would memorialize the 184 lives lost in the Pentagon crash. The site is a two-acre preserve just to the west of the Pentagon, immediately in the path followed by American Airlines Flight 77. One hundred and eighty-four cantilevered benches of anodized aluminum will rise out of the ground and jut out over individual pools of water that trace the path of the jet. Each bench will have an engraved nameplate and, perhaps, something more about the person whose life was lost. Expected to be finished in the fall of 2004, it will cost about 5–7 million dollars, to be raised by private donations. Countless people the world over sent tokens to workers in the Pentagon that were very similar to the ones left at the spontaneous memorial (Kunkle 2002a: 1); June Forte of the Pentagon's Office of Public Affairs of the Secretary of Defense curated a quilt exhibit (Martinez 2002), and Pentagon workers gave other quilts and mementos to families of those who died (Papadopoulos 2004). And two years after the attacks, the sketch of the winning design for the New York City's official memorial shows spontaneous memorial tokens lining the wall of one of the spaces (Forgey 2004: A1).

Those of us who visited the spontaneous memorial at the Pentagon have our photographs and our memories; the wooden message board, the signs from new Americans, the flag made of little footprints, and the rows of faces still appear before us. Certainly our reasons for visiting that roadside site were many, but, for whatever reason, we could not just pass by. Like the travelers in "Blessing's Precision," we, too, decided on a ritual practice: a visit to the memorial and the possibility of transformation that such a visit offers. Anything may happen at these roadside shrines: grieving may begin, healing may come, or we may publicly promise to care for a dead comrade's family. Although the intense personal mourning and reflection at the spontaneous memorial for the Pentagon muffled voices of protest, the deep

yearning for change in a world torn asunder may lead to one other transformative possibility: more of us may decide to walk the path of peace.

## Notes

1. Quoted messages and descriptions of the Pentagon spontaneous memorial site and other memorial sites come from my fieldwork journals and photographs in my personal collection, unless otherwise indicated. Many thanks to my colleague Debra Shutika for reading an earlier version of this paper and for her translations of the memorial messages in Spanish. My thanks also to my graduate research assistant, J. Michael Martinez, for help with web-based research, and to my colleague Amelia Rutledge and my folklore student Ieva Cucinelli who sent me 9/11 articles that contributed to my research.
2. For a discussion of photography, 9/11, and New York City, see Kirshenblatt-Gimblett who claims that "[p]hotography materialized the morally ambiguous activity of watching" (2002: 5).
3. For comparisons of visits to spontaneous memorials with pilgrimages, see Grider (2001: 3) and Duke (2002).
4. To locate 148 of the monuments and memorials in the Washington DC region, visit <<http://www.kittytours.org/thatman2>>. For information on the February 2004 and the May 2004 memorials to the Columbia astronauts and to the World War II dead, respectively, see White (2004), and Reel (2004).
5. See, for example, articles by Bob Dart (2001) of the Cox New Service and David Cho and Jamie Stockwell (2001) of *The Washington Post*. A search of Lexis-Nexis shows the dominance of the term "makeshift memorial." See Grider (2001: 3–4) who also decries the use of the term.
6. Two other spontaneous memorials closely linked to Pentagon families would later appear at different sites. One was created by families of the Pentagon dead as they were ushered to the spot where their relatives died by Pentagon officials on September 17. Families left flowers, wreaths, balloons, notes, and large posterboard signs inside the Pentagon compound; see White and Davis (2001) and Papadopoulos (2004). Another spontaneous memorial for the Pentagon dead was also created at the Family Assistance Center in the Sheraton Crystal City Hotel, organized for families of the victims by Meg Falk, director of the Office of Family Policy for the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense at the Pentagon. The memorial grew to encompass six tables of mementos such as photographs and locks of hair; see Kunkle (2002b) and Papadopoulos (2004). People throughout the metropolitan area, though, erected additional spontaneous memorials to the 9/11 dead; see Gowan (2001), Gowan and Thomas-Lester (2001), and Toto (2001).
7. "Visitor" is hardly an adequate word for the people who came to the Pentagon memorial. Although I use the term for clarity throughout this essay, visitors were also artists, cocreators, and ritual practitioners. See also Hufford (2001: 7).



8. Although Fisher-Price had been promoting police officers and firefighters since 1998, by mid-November 2001, 100,000 of the "Billy Blazes" FDNY action figures, just one of the "Rescue Heroes" figures by Fisher-Price, started to arrive in Toys R Us stores instead of the 20,000 originally planned (Hamilton 2001: E1).
9. The memorial offered a site where the workings of a wartime gender system could be seen. Even before President George W. Bush announced the start of the "War on Terror" to a joint session of Congress on September 20, 2001, and before the first strikes on al-Qaeda military installations in Afghanistan on October 7, visitors to the memorial understood that such violent attacks on United States soil would lead to battle. One visitor left a copy of an editorial cartoon from the San Diego *Union*: "GETTING READY," it read, as an angry bald eagle sits on a stool, hacksaw in claw, sharpening one of his talons. "War must be understood as a *gendering* activity," Margaret Higonnet and her coauthors insist, "one that ritually marks the gender of all members of a society, whether or not they are combatants" (1987: 4). At the Pentagon memorial, young women made ribbons to wear, reminiscent of the yellow ribbons of the first Gulf War. Children spoke for peace. Soldiers were described as "B.A. (bad-assed) boys" though women now serve in the military. And, one of the white paper posters placed adjacent to the message board featured an upright Uncle Sam dressed in red, white, and blue, holding in his arms a Statue of Liberty, her eyes closed, her torch still in her hand and glowing, but lowered, her body clothed in a long, light green, body-clinging dress that revealed every contour of her female body.
10. For statistics on immigration to the Washington DC Metropolitan area, see the Federation of American Immigration Reform (2004).
11. See White (2001), Shaver (2002), Associated Press (2002), and Novick (2002). For information about nativism in the form of yellow ribbons during the first Gulf War, see Pershing and Yocom (1996).
12. "The Latino Community Supports Our U.S. Brothers."
13. "Our Sympathies to Those Who Have Lost Their Families / May God Help America Overcome [this tragedy]."
14. "Neustras [*sic*] oracuones [*sic*] siempre eřtaran con ustedes. Boricue [*sic*] los queremos" is a Spanish translation, with several errors, of the English sentence that precedes it.
15. The use of multiple images here is reminiscent of the NAMES Project's AIDS Memorial Quilt panels where multiple names appear, sometimes upward of one hundred, to show devastation in numbers: people who once acted on Broadway, people who lived in one small town in Texas, for example.
16. Even though the face is a body fragment, it, along with the brain and the heart, is strongly iconic of the entire person and of his or her identity. See Tangherlini (1998: 63).
17. Hearts, hands, and faces also predominate on New York City's many memorial walls, painted in tribute to people who have died, usually violently. See Cooper and Sciorra ([1994] 2001). Many memorials were also painted after 9/11 to honor the dead and the living. See Cotter (2002) and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2002: 2).

18. Elementary school children's art today is filled with images of hearts, hands, and sometimes feet. The state of Virginia offers its citizens, for example, a license plate with images of children's hands like the ones at the Pentagon memorial. On the plate are the words "KIDS FIRST." The evocative symbol of the empty shoe, like the foot, has been used in many public displays as a synecdoche for a person. See the display of victims' shoes at the Holocaust Museum in Washington DC, gravestones with images of loggers' boots (Meyer [1989] 1992: 67), or the recent spontaneous memorial for U.S. soldiers killed in Iraq (Brinkley 2003). The shoe as container for the living especially evokes both absence and presence.
19. As the *Washington Post* recently reported, the monitoring and distrust of Middle Eastern Studies continues. See Dobbs (2003).
20. See Schneider for a report on several antiwar messages at the Union Square memorial in September, including one person whose sign read, "The war is over, if you want" (2001: 1).
21. Concern about censure and personal safety routinely affects public displays. University of Massachusetts professor Jennie Traschen, for example, received death threats and more after September 11, 2001 when people learned that she had recommended on September 10, a day *before* the attacks, that her town of Amherst not display great numbers of flags on its downtown streets, since the flag was, in her opinion, "a symbol of terrorism and death and fear and destruction and oppression" (Abel 2001). Likewise, the furious reactions to the comment about President Bush made by the country music group the Dixie Chicks was, likewise, broadcast widely by the media (St. John 2003). During the first Gulf War, many people who questioned the war and left their doors and yards undecorated felt pressure from neighbors to display yellow ribbons (Pershing and Yocom 1996). See also the discussion earlier in this article about the displays brought to the memorial by DC area international communities.
22. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett notes additional linkages between towering buildings and ominous imaginings of destruction. She describes the "intimation of mortality" that E.B. White writes of in his 1948 essay as he considers how a "flight of planes . . . could burn the towers" as well as a report Adolf Hitler's fantasy of burning New York and seeing its "skyscrapers being turned into gigantic burning torches, collapsing upon one another" (2002: 11).
23. See Gillespie (1999: 4,138), Kumar (2001: 5), and Smith (2003: 2).
24. See Gillespie (1999: 4,138), Bahrampour (2001: 2), and Smith (2003: 2).
25. See Novick (2001: 1) and the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* (2001: 1).
26. "Every attempt I made to donate something was foiled, which made me feel horrible," Corinne Kerr of New York City admitted. "I tried to give blood. I tried to volunteer. . . ." So Kerr went to the Union Square memorial with a candle: "At least you can help in spirit and give your energy" (Wartofsky 2001).
27. From the poem "The Plum Trees" by Mary Oliver ([1978]1983: 84).
28. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett writes about New Yorkers' reactions as city officials removed the spontaneous memorials at Union Square on September 19: "People posted photographs of the memorials that were once there, with messages protesting their removal" (2002: 12).



29. In 1993, Steve Zeitlin wrote that the ground of memorials had been hallowed by the death of the people there. At the site by the Navy Annex, people had to make hallow the ground within sight of the dead, but it was not the ground on which people died.
30. My ideas here about the perceived fragility of ritual space and the need for continuous maintenance at spontaneous memorials are adapted from Arjun Appadurai's discussion of the production of locality ([1996] 2003: 179).
31. Amy Shuman has suggested that folklorists could conceive of their discipline as one that focuses on "catastrophe," on "the conditions in which cultures clash, and though not demolished, are forever changed" (2003: 5).
32. My use of "dialogues" here refers to Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the dialogic, which I have written about previously in regards to the study of material culture. See Yocom (2000).
33. See Kirshenblatt-Gimblett for examples of such "random juxtapositions—and their unintended ironies" in the displays in New York City. She reports on a missing person notice, for example, affixed to an advertisement for Continental Airlines that offered "dependable service, time after time" (2002: 6).
34. By September 18, 2001, the remains of 97 people had been pulled from the wreckage, and 11 of the 124 Pentagon employees unaccounted for had been identified. One burn patient had been released from Washington Hospital Center; nine more remained there, six listed in critical condition (Morello and Vogel 2001).
35. My thanks to Professor Christopher Howell of the Master of Fine Arts Program at Eastern Washington University, Spokane, for permission to use his luminous poem.
36. The memorial has had a long life. When a storm threatened the displays on September 28, 2001, Pentagon workers gathered up many of the items for safekeeping. Many of the memorial items are under the care of the Army Center of Military History (Papadopoulos 2004). During the week of February 18, 2002, a fire of unknown origin swept through the memorial destroying almost all of its displays (McCaslin 2002: 2). Occasionally, in 2004, mementos have appeared at the site on the Navy Annex lawn.
37. The committee received 1,126 entries in the Memorial competition. The 11 judges and one alternate, including artists, architects and landscape architects, two former secretaries of defense, and relatives of the victims, selected 45 top entries and then the finalists. One of the entries in the exhibit openly credited spontaneous memorials as their major influence. On their 30 × 40 inch competition poster, Brandon Padron of Miami, Florida, with team member Jason Frantzen, showed visitors walking into a chamber formed by two dark towering walls, leaving their candles and flowers at the walls and taping photos and notes on the walls. Padron and Frantzen explained,

The events of September 11 have had a profound impact on the world, both through the horrendous carnage of the event itself and the subsequent revaluation of the world in its aftermath. On a secondary level, they have

also made transparent the rituals of the grieving process, illustrating our desire to come to terms with this tragedy through collective acts of mourning.

The temporary memorials which sprang up in New York, Washington, and many other locations in the country can be understood as perhaps the most democratic and genuine representation of this need. Deprived of even the remains of the victims, many families erected small shrines to their loved ones, often times composed of personal artifacts from the victim's daily life. Similarly, the outpouring of flowers, messages, and candles on these sites from concerned strangers all over the world makes apparent the symbolic need for active participation in order for the healing process to begin. These memorials became intensely personal environments, opening up what is usually a very private act to the public so that all may begin to understand. In the process it brought a certain sense of corporeal reality to a tragedy which seemed so unreal through its endless replay in the media. The overwhelming personal intensity of these artifacts conveyed the universal sense of loss felt throughout the world more effectively than any memorial with a specific form in a singular meaning.

With this understanding, the Pentagon memorial was conceived as a pair of abstract open-air meditation chambers in which this grass-roots grieving process can continue. Like the Vietnam memorial on the Washington Mall, these spaces will act as a container or cabinet for the myriad of smaller, personal monuments which visitors erect, its meaning will emerge out of the multitude of expressions of sorrow and evolve over time.

All of the six finalists' designs featured close interaction with visitors, just like the spontaneous memorial did. For example, the entry by Jean Koeppel and Tom Kowalski of Brooklyn featured an arrangement of 184 inner-lit glass slabs, one for each of the victims, which would be cooled to allow visitors to leave temporary messages in the condensation. A "continuous 'tabula rasa,'" the team called it. "We have witnessed human nature in its finest hour," they continued,

as we joined together, united in expressing our love and respect for one another. It is this wonderful act of human expression that led us to our concept for the Pentagon Memorial. . . . We believe that the memorial should be a place where people not only come to visit, but come to find comfort through interaction with one another and with the monument itself. It is the people who will ultimately fuel this memorial. (Forgey 2002)

Similarly, finalist Jacky Bowring of Centerbury, New Zealand, with team members Peter England, Richard Weller, and Vladimir Sitta, designed 184 metal-clad units in orderly rows, like gravestones. Metaphorically, each of these "life recorders" is a transformation of the airplane's "black box," as well as a grave marker. Each will contain a mirror, a little pool of water, and a family memento or two (Forgey 2002).



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