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Abstract

How a memorial impacts public memory depends not just on its symbolic appeals but also on how it gains the attention of visitors and how those appeals convert visitors into engaged participants. Although numerous studies have explored visitors' performances at sites of memory, this scholarship has largely overlooked what we call "the accidental tourist," the would-be visitor who had not planned to visit a site of memory but ended up doing so because of the site's proximity to another existing attraction or daily route. Building on research into the performances of memory at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt, we expand inquiry into the way memorials attract and engage visitors by studying two temporary memorials to the cost of the Iraq War. We demonstrate how these memorials gain attention and prompt the engagement of "accidental tourists" through temporal and spatial tactics as well as both overt and subtle cues for visitors to interact with the site, organizers, and other visitors.

Keywords

accidental tourist, Iraq War, public memory, temporary memorials

Introduction

Monuments and memorials often occupy prominent public spaces, their physical presence in the landscape intended as a guarantee against indifference and forgetting. But how often do we stop to contemplate them? What good is a monument if no one notices, no one pays any heed? Over two decades ago, historian James Young (1993) argued that public memorials in themselves are "inert and amnesiac" and "dependent on visitors for whatever memory they finally produce" (p. xiii). Young's insistence on the "fundamentally interactive, dialogical quality of every memorial space" has inspired a generation of scholars to shift attention from formal-aesthetic properties and historical referentiality of memorials to audience reception. However, most studies of audience

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interaction with memorials and other physical memory sites focus on destination visitors—those people who are already committed to seeing a particular memorial, monument, or museum. Little research has been conducted into what we call “accidental tourists.”

By “accidental tourists,” we mean those would-be visitors who had not planned to attend a site of memory but ended up doing so because of the site’s proximity to another existing attraction or daily route.¹ For destination tourists, “the visit to a memory place is consummatory” because it brings to fruition a process that may involve travel arrangements, reading advertising and travel literature, and other preparation for what is expected to be a “departure from the ordinary” (Blair et al., 2010: 26). For accidental tourists, by contrast, the visit to a memory place often seems like an unexpected side trip, as when one interrupts a journey to some destination to get food or gasoline and discovers a local Civil War monument or when one encounters a temporary memorial in a public park while taking a lunchtime walk.

In this essay, we are particularly interested in how temporary memorials—rather than permanent memory sites—attract visitors and involve them in memory work. Unlike traditional memorials that occupy specially designated places, ephemeral memorials temporarily disrupt existing scenes and routines of daily life and compete for attention of accidental tourists with other public attractions. Yet, with the exception of studies of roadside shrines memorializing victims of traffic accidents, scholarship on grassroots memorialization has scarcely considered the significance of accidental tourists as potential audiences or contributors to memory practices.² We probe the phenomenon of accidental tourism by examining two ephemeral Iraq War memorials, the *Eyes Wide Open* touring exhibit and the *Arlington West* memorial erected every weekend on the beaches in Southern California.³ Their mission, to quote one of the organizers of *Eyes Wide Open*, has been to “attract an accidental tourist” and invite “people from different ends of the political spectrum to participate.”⁴ Conceived as grassroots responses to the war in Iraq, these memorials resemble many temporary shrines marking sites of untimely death and share their activist stance (Margry and Sánchez-Carretero, 2011; Santino, 2006). At the same time, through their orderly arrangement of military boots and crosses, they pay homage to military cemeteries in the United States and Europe. As distinct from conventional war memorials, however, they commemorate the war dead on both sides of the conflict and draw attention to the economic toll of US interventions on foreign soil. But it is not only what they *represent*—the human and economic cost of war—that makes them different from most war memorials. Rather, what distinguishes them is their ability to confront passersby and beachgoers and to convert them into *witnesses* to the cost of war.

The essay begins by engaging the scholarship on audience interactions with sites of memory, particularly the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (VVM) and NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt. We then proceed to analyze the tactics⁵ *Eyes Wide Open* and *Arlington West* use to engage accidental visitors. These tactics include the timing of the memorials, the spatial positioning of the displays vis-a-vis other public spaces and arrangement of memorial markers within the displays themselves, and, finally, the interactions of accidental visitors with destination visitors and volunteers. These tactics not only interrupt prearranged travel itineraries and challenge visitor expectations about honoring the war dead but also create provisional public forums where citizens are invited to reevaluate conventional notions of patriotic sacrifice.

Recognizing the memorial visitor

Since the 1982 unveiling of the VVM and the rise of media attention to visitor behavior at the site, scholars of public memory have begun to recognize visitors’ experience at public memorials as a significant aspect of their meaning. Along with the AIDS Memorial Quilt, the VVM has been the

focus of a great deal of research on visitor interactions with and contributions to public memorials. These studies have generated valuable insights into the practices of public memory, but they have not fully explored how memorials become visible to the large and diverse audience whose participation in memory work is required for collective healing and social change. We contend that the attention of the “tourist” is an important part of this process of creating awareness and that it is equally important for scholars to examine how memorials gain the attention of these tourists, especially accidental tourists.

Much research on the VVM has focused on how Maya Lin’s black granite design created room for multiple interpretations and experiences of the Wall (Ehrenhaus, 1988; Foss, 1986; Griswold and Griswold, 1986; Sturken, 1997). The VVM has been seen as “a screen for many projections about the history of the Vietnam War and its aftermath” (Sturken, 1997: 82) and as a pilgrimage site where veterans, family members, and others touched by the war would travel in search of meaning and healing (Berdahl, 1994; Carlson and Hocking, 1988; Dubisch, 2005; Ehrenhaus, 1988; Haines, 1986). Scholarship on the AIDS Memorial Quilt would take a similar perspective, noting the commonalities between the memorial practices at the VVM and at the Quilt (Bennett, 2011; Blair and Michel, 2007; Hawkins, 1996; Lewis and Fraser, 1996; Sturken, 1997), and highlighting the Quilt’s status as a destination for pilgrimage (Blair and Michel, 2007: 601; Hawkins, 1996: 97) and its capacity for healing in the AIDS community (Blair and Michel, 2007: 610; Hawkins, 1996; Lewis and Fraser, 1996; Sturken, 1997).

One of the most fruitful directions of research on these memorials has been the examination of the offerings left by these “pilgrims.” Several studies looked closely at the letters, photographs, and other objects visitors left behind at the Wall (Berdahl, 1994; Carlson and Hocking, 1988; Hass, 1998) and at the contributions of visitors to the AIDS Quilt’s texture (Blair and Michel, 2007; Lewis and Fraser, 1996). Carlson and Hocking (1988), for instance, proposed that the letters carried to the Wall revealed how visitors sought to heal the wounds of Vietnam through ritual scapegoating and mortification. In addition to grieving for the loss of loved ones to the AIDS epidemic, many contributors to the Quilt used it as “a sounding board about issues about AIDS: some panel makers use it to speak to specific audiences, both those who already understand and those who need to be taught” (Sturken, 1997: 189). Thus, as scholars began to explore the contributions of visitors to the meaning of memorials, they came to see the promise of collective memorialization for social transformation.

As scholarship expanded to examine interactions among visitors at these sites, it illuminated how the memorials helped visitors come to terms with the legacy of Vietnam and the AIDS epidemic. As Bennett (2011) noted, “The Quilt propagated an emotive quality that allowed publics to be constituted around reflection, loss, despair, anger, and hope” (p. 138). Similarly, Hass (1998) observed that “The Wall ... inspired visitors to represent their own grief, loss, rage, and despair. Contributing their private representations to public space, they cross a boundary between the private and the public” (p. 21). In crossing this boundary, visitors become strangers acting as engaged citizens. For Hass, the display of emotion in the artifacts visitors carry to the wall is more than mere catharsis. She found that these public acts of remembrance constitute “an impassioned and unfinished ... conversation about the shape of the nation, the status of the citizen, and the problem of patriotism” (pp. 123–124).⁶ Such a conversation is especially promising when it includes not only those dealing with great personal loss but also those with less investment. Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz (1991) proposed that through such displays, “society exercises a moral pressure over those not directly affected by loss to add their presence to the situation and to align their sentiments with it” (p. 403). Whereas the laconic listing of names on the Wall does not instruct the viewer how to react to the memorial, the presence of other visitors compels one to join, or at least to witness, the unfolding social drama enacted in this space of memory.

Visitors therefore often look to the responses of others at the site to cue their own behavior. In his exploration of the different types of visitors at the VVM, Ehrenhaus (1988) noted the relationships particularly between volunteers and other visitors, as well as between what he called “searchers” and “mourners.” Searchers visit the memorial seeking answers and are moved to have an “authentic” experience of self-discovery, often “[using] mourners and their artifacts as focusing lenses for their own discoveries” (p. 53). However, Ehrenhaus was skeptical about the possibility of a transformative experience among a large portion of the viewers whom he identified as “tourists.” Tourists interact with the memorial “superficially” and move on to their next destination. In contrast, when visitors take these memorials seriously and engage with each other, they enact a kind of stranger relationality that can bring society together (Bennett, 2011). But if memorials are able to spur such powerful interactions among strangers, and if the goal of these memorials is to facilitate collective healing and advocate for social change, it is important to explore how even the uncommitted visitor is drawn into the “conversation.”

Yet, much of this scholarship has lacked attention to how the VVM and AIDS Quilt actually bring a diversity of visitors to the site and invite engagement among those with different levels of commitment. Several studies have given some, although limited, indication of the importance of this promise. For instance, Lewis and Fraser (1996) remarked that some comments left on the signature panels at the Quilt indicated that it had, indeed, moved and raised the consciousness of those previously “untouched by AIDS” (p. 446). However, in acknowledging the impact on this significant population, they only suggested the ways the Quilt’s symbolic appeals managed to elicit this response. The question they did not address is how the Quilt reached this audience.

Perhaps because both the VVM and the AIDS Quilt were well publicized by the time they became objects of academic study, scholarship on these memorials has largely bypassed the question about the mechanism of visibility. In fact, several studies have addressed the large amount of media attention these memorials received without fully exploring which came first, the spectacle or the media coverage (Gambardella, 2011; Haines, 1986: 6–7; Sturken, 1997: 211). Recent scholarship on grassroots memorials, however, has begun to shed light on the work of less high-profile commemorations in raising awareness of important issues. As Santino (2006) has argued, even the smallest spontaneous shrine may seek to highlight the circumstances of untimely death and invite spectators to take a stand against those circumstances. Implicit in this view of what he calls “performative commemoratives” is a public visibility that allows grassroots efforts to gain attention for such issues. This visibility may be assumed in shrines to victims who died in highly trafficked city streets (Dobler, 2011; Rulfs, 2011; Stengs, 2011), although other deaths may be memorialized in such spaces not because they occurred there, but rather because mourners seek to attract attention to their act of commemoration. For instance, Hartley (2006) examined the memorialization of genocide in the former Yugoslavia where families did not have access to the sites of tragic death. Instead, they produced memorials in the commercial center of the city of Zagreb. Although Hartley did not articulate the importance of visibility for these memorials, the example demonstrated a quality of visibility Santino (2006) described when he wrote about spontaneous shrines: “The shrines insert and insist upon the presence of absent people. They display death in the heart of social life. These are not graves awaiting occasional visitors and sanctioned decoration” (p. 13). Most memorials, especially grassroots memorials, are unlikely to receive the kind of media attention the VVM and AIDS Quilt have. Therefore, they must position themselves to attract the attention of passersby, the everyday “tourists” of public spaces.

Studies of memorials often have concentrated on destination visitors (pilgrims, mourners, searchers, and so on) and labeled as “tourist” whomever does not seem to fit the role of an engaged visitor. As Ehrenhaus (1988) put it, tourists are those for whom the VVM “is but one stop on their itinerary of ‘what one must see’ in Washington” (p. 51). In a more recent account of US memorial

culture, Sturken (2007) similarly ascribed to tourists “a detached and seemingly innocent pose”; “tourists typically remain distant to the sites they visit, where they are often defined as innocent outsiders, mere observers, whose actions are believed to have no effect on what they see” (pp. 9–10). Doss (2010) also regarded tourism of memory sites as an activity that is “physically and emotionally insulated from death and disaster” and “privileges the souvenir as a primary agent of remembrance” (p. 94).

This largely pejorative understanding of tourism stems in part from a recognition that in the last 30 years, travel and sightseeing have been taken over by corporate interests and that “every destination is increasingly commodified, packaged, and marketed” (MacCannell, 1999: 195). Moreover, commercialization of tourism not only seeks to promote or even “fake up” destinations but also to homogenize the very experience of travel, “to contain sightseeing as generic entertainment and manufactured fantasy that can be delivered to any place” (MacCannell, 1999: 195). Such pre-programmed experience, presumably, leads visitors to consume all destinations in the same way (such as purchasing kitschy souvenirs or snapping pictures), never developing a genuine connection to them.⁷

However, as MacCannell (1999) pointed out in his influential book, “the economics of sightseeing is ultimately dependent on a non-economic relation” (p. 196), and it is this relation that can transform the status of a place from a mere “spatial coordinate” into “the locus of an urgent desire to share—an intimate connection between one stranger and another ... through the local object” (p. 203). Therefore, “anyone who tries to budge the grid of human experience off its current numbingly predictable coordinates revitalizes ‘the touristic’” (p. 203). A segment of tourism research takes seriously those tourists who would seem to “revitalize” tourist activities, for whom the activity serves a deeper purpose than the consumption of kitsch culture. Consider, for example, the German expellee “homesick tourists” at Polish sites where personal memory intersects with collective memory (Marschall, 2015), “legacy tourists” in search of connection to ancestral roots (McCain and Ray, 2003), or others who experience a sense of national belonging through their tourist activities (Palmer, 2005). These different types of destination visitors prove that tourism is not limited to superficial sightseeing but encompasses a range of culturally significant and ethically transformative practices.

We suggest that ephemeral interventions in existing public spaces create “accidental tourists” insofar as they temporarily disrupt habitual patterns of seeing and arrest the attention of passersby and destination visitors. Whether permanent or temporary, all public memorials must compete for spectators. However, not all memorials have the advantage of being listed on maps and travel itineraries or enjoy the benefit of extensive media coverage. To get attention and inspire engagement, temporary memorials—especially if their goal is to confront the public about certain painful issues—must not only tap into the contemporary aesthetic sensibilities but also act opportunistically with regard to time and location. We now turn to *Eyes Wide Open* and *Arlington West* to explore how these temporary memorials have used their ephemerality, mobility, and physical layout to stage scenes of interaction among strangers and to convert accidental tourists into agents of memory.

***Eyes Wide Open* and *Arlington West*: converting passersby into witnesses**

Eyes Wide Open and *Arlington West* are temporary memorials that arose in response to the lack of critical media coverage of the invasion and occupation of Iraq and a climate of public acquiescence to the war. Although the Department of Defense reported military deaths on its website, mainstream media were forbidden from publishing photographs or showing moving images of caskets returning home from Iraq. Military funerals were private rituals conducted for families of the

fallen, and the general public was exhorted to “support our troops” and foot the burgeoning bill for a war that was both poorly planned and ill-justified. Meanwhile, the growing civilian casualty count in Iraq as well as the extent of the country’s devastation were kept out of public sight in the United States altogether.

Organized by the American Friends Service Committee (a pacifist organization affiliated with the Quakers) and Veterans for Peace, respectively, *Eyes Wide Open* and *Arlington West* both sought to offer a place for public mourning and to invite audiences to question the cost of war.⁸ *Eyes Wide Open* was first staged in Chicago’s Federal Plaza in January 2004, when the US casualties reached 500. The memorial consists of military boots, each pair standing for a dead American service member, and a collection of civilian shoes to symbolize Iraqi deaths. Mobile by design, *Eyes Wide Open* toured nationally until spring 2007, after which it was split into state-specific displays. *Arlington West* began appearing on Southern California beaches in November 2003 and has been erected at Santa Monica Pier every Sunday since February 2004. It uses crosses⁹ arranged in a grid to represent the American dead in the Iraq War,¹⁰ as well as photos and names of dead and injured Iraqis and American soldiers.

Unlike the militant peace movement of the Vietnam War era, these two anti-war projects appeal to their prospective visitors by symbolically reconciling seemingly contradictory agendas: to pay tribute to fallen warriors while condemning the war. Orderly rows of combat boots and temporary grave markers make the displays look decorous and considerate of the military, which was essential especially during the early years of the war, when public opinion was still largely in favor of the invasion. Some scholarly critics have seen this apparent deference to the convention of memorializing the war dead as “the problematic obligation of gratitude” (Doss, 2010: 250). Doss (2010) insisted that despite their desire “to ‘speak truth’ about the War in Iraq,” these memorials are still “agents of national thanksgiving” and thus fail to “question the huge economic and political appeal of militarism in today’s America” (p. 251). On the other hand, in her analysis of *Eyes Wide Open*, Haskins (2011) argued that the memorial cultivates a “perspective by incongruity” by juxtaposing military boots and civilian shoes, thereby making it impossible to ignore the consequences of foreign wars waged by the United States. While these interpretations foreground the memorial symbolism as key to their meaning, we suggest, following Young (1993), that it is more informative to examine how these memorials work to attract their visitors, especially “accidental tourists.”

Temporal tactics

In contrast with the perceived durability and assumed importance of traditional war memorials, *Eyes Wide Open* and *Arlington West* are a “plea for [their]own obsolescence” (Haskins, 2011) because they have aspired not only to memorialize the war but to bring an end to US military involvement overseas. Rather than create an enduring representation of the cost of war, their function has been repeatedly to occasion conversations about this cost. These memorials’ ephemeral quality is therefore a rhetorically poignant feature of their overall symbolism as well as a way to draw public attention in the absence of critical media coverage of the war.

Both memorials aim to represent the mounting casualty count, but each employs distinct temporal tactics to make the losses visible and relevant to their audiences. *Eyes Wide Open* has often timed its national tour and its state-specific appearances to coincide with the nation’s holidays and other meaningful dates, such as Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, and Tax Day. This approach has allowed the display not only to attract crowds of onlookers who happened to congregate in public spaces where it was deployed but also to tie its agenda to issues and events already highlighted in national and local media.

On some occasions, the memorial created a critical counterpoint to another event held at the same time in a nearby location. On Memorial Day 2004, during President Bush's dedication of the National World War II Memorial at the west end of the National Mall, *Eyes Wide Open* was set up on a lawn near the US Capitol. If the dedication ceremony arguably constituted a "highjacking of 'the Good War'" by the Bush administration to justify the invasion in Iraq (Balthrop et al., 2010), the *Eyes Wide Open* display exposed the truth about the current war the President was promoting. Similarly, one of New York State exhibits appeared in Staten Island simultaneously with the National Night Out against Crime, an annual event funded by local police precincts and used as a public relations and recruitment venue for law enforcement agencies. *Eyes Wide Open* relied on its proximity to the event to bring in and educate young visitors who came to see and touch weapons displayed at the Night Out against Crime booths (Good, 2007).

At other times, *Eyes Wide Open* seized a chance to recruit visitors from audiences already committed to an anti-war agenda but unaware of the memorial's existence. For example, in Denver, Colorado, the display coincided with the Tent State Music Festival to End the War. To entice visitors, organizers used a lottery for free tickets to a Rage Against the Machine concert. According to *Eyes Wide Open* coordinator Sarah Gill (2008),

15,000 Rage fans walked past our booth to register for tickets. I'm pretty certain of my assessment that many of these folks had never heard of AFSC before, and while they may have shared some of our convictions, we gave them a way to make those convictions known to others.

Arlington West also has employed temporal tactics to reach large numbers of visitors and draw attention to the human cost of war. For instance, Veterans for Peace takes advantage of both the patriotic and the recreational association of the beach with Memorial Day, setting up the display each day of the 3-day weekend, typically welcoming its largest crowds of the year at a time when war and remembrance are already in many people's minds. However, *Arlington West's* chief temporal tactic is repetition. By exhibiting the memorial each week, Veterans for Peace is able to provide regular, visual updates on the mounting number of casualties. This is displayed in the form of flag-draped coffins set up at the front of the field of crosses, each representing one US service member dead in the past week. By responding to the events of the war almost as they happen, Veterans for Peace is able to make a powerful appeal to public opinion.

It is significant that *Arlington West* is set up on the weekend, rather than during the work week. Thus, the regular updates are directed specifically at leisure-seeking locals and out-of-towners, at times when they are perhaps more open to learning about the cost of war than they might be after a long day at work. Despite the finding of scholars who have associated tourism with consumption and a lack of meaningful engagement,¹¹ we suggest that the association of leisure can benefit ephemeral memorials because it helps draw in and engage large numbers of visitors. Of course, the notion of reaching audiences during their leisure time must also be addressed alongside spatial appeals, including appeals at sites of leisure.

Spatial tactics

If temporal tactics enable *Eyes Wide Open* and *Arlington West* "to weave themselves into the course of ongoing events" (Young, 1993: 12), their spatial tactics arrest attention of distracted spectators by getting in their way. In contrast with permanent sites of memory (*lieux de memoire*) theorized by Pierre Nora (1989), as well as temporary memorials erected "at unexpected sites of unanticipated tragedy" and popularized by news media (Doss, 2010: 74), ephemeral anti-war

memorials are not quite “destinations” in themselves and therefore must take over existing public spaces known to draw pedestrian traffic.

Eyes Wide Open has visited a variety of locations over the years, from iconic tourist magnets to college campuses, beaches, and even banal shopping plazas. On its national tour, the exhibit was able to garner tourist attention and media coverage by appearing in such civically prominent settings as the National Mall in Washington, DC. It also benefitted from associating itself with sites of pilgrimage like the Lorraine Hotel in Memphis, where Martin Luther King, Jr. was shot; and the Strawberry Fields memorial to John Lennon in New York’s Central Park. The appearance in these sites enabled the exhibit to interest already sympathetic audiences and to augment its presence by playing off each location’s historic aura as well as by gratifying the “tourist gaze” (Urry, 1990, 2002) of visitors primed for a visual spectacle of the out-of-the-ordinary and noteworthy.

Yet, it was the unplanned encounter in an ordinary public place that was favored by the *Eyes Wide Open* organizers. Meeting its potential audiences half way, the exhibit has entered public parks, beaches, and Walmart parking lots to go after the accidental tourist. Joggers in parks, students crossing college campuses on their way to class, beachgoers in Staten Island and Southern California, shoppers in suburban shopping centers—all of them could become visitors without ever embarking on a properly “touristic” journey. As many volunteers recalled, these spontaneous acts of attention—regardless of the visitor’s initial stance on the Iraq war—often generated the most transformative conversations.

In its regular displays on the beaches, *Arlington West* has sought the leisure-seeking crowds of Southern California. The memorial capitalizes on the popularity of the beach, and the regularly occurring exhibition at Santa Monica Pier is particularly noteworthy. Tourists and young locals visit the Pier to ride the amusement park rides, see the aquarium, eat at the restaurants, or just sit on the end of the pier and gaze at the expansive Pacific Ocean. Others venture onto the beach or merely pass by along the Marvin Braude bike trail that stretches from Torrance in the South to Will Rogers State Beach just north of Santa Monica. Visitors to the pier often congregate at the railing to look out at the *Arlington West* display. Beach goers who park in any of the lots on the pier or south or east of it must walk through the memorial on their way to the beach. Those walking, running, skating, or biking along the trail at the edge of the beach also often stop to get a better look at the memorial. In fact, traffic along this route must stop during the mock funeral procession as the week’s coffins are brought out from under the pier.

The seemingly conflicting sites of leisure and solemn remembrance routinely overlap during the mock funeral procession. At these times, visitors crowd along the railing, watch from the walkway leading to the beach, and stop along the bike trail. In a performance of what Santino (2009) terms “the ritualesque,” pairs of volunteers carry flag-draped boxes as a recording of “Taps” plays. Santino defines the “ritualesque” as “symbolic public actions . . . that partake of ritual elements but are clearly something other than ritual” and that “involve the public use, production, and display of the symbolic in order to transform society” (p. 24). So powerful are these ritualistic symbols that the chatter of tourists usually turns to reverent silence or hushed whispers, and more than one Veterans for Peace member admitted that it is common to be asked by bystanders whether there are, in fact, bodies in the coffins. The tactic of finding an audience by positioning the memorial among sites of leisure, then, succeeds in drawing in a sizeable crowd to a collective act of mourning. This is a memorial intervention in what Blair and Michel (1999) would call “the theme park zone,” and in at least these instances, the dominant response of visitors seems to be a solemn acknowledgment of the human cost of war.

Physical layout

In addition to their proximity to sites of tourism and leisure or habitual patterns of foot and biking traffic, the spatial layout of the displays also works to make people stop and look. Temporary

memorials, observes Doss (2010), are “aggressively physical entities: spaces that must be walked around ... and demand our physical attention” (p. 74). *Eyes Wide Open* and *Arlington West* certainly fit this pattern, although their layout is more invitational than aggressive. Both memorials arrange the markers—boots and crosses—to allow visitors to walk freely among them as well as to bend or kneel to take a more intimate look at individual memorial signs. Observed all at once, the regular rows of boots and crosses resemble a military cemetery, which is precisely the effect their organizers were after. Such a sight can be arresting in itself, particularly when it appears in the midst of a leisure spot. When one gets closer, the names on boots and crosses as well as various inscriptions and objects contributed by other visitors come into view. Similar to offerings left at the VVM (Hass, 1998), artifacts sewn into the panels of the AIDS Quilt (Hawkins, 1996; Sturken, 1997), or hand written messages to the dead deposited in spontaneous shrines around New York City after 11 September 2001 (Fraenkel, 2011), these mementos both personalize the losses and invite onlookers to move closer (Fraenkel, 2011: 235) to examine them, to become witness to other people’s expression of grief, pride, gratitude, or anger. If one enters into the space of these exhibits, it is difficult to pay no heed to them and walk away. Even the avoiders who steer clear of the *Arlington West* memorial and choose to trudge through the soft sand behind the pop-up tents of Veterans for Peace instead of the easy walkway through the exhibit give the war some form of attention. At Santa Monica State Beach on Sundays, forgetting the cost of war is harder work than remembering it.

Whereas visitors to the VVM must make sense of the loss of American lives, audiences of *Eyes Wide Open* and *Arlington West* are also confronted with the difficult to stomach truth about a much greater number of foreign casualties. *Eyes Wide Open* juxtaposes military boots signifying US deaths with civilian shoes representing dead Iraqis.¹² The visual variety of civilian footwear—men’s, women’s, and children’s shoes—creates an unsettling spectacle reminiscent of the shoe display at the Holocaust Memorial Museum. Often, the exhibit exhorts onlookers to ponder the magnitude of *those* losses compared to US military casualties by arranging 200 civilian shoes in concentric circles around a single pair of untagged military boots.

Arlington West also presents references to dead Iraqis alongside the symbols of US casualties. At Santa Monica State Beach, a sign near the field of crosses reads, “If we were to acknowledge the number of Iraqi deaths, the crosses would fill this entire beach.” There are other reminders as well, such as plywood “pillars” listing the names of killed civilians accompanied by a sign:

This small memorial represents only a portion of the more than one million Iraqis killed since 2003. Imagine walking with one foot in front of the other, toe to heel. Each step is one Iraqi life. If you took one step for each Iraqi life, you would walk 190 miles.

However, these are mostly verbal prompts that rely on the visitor’s imaginary powers to visualize Iraqi deaths, which is arguably a less spatially prominent—or emotionally powerful—device in comparison with *Eyes Wide Open*’s display of civilian shoes.

All memorials require physical, cognitive, and emotional labor on the part of their would-be visitors, but ephemeral memorials must first gain interest and generate awareness among distracted or indifferent audiences. As we have argued so far, their temporal and spatial tactics constitute an important initial step toward engagement. But it is the embodied interaction with others at the site that ultimately leads accidental tourists to engage meaningfully with memorials and issues they represent.

Visitor interactions

As distinct from “fixed sites like Mount Rushmore and the Statue of Liberty” that people “visit and look at,” remarked Doss (2010), temporary memorials “are performative public spaces.

People bring things to these memorials, not only making them but orchestrating their affective conditions” (pp. 74–75). *Eyes Wide Open* and *Arlington West* embrace visitor contributions and incorporate them into each successive display. As we have suggested above, these objects and inscriptions impart visual diversity to the uniform rows of boots and grave markers and entice one to explore the memorials if one chances to wander in. Added by family, friends, and comrades-in-arms, the mementos left at boots and crosses reveal a spectrum of emotions and stances toward the war. While many of these offerings do convey expressions of thanks for the soldiers’ sacrifice, contrary to Doss’ (2010) assertion, gratitude is not the dominant emotion among them. Numerous artifacts testify to the sense of loss and unabated grief, as is evident in many photos and letters to the dead deposited by loved ones. In fact, the reaction of military families to the exhibits has ranged from utter antagonism, as when parents or spouses requested that *Eyes Wide Open* remove the name tag with their relative’s name from the boots, to enthusiastic support for the exhibits’ anti-war agenda, signaled by “support our troops—bring them home” buttons. In sum, like the many objects left at the VVM, mementos contributed by visitors to *Eyes Wide Open* and *Arlington West* constitute a noisy “conversation” about loss and patriotism. Along with the boots and crosses—as well as representations of Iraqi deaths—they call out to uncertain spectators and ask them to consider the cost of war to individuals and the nation.

These diverse sentiments are communicated and elicited not only by artifacts, of course.¹³ As Blair et al. (2010) pointed out, “memory places are virtually unique among memory apparatuses in offering their symbolic contents to groups of individuals who negotiate not just the place, but stranger relations as well” (p. 27). Whether one simply observes the behavior of others in the space of the exhibit or enters into dialog with them, this act is unlikely to leave an accidental visitor indifferent.

Both *Eyes Wide Open* and *Arlington West* rely on volunteers to facilitate spontaneous interactions at the exhibits. Volunteers are a diverse group composed of veterans, military parents, clergy, and young activists radicalized by anti-war protests leading up to the invasion of Iraq. The presence of veterans especially imparts credibility to the exhibits and allows those unfamiliar with realities of war to learn from those who know them all too well. For example, when *Eyes Wide Open*’s New York state exhibit was set up next to the police-sponsored recruitment event in Staten Island, a number of young visitors, many of them youths considering joining the military, wandered through the cost of war exhibit and talked to veterans there. *Arlington West*, too, welcomes populations that are vulnerable to the promises of military recruiters. As one volunteer explained, the group prefers Santa Monica State Beach over others in the area because it is frequented by young, lower income people of color.¹⁴ These visitors may browse the counter-recruitment literature available at the Veterans for Peace tent and engage in conversations with veterans whose insight and experience challenge recruitment rhetoric.

Although many volunteers have stories to tell, their primary objective, as *Eyes Wide Open* and *Arlington West* organizers envisioned it, is to promote “a calm, reasonable conversation”¹⁵ and allow visitors to argue, express their grief and anger, and ask questions. This stance was particularly vital in the early years of the war, when public opinion was still sharply divided on the subject of the invasion and President George W. Bush’s foreign policy faced little opposition in Congress. Volunteers at both memorials recall how on many occasions they dealt with anger and resentment from parents and friends of the fallen who found it intolerable to think of their loved ones’ deaths as anything but heroic sacrifice for a just cause. However, the exhibits made room for such angry outbursts as a way to work through the trauma of loss, even when no “reasonable” conversation ensued. At an *Eyes Wide Open* display at Hofstra University on the eve of the last Presidential Debate in 2008, remembers a volunteer from New York,

A father showed up to remove his son's boots and name tag from the display. He was angered by the fact that AFSC would use his son's death in this way. . . . He argued with the AFSC coordinator about how we must kill the terrorists, and his son did not die in vain, and we had some nerve doing this. . . . The rest of us stood aside and let him rant, feeling his pain, anger, and frustration. (Brower, 2008)

Veterans for Peace organizer Michael Lindley described similar encounters, which he said were common early in the war. People who began shouting at volunteers would often calm down and end up adding a loved one's name to a cross. Witnessing the volunteers' empathy toward aggrieved family members can be an illuminating experience even for an uncommitted observer. At the very minimum, then, such encounters at the exhibits show what civic tolerance and acceptance of dissent feel like, which is an important lesson in stranger relationality in itself.

Eyes Wide Open and *Arlington West* are usually erected and dismantled on the same day, and this arduous task requires many participants. Coordinators and volunteers therefore recruit accidental volunteers from among those present. An *Eyes Wide Open* coordinator from Colorado reported,

Mornings and evenings, we invited everyone at the exhibit or nearby to help us put up or take down the exhibit. If they agreed, I'd give them these instructions: As you pick up a pair of shoes or boots and place them in a bag, say the name of the person—out loud, or to yourself. . . . Many of these "accidental volunteers" thanked me for offering them such a moving experience. (Gill, 2008)

At *Arlington West*, where much of the work is done long before sunrise, curious revelers still out on the town for a raucous Saturday night sometimes happen upon the scene and offer to help. When one of the authors of this essay participated in such early morning work, there was a serious, although inebriated, Iraq War veteran hard at work. Although he showed little interest in conversing, his apparent dedication to the job seemed to demand a similar approach among those of us who worked alongside him. This experience transforms visitors from spectators into physically and emotionally engaged participants.

Typical destination visitors such as those who attend a memorial to leave a letter next to a pair of boots or a photograph on a cross most likely come with their own emotional agenda set. But those who arrive on the scene without a distinct goal are often cued by other visitors' responses to the memorials. Visitor log books at *Arlington West* offer evidence that guests of the memorial look at the responses of others for a model of their own comments.¹⁶ For instance, whereas the vast majority of the comments are addressed to US service members or their families, occasional clusters of comments speak directly to the Veterans for Peace. In five consecutive pages from 4 December 2005, six comments (apparently from different visitors) either thanked Veterans for Peace for the memorial or challenged them for being unpatriotic. In most cases, it is impossible to identify whether a log book comment is from a destination visitor or an accidental tourist, but the cueing of the emotion and content of responses is particularly worthy of attention in considering how a diverse audience experiences the memorial together and engages in a noisy but vital conversation about the cost of war.

Conclusion

This essay's analysis of two temporary memorials to the human cost of the Iraq war highlights the relevance of the notion "accidental tourist" to public memory scholarship. We do not suggest that "accidental tourists" are a homogeneous group; indeed, our research reveals that they are quite diverse. Rather, they represent those would-be visitors whose attention, for one reason or another,

has yet to be drawn to a memory site. Yet, their attention and participation expand the “conversation” orchestrated by temporary sites of memory and make these sites into public forums for people across the political spectrum.

Attracting accidental visitors to a temporary memorial requires a combination of tactics. These tactics include propitious timing and spatial positioning of the displays to create salience and capitalize on the proximity to popular destinations, the layout and visual appeal of the memorials’ physical components and, perhaps most crucially, the openness to interaction with a diverse set of visitors. Created in the absence of a broad public awareness of the cost of the Iraq war, *Eyes Wide Open* and *Arlington West* endeavored to set up provisional public spaces within which people could both publicly grieve for the fallen soldiers and openly debate the desirability of military sacrifices and the loss of civilian lives on the “enemy” side. While the participatory nature of these memorials encouraged contributions of mourners and other destination visitors, their primary mission has been to reach those for whom the war was a remote abstraction and to convert them into witnesses.

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Notes

1. The term “accidental tourist” was popularized by Anne Tyler’s (1985) novel by the same name. Tyler’s protagonist, Macon Leary, is a travel writer who hates travel and whose readers are “people forced to travel on business.” Unlike typical tourists who seek variety and novelty on their journeys, the concern of Leary’s readers “was how to pretend they had never left home” (Tyler’s, 1985).
2. See Margry and Sánchez-Carretero (2011), especially Dobler, Rulfs, and Stengs.
3. Our research on these sites included field research, personal communication with organizers, and the study of secondary texts. One of the authors visited several *Eyes Wide Open* state exhibits, where she interviewed volunteers and American Friends Service Committee spokesperson Mary Zerkel. She supplemented this research by studying the group’s literature and media responses to the memorial. The second author participated in the setup of *Arlington West* (and in the performance of a mock funeral procession) on two occasions in July 2012, observing visitor interactions at the site and conducting interviews with organizers and volunteers.
4. Telephone interview with Mary Zerkel, 17 July 2008.
5. Our use of the term “tactic” is indebted to De Certeau’s (1984) distinction between “strategies” and “tactics.” If economic and political elites put in place strategies (such as urban planning), “tactics” represent adaptive and improvisational qualities of everyday practices, such as walking the city.
6. See also recent scholarship on grassroots memorials, examining temporary memorials as sites of debate about the symbolic form of memorialization, as well as about the terms of forgiveness and healing: Grider (2011), Dobler (2011), Goldstein and Tye (2006).
7. See Blair and Michel (1999).
8. These are just two of many such memorials across the country and the world to insist on acknowledging the human cost of war. See, for instance, The Crosses of Lafayette (2014) in Lafayette, CA; and the 2007 “Memorial to the Iraq War” installation at London’s Institute of Contemporary Arts (*Memorial to the Iraq War*, 2007).

9. Veterans for Peace explain that they chose the cross “for its simplicity, not for its religious connotation” (Los Angeles Veterans for Peace, n.d.). However, in an effort to be more inclusive, they have added a small number of Jewish Stars of David and Muslim crescents to the display.
10. *Arlington West* also began commemorating the dead in the Afghanistan War in 2011.
11. See, for instance, Blair and Michel (1999). They argued that tourists at Kennedy Space Center failed to appreciate the Astronauts Memorial because they were too immersed in their Disney World vacations.
12. Civilian shoes were added to the display on 4 July 2004 in Philadelphia, when the names of about 3000 dead Iraqis became available.
13. We observed visitor behavior but decided not to interview visitors unless they engaged us themselves. Interviews with over 100 visitors to Arlington West are included in a documentary film, *Arlington West*, Marr and Dudar (2006).
14. Veterans for Peace also engage in active outreach to these audiences by hosting fieldtrips and welcoming local high school students to volunteer at *Arlington West* in fulfillment of their community service requirements for graduation.
15. See the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) “Eyes Wide Open Organizing Toolkit” (American Friends Service Committee, n.d.).
16. One of the authors of this essay was granted access to and assisted in the digital archiving of 45 visitor comment log books collected between 2005 and 2012.

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